

THE AVRAHAM EFFECT

by Rabbi Berel Wein

One of the more intriguing episodes in the parsha of this week is the story of the three visitors to the tent of Avraham and Sarah. The Torah first describes the three visitors as anashim - human beings. And that is how Avraham certainly saw them - as Bedouin Arabs whom he suspected of being idol worshippers who sanctified the dust on their feet. Therefore, he gently requests them to wash their feet before sitting down to eat their meal at his home.

Judaism, which always operates in reverse veneration to paganism, therefore bids us to wash our hands before we sit down at a meal to break bread. But in any event, it is clear from the text of the Torah that these visitors to Avraham and Sarah are simply viewed as being three passing human strangers at the beginning of their visit. Suddenly, Avraham realizes that these three visitors are really God's angels sent to him to reveal God's plans and to fulfill His Divine mission.

The Torah now calls them malachim - angels. I have always felt that there was a deep subliminal message in this change of description of Avraham's guests. Namely, that coming into the tent of Avraham and Sarah can by itself transform seemingly pagan Bedouin Arabs into heavenly angels. Such is the effect of Avraham in the world and such is the influence of the tent of Avraham and Sarah in their society. The Hittites will be moved to say: "You are a prince of God in our midst." And so he was.

The Jewish home was always the place of individual spiritual elevation and holy transformation. It was the factory that produced holy and devoted people, conscious of their responsibilities to God and humankind. With its rituals and rhythms, with its silences and loving disciplines, with its peace and the serenity of the Sabbath and the Holy days, the Jewish home was able to transform and uplift people.

I once had a tradesperson - a woman drapery designer - come to our home Friday early afternoon to give an estimate on draping our windows. Our home, due to the influence of my wife, was a place of serenity and calm on Friday afternoons as it pretty much was at all times. The woman remarked to me as she left: "I have never felt such a feeling of serenity as I do in your home." I explained to her that the transformation was due to the upcoming arrival of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is serenity and the only way to welcome it is with serenity itself. The Jewish home was the direct descendant of the tent of Avraham and Sarah. It genetically inherited the transcendent ability to sanctify, enhance and transform human beings. It provides the setting and milieu for human

beings to work on becoming angels.

The privilege to be visited by angels can be experienced by all of us. We welcome them to our home every Friday night at the onset of the Sabbath and we can have them accompany us all week long as well, if we only will it. Such is the legacy of Avraham and Sarah to us, their children.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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