

Altar-cation

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל יַעֲקֹב קוּם... וַעֲשֵׂה שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לְקַל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ בְּבָרְחֶךָ
מִפְּנֵי עֵשׂוֹ אָחִיךָ

“G-D said to Yaakov, Arise... and make there an altar to G-D who appeared to you when you fled from Eisov your brother.” (35:1)

Rashi quotes the Midrash that Hashem informed Yaakov that the troubles which had befallen him and his daughter Dinah were a consequence of Yaakov having failed to fulfil the oath he swore to Hashem. However, Rashi does not make it explicit which oath Hashem referred to. The Proshos Derochim cites the R'eim, who writes that the oath concerned the stone(s) that Yaakov placed around his head whilst sleeping, on his way to Lovon. Yaakov had promised that if Hashem would guard him, and return him in peace to his father's house, he would use that stone to build an altar. Hashem therefore, mentioned an altar in the above Possuk, to hint to Yaakov that he had delayed fulfilling his promise of using the stone as an altar. The R'eim continues to explain, that Hashem considered Yaakov's lack of fulfilment of his vow until that point to be reasonable, since Yaakov was in Lovon's house and he had only promised to build the altar if he returned home safely. However, once he began his homeward journey, Hashem felt that he should have hurried to build the altar.

The Proshos Derochim brings Harav Shmuel Yaffe, who disputes this opinion of the R'eim. He questions the premise that leaving Lovon's house was tantamount to returning home, an argument he says that, “Requires friends to agree to it.” When Yaakov made his oath, he points out, he laid down explicit conditions, and one of these was returning home, not simply beginning his journey. As such, returning home was a prerequisite to having to fulfil his oath, and without its fulfilment, he had not delayed since his obligation had not begun. Harav Yaffe therefore offers an alternative explanation; that Yaakov was held accountable for not having fulfilled his promise to separate a tithe to Hashem of all his income. Hashem therefore, commanded Yaakov to build an altar, by which He implied that Yaakov should tithe his flocks there and use the animals he had set aside to offer up sacrifices.

However, the Proshos Derochim dismisses this explanation of Harav Yaffe. He argues that when Hashem told Yaakov to build an altar this was because the altar was the focus of Hashem's command, and not simply a means to another end, a suggestion he calls, “A very forced answer.” Rather, the Proshos Derochim ascribes to the opinion of the R'eim, that Hashem punished Yaakov for not having built an altar, as the Possuk implies. The Proshos Derochim explains that when Yaakov made his vow, and the condition regarding returning home, his real thoughts and concerns were of returning home in peace, meaning that Eisov would no longer intend to harm him. It had not occurred to Yaakov that he might encounter Eisov along the way, and as such he had spoken of returning home. However, when Yaakov met Eisov on his journey home, and made peace with him, it turned out that the condition of returning home in peace was already fulfilled, since this was his main concern. This is hinted at, concludes the Proshos Derochim, in the Possuk above when it refers to Yaakov fleeing from Eisov. Hashem was implying that Yaakov was now free of the fears he had, when he had made his promise to build an altar. As such, the promise was ripe to be fulfilled and the delay on Yaakov's part was incorrect and led to the problems with Dinah.

Hidden Torah

וַיִּגַע בְּכַף יָרְכוֹ

“He smote the thigh of Yaakov.” (32:26)

The Kli Yokor explains this Possuk, which although cannot be taken out of its literal meaning he stresses, can be understood more esoterically. He writes that the angel Yaakov fought with was the spiritual representation of Eisov, and it desired to remove all Torah knowledge from Yaakov. When he recognised that this was impossible, he struck Yaakov on his thigh, since the thigh is the archetypal hidden part of the body, and as such symbolizes the hidden areas of Torah. The angel was showing Yaakov, that through his returning to collect the small vessels he had left behind, he had imbued within himself the attribute of loving money. This love for money might not lead Yaakov to total heresy and abandonment of Torah; however it was sufficient to prevent Yaakov from being able to access the hidden depths of Torah. This was symbolized through hitting the thigh, since the thigh; hidden Torah is pushed aside by love of money which was the aim of the angel who came to confront Yaakov due to his returning for the vessels.

Name Shame

לְמָה זָה תִשְׁאַל לְשִׁמִּי

“Why do you ask my name?” (32:29)

Rabbeinu Bachaya offers an explanation as to why the angel was so surprised that Yaakov asked what his name was. He writes that an angel does not usually want to reveal his name, since doing so would mean people saying, “So and so,” i.e. the angel, did this miracle. Rather, angels recognise that their actions are purely a manifestation of the will of Hashem, in that they are merely slaves who fulfil the will of their master, which means it is inappropriate to say that they have done anything themselves. He adds that this was the intention of the angel who told Shimshon's father that his name was, “Hidden.” The angel was intimating that an angel does not take credit for its actions, since this would be at the expense of giving honour to Hashem.