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 commentators suggest the malachim knew the Torah existed on many different levels, פַּרְדֵּס, דָּרַשׁ וְסוֹד, רֶמֶז, פָּשַׁט. 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.

As we take a step back from that Gemara, let us look to Simchat Torah, when we essentially celebrate the many different levels of understanding and appreciating the Torah.

The Vilna Gaon suggests a fascinating idea. דָּמַע can mean tears, but it could also come from the word מִדּוֹמֵעַ, 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 בְּדֶמַע – 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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