

Terumah

Men and Angels

Let them make Me a Mishkan

Shemos 25:8

“When the Jewish people joyously announced, ‘*Naaseh vinishma* – we will do, and we will listen,’¹ Hashem immediately told Moshe to tell the Jewish people to give him donations, and build a Mishkan.”² What is the direct connection between the Jewish commitment to do, and only then to listen, and the building of a dwelling place for Hashem in the desert?

There are more connections between the Torah and the donations to the Mishkan, as well. The Sheloh³ teaches that the word *trumab* is made of the same letters as the word Torah, plus the letter *mem*, which is forty, representing the forty days in which the Torah was given to Moshe. He explains that the whole purpose of the Mishkan was so that the ark with the tablets, representing Torah, could be placed in it. What is the connection between the Torah and the donations to the Mishkan?

When the Jewish people declared, “*Naaseh vinishma*,” a voice came out from Heaven and announced, “Who revealed the secret of the ministering angels to My children?”⁴ What is so angelic about this announcement? R. Yitzchak Hutner⁵ explains that an angel really *is* his mission. The force that causes a seed to grow is nothing more than that force. (And after all, the Rambam⁶ writes very clearly that the best example of an angel is a force of nature.) There is not an independent person there, named, for example, Bill, who can then choose whether or not to make seeds grow. The angel *is* that force! This is why the angels say, “We will do and then we will listen,” for until they say “we will do,” there is nobody there to listen! The Jewish people, at Sinai, became aware that, much like the angels, they were only created to connect to Hashem, and fulfill His Torah. The real truth is that we do not exist without the word of Hashem. Our very essence is the Torah.

When the Jewish people accepted the Torah, and said, “*Naaseh vinishma*,” they reached the level of the angels. But they, in fact, became greater than angels. Man can reach the level of the angel by his own efforts, whereas an angel is simply created that way. The man who works and, despite his challenges and his human side, becomes an angel, is far greater than any angel, for he earned his stripes. At Sinai, the Torah was given to man. Moshe went up to Heaven to

1 Shemos 24:7

2 Midrash Tana Dvei Eliyahu, 17

3 Terumah, *Derech Chaim Tochachos Mussar*. See also *Sifsei Kohan al Hatorah*.

4 Shabbos 88a

5 *Pachad Yitzchak*, Shavuot, 4.

6 *Moreh Nevuchim*, 2:6

bring the Torah to Earth, and he argued with the angels.⁷ “Do you have a father?” asked Moshe. “If not, then what value is the commandment to honor one? Do you fight jealousy? If not, then who would you contemplate murdering?” Moshe made the argument that without challenge, there could be no use for the Torah. When man could show that they could be even greater than the angel, the Torah could be given to man. Not despite his weakness is man the greatest of creatures, but precisely because of it.⁸ At Sinai, man became aware that the Torah was meant to be on Earth, not for the angels, that it could help man be as great as an angel.

R. Chaim Volozhin⁹ points out that there seems to be disagreement among our Sages as to whether or not an angel is greater than a man, or a man is greater than an angel. The answer, he tells us, is that both are true. Man is, in fact, weaker than an angel. Angels have greater spiritual awareness, and start out close to Hashem. But man can become an angel, himself, and if he does so, he is, in fact, far greater than an angel. Like a pawn on a chessboard, though he is weakest, he can reach the end and then become a queen, surpassing all the others. And that little pawn, who *earned* his place as a queen, is, in fact, greater than the queen who began that way, for he is the one who attained his level through his own accomplishment. When the Jewish people stood at Sinai and reached the level of angels, they in fact passed the level of angels as well. They became aware that the struggle that man has, the fact that man begins as a pawn, is what gives his ultimate level of “queen” its value.

Hashem created this world for man. This is so that man can achieve the greatest of achievements and be worthy of the ultimate reward. Our Sages tell us that Hashem “desired to have a home in the lower parts.”¹⁰ God wanted us to bring Him down here. The most distant places from Hashem are, in fact, the very parts of our world that allow us to connect to God. Our building the Mishkan was our creating a place in this world for Hashem to dwell. When we announced at Sinai that “we will do and we will listen,” and became aware that the purpose of the Torah is for us to create a home in this world for the spiritual, we became ready to build the Mishkan. Says the Sheloh that the word *trumah*, the word referring to donations for the Mishkan, is made up of the word “Torah” and the letter *mem*. For the Torah came to this world in forty days; that is how long it took for the Torah to go from Heaven to Earth. And that is really what the Mishkan was, as well; it was the process of the Divine Presence coming from Heaven to Earth. The Mishkan is about realizing what the Torah really is for. It is for building this world properly, not for escaping to become an angel. He who lives without a wife, said our Sages, lives without the Torah.¹¹ A home is a place where the Torah is far more

7 Shabbos 89a

8 See R. Avraham Palagi’s *Avraham Es Einav* to Shabbos 89a, where he explains that when Hashem told Moshe to “give the angels a *tshuva*,” which literally means “an answer,” He was hinting to “reply to the angels: ‘*tshuva*,’” tell them the idea that man, despite his weakness, has the power to repent and do *tshuva*, which brings him to an even greater level than had he never sinned. This wordplay is already suggested by the Sheloh Hakadosh. Man can thus reach levels that angels, who never make mistakes, can never aspire to attain!

9 *Nefesh Hachaim*, 1:10. See also *Afikei Mayim* of R. Moshe Shapiro to Shavuos, 33.

10 Tanchuma, Naso, 16. See Sheloh, Pesachim, *drush* 6, 11, and Alschich to Bereishis 9:1–3. See also *Sfas Emes*, Pikudei, 652, s.v. *bimidrash*.

11 Yevamos 62b

physical than it is in the Yeshiva. In the Yeshiva, one can be an angel. In the home, one can be a man. It is the goal of man to be an angel and a man at once. This is what happened when we proclaimed *naaseh vinishma*. And when that happened, the Midrash tells us that Hashem immediately said, “This is a group of people who can build Me a Mishkan.” Here are the people who can truly introduce the divine into this little world – the world that would seem to be the last place where anything holy might find its permanent dwelling place.

“When the Jewish people made the curtains for the Mishkan, their faces glowed like the angels.”¹²

12 Targum to Shir Hashirim 1:5; see also Yalkut Reuveni to Trumah, p. 72a.