

ACCOMPANYING ANGLES

by Shlomo Katz

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Vayeitzei

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Today's Learning:

Zavim 5:1-2

Orach Chaim 18:1-3

Pesachim 104

Yerushalmi Pesachim 71

We read in this week's parashah that Yaakov referred to the place where he slept on his way to Charan as the "Bet Elokim"/"House of G-d." Chazal say that that place was the future site of the Bet Hamikdash. They also note that Avraham had previously called this same place a "har"/"mountain" (Bereishit 22:14) and Yitzchak referred to it as a "sadeh"/"field" (ibid 24:63).

R' Sar Shalom of Belz (the first "Belzer Rebbe"; died 1855) observes as follows: The gemara (Nedarim 39b) teaches that the Bet Hamikdash was created before the world. This could not be meant literally; however, Rashi (in our parashah - 28:17) states that besides the earthly Bet Hamikdash, there is a "Heavenly" Bet Hamikdash that is situated opposite the earthly one. Perhaps it was _that_ Bet Hamikdash which preceded the creation of the earth.

In the desert, Bnei Yisrael surrounded the mishkan on four sides with four different camps. Chazal teach that so, too, in Heaven, Hashem surrounds Himself with four different camps of angels.

Perhaps it is these camps of angels that are referred to as the "Heavenly Bet Hamikdash." At the end of our parashah such a camp is called a "machaneh." (The encampments of the Jews around the mishkan are also referred to as "machaneh" in Bemidbar 2:3).

However, as long as Hashem had not yet fully revealed His presence on earth, and there was no earthly Bet Hamikdash, the Heavenly Bet Hamikdash was also incomplete. Before Avraham came along there were not four camps of angels surrounding the Shechinah; there was a Heavenly Bet Hamikdash but it consisted of only one wall surrounding the Shechinah, made up of one camp of angels. As the Patriarchs began to reveal the presence of Hashem to earth's inhabitants, the heavenly Bet Hamikdash became more and more complete.

Avraham prayed at the place where the Bet Hamikdash would be built, and with his prayers he added an additional wall to the heavenly Bet Hamikdash - a second camp/machaneh of angels. The gematria of "machaneh" is 103. Two times that (for two walls) equals 206. That is why Avraham called the place a "har," the gematria of which is 205. [A rule of gematria is to disregard differences of 1.]

Yitzchak prayed there and added another "machaneh" of angels to the Heavenly Bet Hamikdash, giving it a third "wall." Now that there were three camps, he referred to it as a "sadeh" which has the gematria of 309, or three times 103.

When Yaakov prayed there he added a fourth wall, making it a "bayit," which has the gematria of four times "machaneh" (412). However, the Heavenly Bet Hamikdash did not yet have a ceiling, just as the Mishkan in the desert had four walls but no ceiling (only a covering of cloth). Moshe Rabbenu prayed for the completion of the Heavenly Bet Hamikdash. He prayed using the word, "Va'etchanan" (Devarim 3:23), which has a gematria of 515, or five times 103. (Heard from R' Benjie Gerstman)

The Angels That Accompany Man

"He dreamt, and behold a ladder stood on the ground and its head reached the Heavens; and behold, angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it." (28:12)

Rashi explains: The angels that accompanied Yaakov in Eretz Yisrael could not leave the Land. They went up to the Heavens, and angels of Chutz L'aretz/outside the Land came down to accompany him.

The gemara (Berachot 60a) teaches that every person is accompanied by angels, and before a person enters a restroom, he should recite:

Honor yourselves, honored ones, holy ones who serve Above. Give honor to the G-d of Israel, leave me alone until I enter and fulfill my desire, and then I will return to you.

Another version of this prayer appears in the Tur, as follows:

Honor yourselves, honored ones, holy ones who serve Above. Guard me, guard me. Aid me, aid me. Wait for me until I enter and exit, for such is the way of man.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 3:1) states that today it is not customary to address the angels in this manner. Many poskim/halachic authorities explain that we do not consider ourselves to be sufficiently G-d-fearing to merit the company of angels.

If so, asks R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (died 1935), why do we recite Shalom Aleichem on Friday night? (That poem greets the two angels that the gemara says accompany man home from shul.) He answers that the reason that angels accompanied our ancestors constantly in the time of the gemara was that our ancestors wore tefilin all day. We do not wear tefilin all day, so we are not accompanied by angels. However, the Shabbat-day itself fulfills the role that tefilin fill on weekdays (i.e., being a sign of our covenant with Hashem); therefore, on Shabbat, angels accompany all of us in the merit of Shabbat just as they accompanied our ancestors on weekdays.

R' Yaakov Emden z"l (died 1776) disagrees strongly with the view that we are no longer accompanied by angels. He writes (in Mor U'ketziah ch.3):

It does not appear reasonable to assert that these angels accompany only the most pious people, and I can prove this from several places in the Talmud where it appears that angels accompany every person. For example, the gemara (Ta'anit 11a) states that if a person does not participate in the suffering of the community, the two angels that accompany him will testify against him. One learns from this that even a wicked person [who does not feel the community's pain] is accompanied by angels.

Furthermore, in Shabbat (119b) we learn that two angels accompany a person home on Friday night, one good angel and one bad angel. The gemara states that if one's house is not prepared for Shabbat, the bad angel says, "May it be G-d's will that it be this way next week." From here, too, we learn that even one who is not extremely pious [i.e., he is not sufficiently prepared for Shabbat] is accompanied by angels.

Since the angels who come on Friday night are referred to as "good" and "bad," it seems to me that they refer to the yetzer ha'tov/good inclination and yetzer hara/evil inclination. One of these angels teaches man to be good, while the other tempts him to do evil. [Therefore, again, the implication is that even those who are not extremely pious are accompanied by angels.] (Later, I saw in the Zohar, Parashat Toldot, that it says, "A person has two messengers and they are called the yetzer ha'tov and the yetzer hara." Thank G-d, this is exactly as I had said on my own [above]. The same idea appears other places in the Zohar as well.)

Chazal say, "In the way that a person wants to go, they take him" [i.e., if a person wants to be good, Hashem assists him, and if he wants to sin, Hashem provides opportunities to sin]. It appears to me

that the plural form ("_they_ take him") refers to the two angels that accompany a person all the time. Even when a person accepts the advice of one of the angels, good or bad, they both accompany him, and neither one leaves him. In fact, the Zohar says that these two angels eventually will testify against the person.

[Why, then, do we not recite the formula found in the gemara?] Because the prayer mentioned in the gemara was composed for a time when outhouses were located in the fields where no people were found. Accordingly, people needed protection and it was necessary to ask for mercy. Today, this is no longer necessary.

Some kabbalists and Sephardic poskim hold that, not only are we still accompanied by angels, we should also continue to recite the prayer as in the days of old. However, R' Yaakov Chaim Sofer z"l (early 20th century) writes that perhaps this recitation is intended only for those who study Torah full time. For others, it might appear to be presumptuous. (Kaf Ha'chaim 3:1)

R' Yosef Karo z"l (1488-1575; author of the Shulchan Aruch) was regularly visited by an angel known as a maggid. (This angel told R' Karo that he appeared to him in the merit of his study of mishnah.) The angel said, "When you enter a dirty place, I and all of my soldiers wait outside. You should know, however, that even more than we distance ourselves from you when you stand in a dirty place, do we distance ourselves from you when your thoughts depart from Torah study. Therefore, be very careful not to remove your thoughts from the Torah even for a moment." (Maggid Meisharim, Parashat Matot Masei)

Sponsored by Moshe Cohen in memory of his mother Malka Rivka bat R' Avraham Chaim a"h

Judy and David Marwick in honor Yedidya Avraham and Yonatan Elazar Even-Chen

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