

Cosmic Message

"Avi. Avi."

"Oh. Hello Chaim. Shalom. How are you?"

"Fine. Did you hear me calling you?"

"I was so absorbed in the science fiction story that I am reading that I did not hear you."

"Can I read it?"

"Sure, Chaim. Here it is."

One cold, clear winter evening in the observatory, high atop a mountain in northern Washington . . .

"Come quickly, Dr. Benson. Look at this!"

Dr. Benson rushes from the other end of the deserted laboratory to join his colleague, Dr. Rosen in front of the radio-telescope screen.

"Do you see this on the screen?"

Dr. Benson's eyes open wide.

"It looks like a message coming in."

"Exactly."

"Who could be transmitting this message?"

"We must investigate. Read me the coordinates of the radio telescope."

"39° north, 147° east."

"That cannot be."

"Why not?"

"The nearest star in that quadrant is 3500 light years away. That means that the message that we are receiving has been traveling at the speed of light for 3500 years."

"Do you mean that the senders of this message began transmission 3500 long years ago? They must be all long gone by now. Nevertheless, their message is reaching us today."

Words slowly form and fill the screen. The two scientists are in awe of what they are seeing.

"Dr. Benson, this will make international news headlines. A communication from the distant past. A message launched across 3500 years of history . . ."

We return to our friends, Chaim and Avi . . .

"Chaim. Chaim."

"Yes, Avi. I'm sorry. I was very absorbed in the story. A message from 3500 years ago. You know, Avi, the story has some truth to it."

"Really Chaim? In what way?"

"The first verse in Sefer Devarim states, 'These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel.' Moshe gathered the Jewish people together in the desert, shortly before their entrance to the Land of Israel. It was

there that he delivered his final message to the Jewish people before he passed on from this world. The Ohr HaChaim explains why the expression 'all Israel' was used instead of just stating 'Israel'. Moshe was not speaking only to those Jews present in the desert at that time. Rather he was addressing all of the Jews of all future generations. These words of Torah that he was about to convey to them were timeless. There are no other words in existence that can inspire and guide a people throughout history like the Torah. So you see, Avi, every time that we read and learn the Torah, we are receiving a message that began transmission 3500 years ago, and is still going strong today."



"What a cosmic experience. If people realized this, they would be standing in lines from here to Cincinnati to read the message."

"Avi, let's see what we can do to help people realize the timeless value of the Torah."

"I'm with you, cosmic buddy. Let's blast off!"

Kinderlach . . .

The Torah is timeless. The same words that inspired the Jewish people 3300 years ago inspire us to this very day. Let us learn the Torah with all of our might. Let those words sink into our minds, our hearts, and our bones. They will inspire us also. And we will merit to become a link in this 3300-year chain.

The Soft Touch

In the beginning of parashas Devarim, the Torah recounts many of the sins of the Jewish people. Oddly

enough, it only mentions the places where the sins occurred, and not the sins themselves. Rashi comments that the sins were not explicitly stated in order to preserve the honor of the Jewish people. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l adds that although the sins were well known, they were nonetheless only hinted at. We learn from this to be very careful not to hurt another's feelings even when we are correcting him. We also learn this directly from Hashem. He killed Bilaam's donkey the day after the donkey had spoken to Bilaam. Why? Because the donkey had humiliated Bilaam. Although Bilaam was a wicked person, Hashem was nonetheless careful about his honor.

What happens if we do not act with *kovod* (respect) and we embarrass the person? The gemora writes (Gittin 57a), "Rebbi Elazar says, 'Come and see how great the power of embarrassment is. Behold, Hashem assisted Bar Kamsa, destroyed His house and burned His sanctuary.'"

Bar Kamsa was humiliated in public when he was thrown out of a large festive meal. The great Rabbis of the time were in attendance and they did not protest his disgrace. Bar Kamsa took revenge (and we see that Hashem helped him) by informing to the Romans and thereby causing the destruction of Jerusalem.

Kinderlach . . .

Whenever possible use the soft approach. People can be sensitive, easily embarrassed, easily hurt. Consider their feelings at all times. Say things as nicely as possible. Choose your words carefully. Speak privately whenever possible. Do not raise your voice unless absolutely necessary. Soft and nice, that's the way to be.

Parasha Questions:

- Which *aveyra* was "*Di Zahav*" a reminder of? (Rashi 1:1)
- Can a judge favor a strong man for fear of his life? (Rashi 1:17)
- Which tribe was not represented among the *meraglim*? (Rashi 1:23)
- Which land did Eisav inherit? (2:12)
- Which lands did Lot inherit? (2:9,19) In what merit? (Rashi 2:5)
- What Heavenly sign caused the nations to fear Klal Yisrael? (Rashi 2:25)
- Were there any survivors of the war with Sichon? (2:34)
- Which tribes went out first in battle? Why? (Rashi 3:18)

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