

# Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Mishpatim 5785

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Hashem tells Moshe how to navigate to Eretz Canaan.

הִנֵּה אֲנִי שֹׁלֵחַ מַלְאָךְ לְפָנֶיךָ לְשָׁמְרֶךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וְלְהַבְיֵאֲךָ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הִכְנַתִּי:

“Behold! I am sending a messenger before you, to guard you on the way, and it will bring you to the place that I have prepared.” (Shmos 23:20).

Was this messenger the plan all along? Who or what was the messenger? Why is the pasuk in the second-person singular? What was at stake with this angel?

The second-person singular pronoun makes the pasuk seem to read that Hashem is only talking to Moshe. Much of the Torah, generally, is written in the singular second-person pronoun. “And the Harvest Festival of the first fruits of your labors...” (ibid 23:16) and “The first fruits of your land” (ibid 23:19) are examples. Clearly, the pesukim are not referring only to Moshe as he would not be in Eretz Yisroel to harvest the land and bring the first fruits. The Torah refers to the people. Hashem talks to Moshe in that singular person because the Torah is given to each individual. In turn, Moshe would teach the Torah on a personal level to all Bnei Yisroel.

Other times, when Moshe talks to the people, the Torah is in plural. “And Moshe said to the people, ‘Recall this day that you left from Egypt from the house of bondage.’” (Ibid 13:3). The term there for “you” is plural. Similar to, “Today you (pl.) go out in the springtime.” (Ibid 13:4). This can be contrasted with the next paragraph. “And it will be because Hashem brought you to the Land of Canaan.” (Ibid 13:11). Written in singular. “You shall separate all the first issue of every womb.” (Ibid 13:12). Further, the Ten Utterances are in the singular pronoun. “...that took you out.... you shall have no other...you shall not make for yourself...” (Ibid 20:2-4). All singular and personal.

The reason for the change of number pronoun has to do with who is talking and to whom. When Hashem tells Moshe to command Bnei Yisroel, then the command is going to be plural. They shall “take for me a gift offering.” (Ibid 25:2). Take is plural when Hashem instructs Moshe to tell Bnei Yisroel to take. When the Torah says that Moshe was talking to the entire people, it uses plural, too. However, when commandments and decrees are recorded without introduction, then it is in singular form. When Hashem talks to Moshe it is singular, also, even if it is about the entire people. When Hashem talks to Moshe and Aharon, or multiple people at once, then it is plural. An example is “This month shall be for you (pl.) the first of the months.” (Ibid 12:2).

Thereby, it is still unclear if the messenger was for all Bnei Yisroel. Hashem tells Moshe, “Guard from before it, and heed its voice, do not defy it, for it will not lift your (pl.) transgressions, because My name is within it.” (Ibid 23:21). This pasuk uses the plural for “your” transgressions. It switches plurality pronouns. After the sin of the Molten Calf, Hashem agrees to continue bringing the nation to Eretz Canaan. “Behold! My messenger

shall go before you (sing.) and on the day that I make consideration, I shall consider on them their sins." (Ibid 32:34). This pasuk also refers to "behold" and it will lead "you" (sing.). It also refers to a reconning of sins. The end of the pasuk refers to "their sins" and "upon them." Here, in the same pasuk there is a switching of the numerical pronoun, going from singular to plural. The pauk says a third time in the singular: "I will send before you a messenger." (Ibid 33:2). Further, when Moshe is bargaining with Hashem after the Molten Calf, Moshe questioned who or what the messenger would be. "See, You said to me, 'Bring up these people,' but You did not make it known to me how; who You were sending with me." (Ibid 33:12). This seems to indicate that the messenger was only for Moshe and Hashem would judge the people.

However, Moshe recalls this differently. "And we cried to Hashem, and He heard our voices, and He sent a messenger, and we went out of Egypt." (Bamidbar 20:16). Moshe asks further of Hashem, "Because I have gained favor in your eyes, the people and I, shouldn't it be that You will go with us." (Shmos 33:16). Moshe is clearly asking for Hashem to lead the people, not just himself, in place of the messenger. These verses seem to indicate that the messenger was for all the people.

There were two different messengers. "And Hashem went before them: By daytime in a cloud pillar to lead them on the way. And by nighttime in a pillar of flame to light the way for them." (Ibid 13:21). Clearly, Hashem did not go in physical form. Instead, the cloud and the fire were angels, i.e., heavenly messengers. We know that these are heavenly messengers because the Torah writes, "And the traveling messenger of the Lord that went before the camp of Yisroel, and it now went to their rear." (Ibid 14:19). Lest one argue that the messenger of Hashem was different than the pillars of cloud and flame, the pasuk says, "And the traveling cloud pillar that went before them, it went and stood behind them." (Ibid). Clearly, Hashem sent messengers to lead the way. And these were the pillars. Hashem led the way Himself, but He did it by way of pillars of cloud and flame. That is why Moshe tells Edom, "The messenger took them out."

This messenger of cloud and flame was for Bnei Yisroel as a whole. Hashem, though, was going to send Moshe a personal messenger. This personal messenger was going to come in some form whereby Moshe would be able to communicate with Hashem at all times. Moshe would be able to talk to it face to face and receive replies directly. That is why the Torah talks about not defying the messenger and listening to what the messenger says. It would be Hashem by proxy. However, in Moshe's great humility, he did not want a private messenger. He wanted the entire Bnei Yisroel to know every time he communicated with Hashem.

This is why Moshe's tent was called the Ohel Moed - Tent of Meeting. (Ibid 33:7). Moshe's tent was to be the Mishkan. The entire people watched Moshe go out to the tent and enter it. (Ibid 33:8). Then a cloud pillar would descend and stand at its entrance and Hashem would talk to Moshe. (Ibid 33:9). Hashem would speak to Moshe as if face to face. (Ibid 33:11). However, Moshe davened that it should not be a private affair. Thus, Hashem had already commanded the Mishkan be built and He would dwell among them. (Ibid 25:8). Hashem agreed to reinstate the Mishkan and to only talk to Moshe from there. Hashem continued to lead the people through the pillars.