



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

Parshas Achiarei - Kedoshim 5770 פרשת אחרי מות - קדושים תש"ע

ANGELIC PEOPLE

Akeidas Yitzchak. For many people, the mere mention of this event conjures up an image of intense drama. We picture an emotion-laden scene in which our forefather Avraham was called upon to render the ultimate sacrifice: to offer up his beloved son Yitzchak on the *mizbeach* (altar). So gut-wrenching and moving was this act that even the *malachim* (angels) were brought to tears; as Rashi recounts in his comments to the verse (*Bereishis 27:1*), “And his eyes were weakened from seeing”:

“When he (Yitzchak) was bound on the *mizbeach*, and his father sought to slaughter him (in fulfillment of Hashem’s command) – at that moment, the Heavens opened, and the ministering angels beheld the scene. They wept, and the tears they shed fell into Yitzchak’s eyes, which caused him blindness.”

R’ Meir Tzvi Bergman (*Sha’arei Orah, parshas Toldos*) raises a salient point. True, this event is stirring and emotionally-charged for all who contemplate it. But let us recall – we are speaking here of *malachim*, not human beings. *Malachim* are not subject to the whims and limitations of human emotion, as everything is clear and revealed to them. They surely recognized the true significance and power of this trial and were aware of the astronomic benefit its merit would provide for Klal Yisrael throughout the generations. They possessed the “luxury,” if you will, of viewing this event with purely objective eyes, discerning the infinitely positive potential inherent in this singular act. Why, then, did they cry? If anything – from their perspective, imbued with the knowledge of the true nature of the *Akeidah* – they should have been dancing and singing!

This week’s *parshah* may help provide us some direction in understanding what really lay behind the *malachim*’s

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear parents
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outpouring of emotion.

NOT JUST HUMAN

Parshas Kedoshim opens with the familiar exhortation of “*Kedoshim tihyu*” – “Be holy” (*Vayikra 19:1*) – which, despite its brevity, is the source of a substantial volume of interpretation. Rashi understands the Torah’s command to refer to abstention and distancing from immorality. The Ramban interprets the notion as a more general call to practice a measure of moderation in all areas. An individual should strive to bring holiness into his daily affairs and not debase himself through the unmitigated pursuit of earthly pleasures.

The Ohr Hachaim, however, takes a somewhat different tack and interprets the Torah’s directive in a somewhat unique way. According to the Ohr Hachaim, the intention of the term “*kedoshim*” refers to those “holy beings” – the *malachim* themselves. In other words, the Torah is actually instructing the Jewish people to “become *malachim*.”

This novel approach gives rise to some obvious points: What does it mean for a person to become a *malach*? Is it even possible?

BRIEF RECAP OF HISTORY AND THE MISSION OF LIFE

R’ Moshe of Coucy authored the monumental volume on the *mitzvos* known as the *Semag* (*Sefer Mitzvos Hagdol*). He includes an introduction to this work, which happens to be extremely instructive toward gaining a perspective on life in general.

In this introduction, the *Semag* lays out the basic background and plan behind the creation of man. At first, Hashem created the *malachim*, creatures

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subservient to intellect alone, who fulfill Hashem's Will unfettered by pitfalls of laziness, anger, desire, etc. Later, Hashem brought forth the animals, creatures devoid of intellect and subservient only to desire and base instinct. With the lure of a few grains of barley, they will allow themselves to be led even into the slaughterhouse. Then – at the pinnacle of Creation – Hashem saw fit to combine these opposing forces in a single being. And so He created man.

Man was charged with an awesome task – to battle and overcome the urges and tendencies of his physical condition while striving to perfect his spiritual self. Should he follow his urges alone, he drifts more to the “animalistic” side; but the more he allows his intellect and soul to dominate, the closer he becomes to resembling a *malach*.

In fact, to a certain extent, a person can even “outdo” a *malach*. In *Nefesh Hachaim (1:10)*, R' Chaim Volozhiner refers to a long-standing debate amongst the sages: who is considered “better”: a *malach* or a Jewish person? R' Chaim explains that in reality

each one has advantages. As far as attainment is concerned – what one can comprehend and see – a *malach*, for sure, has no equal. But there is an area in which a person comes out “on top”: that is, in *accomplishment*. A *malach* simply cannot compete with what a person can achieve through his deeds and successful struggles.

This may be the intent of a Mishnah in Avos. Speaking of the inestimable value of Torah study and the levels to which a person can ascend through its medium, the Mishnah states (6:1):

רבי מאיר אומר כל העוסק בתורה לשמה, זוכה לדברים הרבה... ומגדלתו ומרוממתו על כל המעשים.

“R’ Meir says: When one studies Torah for its own sake, he merits many things... and the Torah makes him great, and uplifts him over all *ma'asim* (works).”

The commentators differ as to the exact meaning of this term (*ma'asim*) and this statement of Chazal. Quoting R' Chaim Volozhiner, the *Anaf Yosef* explains the intent in keeping with the ideas expressed above. Using Torah as a guide, a person who cleaves to it becomes transformed and exalted, to the extent that he is considered supreme over all other creations – including *malachim*.

This, then, could be the reason for the anguish experienced by the angels who beheld the scene of the *Akeidah*. R' Yeruchem Olshin explains that of course they were not affected by usual human emotions, and the true noble and beneficial nature of this deed was apparent to them in all of its glory. Yet this is exactly why they cried – for they knew that only man was capable of such a feat. They saw what only a man could accomplish and the remarkable, far-reaching effects of his deeds. The *malachim* could only look on with wistfulness and envy at what a Jew could achieve.

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