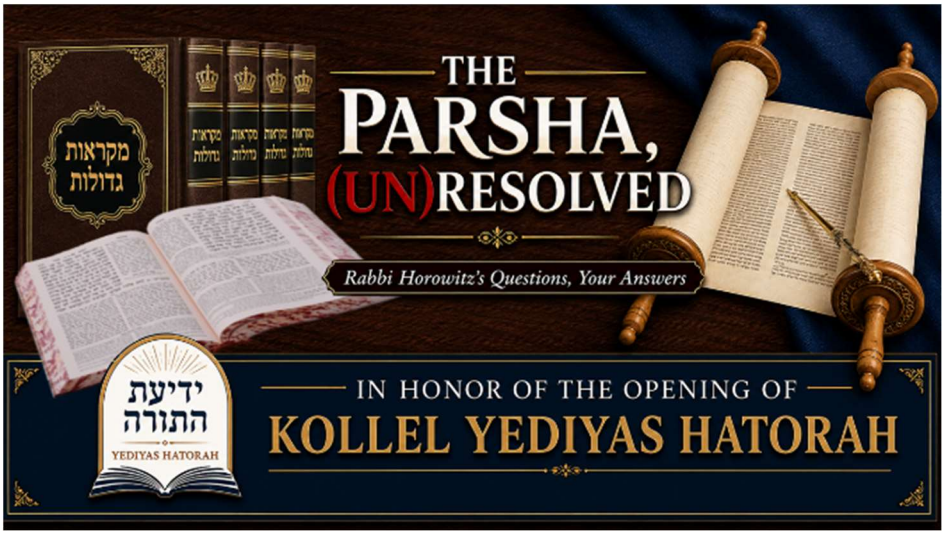


Parshas VaYerah

שנת תשפ"ז

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

Wash First—or Later?

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THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

Wash First—or Later?

יח:ד יֻקַּח־נָא מְעַט־מַיִם וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשָּׁעֲנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ.

"Please let a little water be brought, wash your feet, and rest beneath the tree."

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 86b) states:

"אמר רבי ינאי ברבי ישמעאל, אמרו לו וכי בערביים חשדתנו שהם משתחוים לאבק רגליהם, כבר יצא ממנו ישמעאל".

"R' Yannai bar R' Yishmael said: They said to him, 'Do you suspect us of being Arabs who worship the dust of their feet? Yishmael has already descended from him.'"

We see from the Gemara that there was a criticism of Avraham Avinu for insisting that his guests wash their feet. Although his intention was to be stringent and avoid any concern of avodah zarah, nevertheless, this involved *choshed b'ksheirim*, suspecting innocent people of wrongdoing. Thus, at Avraham Avinu's level, the proper balance of *chassidus* would have been not to insist that his guests wash their feet before entering his home.

On the other hand, Rashi quotes this Gemara and writes:

" כסבור שהם ערביים, שמשתחוים לאבק רגליהם, והקפיד שלא להכניס עבודת אלילים לביתו, אבל לוט שלא הקפיד, הקדים לינה לרחיצה, שנאמר ולינו ורחצו רגליכם ".

"He assumed that they were Arabs who worship the dust of their feet, and was careful not to bring idolatry into his home. But Lot, who was not so careful, placed lodging before washing, as the passuk states, 'Stay overnight and wash your feet.'"

Rashi seems to imply a criticism of Lot for not being as careful as Avraham Avinu regarding the concern of avodah zarah.

We are thus left with a rather puzzling dilemma: If we insist that our guests wash their feet immediately, as Avraham Avinu did, Chazal criticize us for suspecting innocent people. But if we delay the washing, as Lot did, Chazal criticize us for not being sufficiently careful about avodah zarah. Either way, we cannot seem to get it right! So what is a person supposed to do when welcoming guests into his home? When exactly should he have them wash their feet in order to earn the approval of Chazal?

THE QUESTION: When should one ask his guests to wash their feet, so as to avoid both the problem of suspecting innocent people and the problem of not being sufficiently careful about avodah zarah?

Consider the question and send your approach before next week's issue.

LAST WEEK'S QUESTION

Parshas Lech Lecha 5787

Who Is the Angel Named "Lailah"?

יד:טו וַיֵּחָלֵק עֲלֵיהֶם לַיְלָה הוּא וַעֲבָדָיו וַיַּכֵּם וַיִּרְדְּפֵם עַד־חוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר מִשְּׂמֹאל לְדַמָּשֶׂק׃

"He divided his forces against them at night, he and his servants, and struck them, pursuing them as far as Chovah, which is to the left of Damascus."

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 96a) states,

"אמר רבי יוחנן אותו מלאך שנזדמן לו לאברהם לילה שמו שנאמר והלילה אמר הורה גבר."

R' Yochanan said: The angel who appeared to Avraham was named Lailah (Night), as the pasuk states, "And the night said: A man has been conceived."

I don't delve into the hidden realms of Torah to the extent that I am familiar with all the angels. But this particular angel I actually already know from the revealed parts of Torah. The Gemara (Niddah 16b) states,

"הלילה אמר הורה גבר... אותו מלאך הממונה על ההריון לילה שמו, ונוטל טפה ומעמידה לפני הקב"ה ואומר לפניו רבש"ע טפה זו מה תהא עליה גבור או חלש חכם או טיפש עשיר או עני."

"And the night said: A man has been conceived" ... The angel appointed over pregnancy is named Lailah. He takes a drop and presents it before Hashem, asking: Master of the Universe, what will become of this drop? Will this person be strong or weak, wise or foolish, rich or poor?

Presumably, this is the very same angel, rather than two different angels who happen to share the same name. After all, R' Yochanan's source for identifying "Lailah" in Avraham's battle as the name of an angel is the very same pasuk from which the Gemara in Niddah derives the identity of the angel appointed over pregnancy.

Now, as a general rule, one angel does not perform two missions, as Rashi writes in Bereishis 18:2. It would seem, therefore, that everything an angel does must be connected to his particular mission. After all, Hashem certainly has no shortage of angels! He has more than enough angels to carry out whatever tasks require an angel. How, then, can this angel named Lailah be responsible both for overseeing the determination of a person's characteristics before birth and for assisting Avraham in his battle against the four kings? Seemingly, these two responsibilities have nothing whatsoever to do with one another!

We can add another dimension to our question. We can understand why an angel named "Lailah" would be appointed over pregnancy, since conception is associated with nighttime, as the Gemara there states that marital relations are prohibited during the day. But warfare is not something particularly associated with nighttime. On the contrary, battles are generally fought during the day! What connection, then, does warfare have to the mission of an angel named "Lailah"?

THE QUESTION: What is the connection between the angel Lailah's role in overseeing the determination of a person's characteristics before birth and his mission to assist Avraham in the battle against the four kings?

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S QUESTION

Parshas Lech Lecha 5787

1. R' Yosef Matalon (a member of the Kollel) brought to my attention the **Iyun Yaakov** on the Gemara in Sanhedrin 96a, who already raises our question. To understand his words, we must first see the continuation of the Gemara. Following the above statement of R' Yochanan, the Gemara states: "ור' יצחק נפחא אמר שעשה עמו מעשה לילה שנאמר מן שמים נלחמו הכוכבים ממסלותם נלחמו עם סיסרא, אמר ריש לקיש טבא דנפחא מדבר נפחא [ר' יוחנן]".
"R' Yitzchak Nafcha said that Hashem performed a miracle of the night on his behalf, as the passuk states, 'From the heavens they fought; the stars, from their courses, fought against Sisera.' Reish Lakish said: The explanation of Nafcha is better than that of bar Nafcha [R' Yochanan]."

The Iyun Yaakov explains that although Reish Lakish himself states in Niddah that the angel appointed over pregnancy is named Lailah, nevertheless, he maintains that it is difficult to suggest that an angel appointed over pregnancy would perform an entirely different mission. Therefore, he said that Nafcha's explanation is better than that of bar Nafcha."

2. The Maharsha there explains (and many readers pointed to his words) that this is why the passuk states that Nimrod was a mighty hunter before Hashem. This means that already when the angel presented before Hashem the drop from which Nimrod was formed, it was decreed that he would be

a mighty hunter. Accordingly, based on that decree, Avraham should have been defeated in this war, since Amrafel, who was Nimrod the mighty hunter, participated in the war. Therefore, HaKadosh Baruch Hu sent this very angel, named Lailah, to change the decree concerning Nimrod's formation, which had been made through him, so that Avraham would be able to defeat him.

Apparently, the Maharsha means that the decree that Nimrod would be a mighty hunter was so absolute that he could not be defeated in battle at all. Consequently, the only way Avraham Avinu could defeat him was by changing the decree that had been made at the time of Nimrod's formation.

I was familiar with this Maharsha even before writing my question, but I find this explanation very difficult to accept. It seems quite a stretch to suggest that the passuk's description of Nimrod as a mighty hunter means that he was destined to have such a mazal that absolutely no one could ever defeat him in battle, under any circumstances.

Indeed, the Iyun Yaakov himself writes, although the Maharsha offers this somewhat forced explanation to resolve the difficulty, it nevertheless remains a strained interpretation.

3. R' Yonasan Eppel (Beit Shemesh) showed me the **Aruch LaNer** on the Gemara in Niddah, who explains that when it is decreed whether a person will be strong or weak, the precise degree of his strength must also be determined. After all, someone considered strong in comparison to one person may be considered weak in comparison to someone even stronger.

It follows that the original decree must also determine who will be stronger than whom, and who will be capable of defeating whom. Accordingly, the Gemara means that it had already been decreed at the time of Avraham's and Nimrod's formation that Avraham would be stronger than Nimrod and would defeat him in battle.

4. Mrs. Naomi Horowitz (wife of the Rosh Kollel) suggested that the surest way to win a war is to know in advance exactly what moves the

enemy will make, what his strengths and weaknesses are, and how he makes his decisions. With all this information, one can anticipate the enemy's every move and gain a decisive advantage.

Now, the angel named Lailah was present at the time of Nimrod's formation, when all his character traits and abilities were determined. He therefore knew precisely what Nimrod's strengths and weaknesses were, how he thought, and how he would react in any given situation.

Thus, the angel could provide Avraham Avinu with all this information, enabling him to anticipate every move Nimrod would make, even before Nimrod himself made it. Armed with this knowledge, Avraham could easily defeat him.

5. R' Shimon Verbov (Beitar Illit) suggested that pregnancy and war are actually closely related. Pregnancy marks the beginning of life, while war threatens that very life. It is therefore quite fitting that the same angel who is appointed over the beginning of life should also be involved in war, where life itself is in danger.

However, according to these explanations, we might ask: What was so special about Avraham Avinu's war against Nimrod that specifically required the assistance of this angel? Why should his involvement be any more necessary here than in any other war in which Hashem wishes to grant victory to the Jewish people?

R' Verbov explained that this is indeed the case! We can understand this based on the continuation of Rashi's commentary that the night was divided: During its first half, a miracle was performed for him, while the second half was reserved for the midnight of Yetzias Mitzrayim."

Yetzias Mitzrayim is the root of all the redemptions and salvations of the Jewish people from their enemies throughout the generations. Accordingly, the very same angel who assisted Avraham Avinu in his war continues to assist the Jewish people in their wars and redemptions throughout history.

6. R' Shimon Stern (Beitar Illit) wrote the following explanation, and I heard a similar approach from **R' Aryeh Black** (a member of the Kollel).

We can understand the role of the angel named Lailah in an entirely different way. This angel brings the drop before Hashem and asks what will become of it. In other words, his function is to take something whose future is still unknown and bring it before Hashem so that its ultimate destiny can be determined.

The same idea applies to Avraham Avinu's war. On that Pesach night, Avraham brought into existence a new reality of redemption, as we have seen from the above Rashi. However, it had not yet been determined what the significance of this victory would be for future generations, or what would ultimately emerge from the power of redemption that had been created that night.

This is precisely the role of the angel named Lailah: to take things whose future is still hidden and undetermined and bring them before Hashem to clarify what will ultimately emerge from them.

Therefore, this angel appeared during Avraham Avinu's war to determine what the long-term consequences of his victory would be. And the answer was that the power of redemption created that night would indeed be realized in Yetzias Mitzrayim and in the subsequent redemptions of the Jewish people throughout the generations.

THE PARSHA, (UN)RESOLVED

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