



## Pardes's Parsha Discussion with Rabbi Alex Israel

*TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE*

### Vayehi: The Miracles that Surround Us.

Our parsha is filled with blessings. In chapter 48, Jacob blesses his grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe; that God should protect them from harm and that they shall continue to be associated with the family tradition, with “the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, and should have families of their own. This is a prayer – “Hamalakh HaGoel” – that is traditionally recited before one goes to sleep, and in my synagogue, is sung when the children are called to the Torah on Simchat Torah. It is a beautiful prayer:

And he blessed Joseph, saying,  
**“The God** in whose ways my fathers, Abraham and Isaac walked,  
**The God who has been my shepherd** from my birth to this day—

**The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm**  
 Bless the lads.  
 In them may my name be recalled,  
 And the names of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac,  
 And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth.”(48:15-16)

First, we have God, and then an angel! The rabbis of the Midrash are intrigued to understand the “God” who has shepherded Yaakov “from birth to this day” as opposed to the “angel” who protects or redeems him from harm! Are they distinct? Is “God” different to the “angel”?

They draw a startling conclusion: **The earning of a person’s daily bread is beset with more difficulty than “redemption” from harm.** After all, an “angel” is the means by which Jacob is protected from harm. But it is God Himself who has “been my shepherd”, in other words, sustained and fed me, “from my birth to this day.”

ורבי שמואל בר נחמן אמר וגדולה מן הגאולה, שהגאולה על ידי מלאך ופירנסה על ידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא. גאולה על ידי מלאך, "המלאך הגאל אתי", ופירנסה על ידי הקדוש ברוך הוא (תהלים קמה, טז) "פונתם את ידך ומשביע לכל חי."

R, Shmuel bar Nachman: **Earning of livelihood is even greater than redemption**, for redemption comes through an angel – **“The angel who has redeemed me from all harm”** –

and livelihood is from God directly as it states: “You open Your hand and feed every creature.” (Ps. 146)

Usually we see divine protection (a.k.a redemption) in the hands of God, beyond our ability to take control. In contrast, livelihood would seem to be in our hands, a product of our investment, of human effort. Usually we see deliverance from enemies as a sudden and unexpected moment, whereas livelihood is a daily grind, a routine experience.

And yet, here the Midrash asserts that God is there for us in our jobs and our careers – He is our shepherd “From my birth to this day”. In contrast, the rare moments of salvation “from harm” are entrusted to angels, handled by agency. This Midrash is a hymn to the importance of “parnassa” and that we can never take our careers for granted, that the very fact that we can clothe our families and put food on the table is a divine act.

But the Midrash also equates the two:

רבי אליעזר ורבי שמואל בר נחמן. רבי אליעזר אמר הקיש גאולה לפרנסה ופרנסה לגאולה, שנאמר (תהלים קלו, בד) "ויפרקנו מצרינו", וסמיה ליה (תהלים קלו, כה) "נתן לחם לכל בשר", מה גאולה פלאים אף פרנסה פלאים, מה פרנסה בכל יום אף גאולה בכל יום.

R. Elazar and R. Shmuel ben Nachman (were in discussion). R. Elazar said: Redemption is likened to the earning of livelihood, and the reverse; as it states, “and rescued us from our enemies”, and immediately, “He who grants bread to all flesh.” (Ps. 136)

**- Just as redemption are miracles, similarly livelihood is a miracle. Just as livelihood is a daily occurrence; similarly, redemption is a daily event.**

Neither is natural. Just as salvation from enemies is miraculous, so is making a living.

“Both of them – livelihood (parnassa) and salvation (geula) – are no result of the general laws of nature which God fixed once for always but are the outcome of God’s special providence. That the fair, conscientious man, seeking his livelihood only in honest or moral ways, should find his daily bread is a miracle, a wonder, a gift of God each time. (Hirsch)

Second, even if we imagine that livelihood is a divine gift, we don’t think that we need “geula” or salvation on a daily basis! But the Midrash insists: “Just as livelihood is a daily occurrence; similarly, redemption is a daily event!” We all need protection and “redemption” daily!

“Had we but had eyes to see”, remarks a saying of our sages, “we would realise that we are surrounded by ‘mazikin’ – dangerous elements of the physical world.” (Berakhot 6a) ...Happy can we be that we do not see the dangers to life from which we escape every minute in the physical world, nor do we realise the ruin and misfortune that is wished to us by envy and wickedness which, in social life, daily and hourly, may pass over us without our even being conscious of it.” (Hirsch)

Apparently, if we but open our eyes, we might sense that we are surrounded and supported by miracles every day.

Jacob blesses his grandchildren, and we bless ourselves every night before we go to sleep, that this element of divine protection be extended to all of us.

**Please discuss:**

- I have a friend who asks everyone around his Shabbat Table to point out where they experienced God in their lives during the past week. Where did you see God in YOUR life this week?
- Go around the table and ask everyone to suggest something that they have experienced this week that is not to be “taken for granted”?
- Can you share something about your career that wasn’t merely a result of your effort but was a stroke of good fortune, spectacular timing, or maybe “**The God who has been my shepherd** from my birth to this day.”

Shabbat Shalom!