



The Gift the Angels Don't Have

The Gemara (Shabbat) tells us that when Moshe Rabbeinu went up to *Har Sinai*, the *malachim* (angels) confronted him, complaining that G-d was giving the Torah to Moshe and not to them. Moshe responds, “It says in Your Torah, ‘I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt.’ Angels, were you taken out of Egypt? It says in Your Torah don’t worship other gods. Angels, do you ever have a desire to worship other gods? It says in the Torah ‘honor your father and your mother.’ Angels, do you have parents? It says in the Torah ‘don’t kill, don’t steal, don’t covet.’ Angels. Do these apply to you?”

The Gemara says the angels recognized the truth of Moshe’s argument and gave the Torah to him with no complaints. They even gave him gifts on his way down.

Many commentaries ask, what were the *malachim* thinking? They knew what it said in the Torah, they knew who it was for and yet they still wanted it. Why?

Some commentaries suggest the *malachim* knew the Torah existed on many different levels. פְּרִדָּה stands for פֶּשֶׁט, רְמֵז, דְּרִשׁ וְסוּד. Four different levels of interpretation, from the simple to the mystically sublime. The angels recognized that the pshat, the simple interpretation, didn’t apply to them. But they wanted to have the Torah in order to appreciate the deeper ideas. The Gemara answers that, yes, the deeper ideas and all the different levels are significant, but only if you live by the Torah. If you

live by the pshat of the Torah – like human beings do – you can appreciate even the deeper levels.

The angels, who do not live by the Torah, cannot change their appreciation level.

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The Gemara (Menachot 30) describes a *machloket tannaim* regarding the author of the last eight verses of the Torah that describe Moshe Rabbeinu’s death. One opinion says Moshe Rabbeinu wrote them בְּדִמְעָה – in tears. How could Moshe have written them? Can one describe one’s own death after the fact? What does that mean? The second opinion holds that Yehoshua bin Nun wrote the last eight verses. That sounds a little strange too, but it is certainly more logical than Moshe Rabbeinu writing about his own demise.

The Vilna Gaon suggests a fascinating idea. דְּמָעָה can mean tears, but it could also come from the word מְדוּמָע, mixed up. The Ramban tells us that on a deeper level, the entire Torah spells out the names of G-d. When Moshe Rabbeinu received the Torah from G-d, he received it in a decoded fashion. It didn’t spell out the names of G-d anymore. The Torah was spelled out in a way mere mortals could understand. The Vilna Gaon suggests that the last eight verses of the Torah were given to Moshe בְּדִמְעָה – as a mixture – in its pristine, original, coded and ‘mixed-up’ state. It did not say וַיָּמָת שָׁם מֹשֶׁה (and Moshe died there). It said the name of G-d on a hidden, deeper level. After Moshe died, G-d decoded it for Yehoshua bin Nun to spell out the exact verses.

As we celebrate Simchat Torah, the end of the festive cycle, both of the *Yamim Noraim* and the *Shalosh Regalim*, let us recognize the unique gift of Torah. Let us try to live it on a *pshat* level and as we grow level by level, may we be *zoche* to appreciate it even more and plunge the Divine depths of its wisdom.

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