

Shavuos: Responding to the Angels

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

The *Gemara* says¹ that when Moshe ascended Above to receive the Torah, the angels demanded to know why he was there. When G-d told them that Moshe had come to [acquire the Torah for the Jewish people], the angels protested: “This beautiful concealed thing [Torah], You desire to give to one who is of flesh and blood?! ‘Give Your glory upon the heavens!’²”

G-d commanded Moshe to respond to the angels’ protest. Thereupon Moshe rejoined: “The Torah states: ‘I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt.’³ Did you [angels] descend to Egypt? ... It goes on to say, ‘Do not have any other gods.’⁴ Are you dwelling among nations that serve idols?”

Moshe then went on to include the rest of the Ten Commandments: “Do you labor ... Do you engage in commerce ... Do you have parents ... Does jealousy exist among you ... Do you have an evil inclination?”

The *Gemara* concludes that upon hearing Moshe’s explanation, the angels acknowledged that it was indeed proper for G-d to give the Torah to man.

The Rabbis explain⁵ that the legal basis of the angels’ claim that “G-d’s glory be given upon the heavens,” rested on the law of *bar metzra*, a neighbor’s right of preemption. According to Jewish law,⁶ when one sells a field, the owner of the neighboring field has first rights of acquisition. This is because it is beneficial to have one’s fields next to each other,⁷ and the Torah states:⁸ “You shall do that which is proper and good in G-d’s eyes.”

This, too, was part of the angels’ complaint. Since until the time of *Matan Torah* the Torah was found and concealed in the heavens, the angels felt they had the preemptive rights of the *bar metzra* since the heavens were their abode.

Since the law of *bar metzra* was the legal basis for their protest, we must understand how Moshe’s response neutralized their complaint.

The ultimate purpose of Torah is that through it, G-d’s objective in creation — “G-d earnestly desired to have a dwelling in the nethermost level”⁹ — may be fulfilled:

Just as a person finds himself in his entirety within his dwelling, so did G-d desire that His entire essence be found in the “nethermost level,” this physical world. This is accomplished through Torah, for with regard to Torah, G-d says: “You are actually clutching *Me*”¹⁰ — His entire essence is found within Torah.

Accordingly, the angels’ claim of *bar metzra* is entirely negated. For the law goes on to state¹¹ that if the *bar metzra* desires the land for farming while the alternate purchaser desires the property in order to build a house,

then the field goes to the purchaser, inasmuch as a “dwelling is more deserving [of the land usage], and the law of *bar metzra* does not apply.”

Here, too, since the purpose of Torah is to make a domicile and dwelling for G-d's Essence — something that can only be accomplished in this world and not in the angels' worlds on high — the law of *bar metzra* does not apply.

This is why Moshe replied: “Do you labor ... Do you engage in commerce? etc.” Moshe, in effect, was saying that Torah is the province of the Jew, as the Jew is associated with transforming this physical world into a dwelling for G-d.

The fact that Torah was not given to the celestial beings in no way implies that they are not in need of the Divine Essence being drawn down thereby. For even within the higher realms, without the revelation of G-dliness brought about through Torah, only a glimmer of holiness radiates there.¹² It is only through the spiritual service of the Jewishpeople in this world that G-d's Essence is drawn down within *all* worlds, higher as well as lower.¹³

This is similar to the use of a jack or lever to lift a building. If the implement is placed on an upper level of the building, only that part of the structure will be raised. Only when the jack or lever is placed *under* the building — in the “nethermost level” — will the entire building be elevated.¹⁴

This is why the Torah was given specifically in this world, the “lowest level, of which there is none lower.”¹⁵ By doing so, the entire “edifice” of creation is uplifted and elevated.

Moshe also stressed this when he responded: “Does jealousy exist among you ... Do you have an evil inclination?” He was informing the angels that G-d desired to give the Torah to a world so low that jealousy and the evil inclination exist within it. By giving Torah here, in this world, G-d intended that His essence would permeate all levels, from the lowest to the highest.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 28-33.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Shabbos* 88b ff.
2. *Tehillim* 8:2.
3. *Shmos* 20:2.
4. *Ibid.*, v. 3.
5. See *Pnai David* and *Rosh David* (from the *Chida*) on *Parshas Yisro*; *Sefas Emes* on *Parshas Yisro*.
6. *Bava Metzia* 108a; *Rambam*, *Hilchos Shecheinim* 12:5; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat* 175:6.
7. *Rashi*, *Bava Metzia*, *ibid.*; *Rambam*, *ibid.*
8. *Devarim* 6:18.
9. *Tanchuma*, *Naso* 16; *Tanya*, ch. 36.
10. See *Vayikra Rabbah* 30:13; *Shmos Rabbah* 33:6; *Tanchuma*, *Terumah* 3. See also *Tanya*, ch. 47.
11. *Bava Metzia*, *ibid.*; *Rambam*, *ibid.*; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.* 175:26.
12. See *Tanya*, ch. 36; *Basi LeGani* 5711, ch. 4.

13. See also *Ner Chanukah 5643*, end of ch. 1.

15. *Tanya*, *ibid*.

14. See *Torah Or*, p. 4a.

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