

“And an angel of Hashem stood on the road to impede him.” (22:22)

Hashem warned Bilaam not to curse the Jewish nation. Bilaam had the gall to attempt to defy Him. Hashem sent a Heavenly angel to block Bilaam's path. The angel stood there with a drawn sword. Yet, *Rashi* describes this angel as an angel of mercy, sent by a compassionate G-d to prevent Bilaam from committing a sin which would catalyze his self destruction. The donkey who saw the angel saw a menacing angel brandishing a sword. Yet, he is described as an angel of mercy. In *The Pleasant Way*, *Horav Avraham Pam, z.l.*, derives a compelling lesson from here. Life is not always what it seems cut out to be. What appears superficially to the human eye to be a fiery enemy brandishing a sword can really be an angel of mercy.

It happens all of the time. Situations arise in which we think “for sure” that a menace stands in our way, or that our world is about to fall apart. In reality, it may be a blessing in disguise. *Rav Pam* cites an example from the world of *shidduchim*, matchmaking. A young man searches for his *bashairt*, intended one. After awhile, he feels he has discovered the perfect girl, with the perfect background, wonderful *middos*, character traits, who shares his goals and aspirations for life. What could go wrong? Suddenly, the “*Satan* with an outstretched sword” stands in his way. Something comes out of the blue that places the *shidduch* on shaky ground. It usually begins with a bit of *lashon hara*, slander, that creates a cloud of ambiguity. No longer is he sure that this is his *bashairt*. The *Satan* stands in his way. It takes very little to create a *Satan* – but it regrettably happens all the time. Someone has a problem with the *shidduch*, and they are intent on destroying it.

We, however, do not know Hashem's plans. What seems to be a *Satan* that destroys a *shidduch* is really an angel of mercy in disguise. We have no way of seeing into the future, knowing what was in store for this couple, had the *shidduch* gone through. This *shidduch*, instead of being Heaven sent, might actually have been a recipe for disaster. Not every *shidduch* that seems right on paper is consistent with the Divine plan. Problems beyond the scope of our ability to address could have arisen which would have transformed the perfect *shidduch* into a tragedy.

In summation, we do not know the Divine plan, and we do not have the ability to alter it. We should look at every angel – even the one with the fiery sword – as an angel of mercy. We have to fight the natural feelings of depression that accompany disappointment with trust in Hashem, knowing that everything He does is good. We just have to wait until the picture becomes clear. If we assimilate this realization into our being, it will be that much easier to deal with disappointing situations that have so frequently become part of life.

The following story is a classic case which relates to the above idea. It is the story about a young woman named Miriam who came to realize that her *bashairt* had been determined many years earlier during an incident which, at that time, seemed totally unrelated. At the same time, her

bashairt came to realize that the “*Satan*” who stood in his way for so many years was his own personal angel of mercy.

It was a hot day, and Miriam’s family decided to spend *Chol HaMoed Sukkos* at a resort in the Galilee which catered to observant families. Ten-year-old Miriam decided to take a walk with her little sister. Not realizing where they were going, they apparently walked to a nearby village that did not have much love for *chareidim*, observant Jews. Suddenly, a group of young ruffians began to chase them. Fearing for their safety, they climbed up into a nearby tree. The hoodlums shook the tree and began hurling expletives at the two innocent children. As their terror escalated, the girls began to cry and scream for help. This added to the hoodlums’ frenzy, as they began to shake the tree in earnest.

Suddenly, from nowhere, a religious boy about thirteen-years-old appeared. He came towards the gang and told them to stop. However, they were bent on trouble, and no observant boy was going to prevent them from having their fun. They began to attack him and a fight ensued. As he started to run away, the gang took up the chase. He then signaled to the girls to escape while he would lead their would-be-attackers away. The hoodlums caught up with him and began hitting him with a large piece of wood. He was beaten to within an inch of his life, but the girls were able to run back to safety. So ends part one of the story. Miriam was saved by a noble action of a young boy whom she had never met.

Years went by and Miriam, try as she did, could never find out what ever happened to the boy who had saved her and her sister that fateful day. The incident remained forever engraved in her mind.

Part two of the story begins with Miriam turning older, as she rejects one *shidduch* after another. They were nice boys, but something was always missing. People began to think that Miriam might be a bit too choosy. When she turned twenty-three, someone suggested a fine young man named Yehudah. He had it all – learning, sterling character traits, good looks and a pleasant personality. He was on the older side –twenty-six – but after all, she was already twenty-three.

They went out. All the accolades were true – he had everything – except he had a deep terrible scar on his face than ran from his eye to his chin. It was shocking. A kind, gentle, handsome face ruined by this awful scar. As much as she was impressed by his personality and demeanor, she could not get her mind off of the scar. Yet, for some reason she kept on seeing him.

Five dates later, she did not know what to do when Yehudah told her that he felt she was the right partner for him. She did not know what to say or how to say it, but Yehudah could see the answer in the way she looked at his scar. “You do not have to explain,” he said. “I know what you want to say. If you have not managed to overlook the scar by now, I guess you will never reconcile yourself with it.”

Feeling terribly ashamed, Miriam asked how he got the scar. Yehudah smiled sadly and related the

following story: “It happened when I was thirteen-years-old. A group of young hoodlums were chasing two young girls. In my attempt to save them, the hoodlums gave me a thrashing with a large piece of wood. Unfortunately, the piece of wood had a rusty nail sticking out of it which tore open my face. I do not know why I am telling you this. Now, you probably think that I was a wild kid who was into fighting. It just so happened that I was with my aunt and uncle who were staying at a resort, and I chanced upon those frightened girls. I was simply trying to help them, and I received the scar on my face as a result. Well, now you know the story. Over the years, I managed to forget the incident, but as my search for my *bashairt* dragged on from year to year, I guess Hashem reminds me about it every day.”

The rest of the story can be filled in by the readers. Yehudah’s “*Satan*,” his terrible scar, was actually an angel of mercy. It had kept him waiting for all those years – until he found his true *bashairt*. The scar no longer bothered Miriam. After all – it was her scar.

We hear such stories all the time. Interestingly, it was the donkey who saw a menacing angel. That might be our problem. We look with donkey eyes at life’s events and forget that Hashem has plans that supercedes what we see.