

Following the Giving of the Torah in last week's *Parashah*, our *Parashah* opens with the laws of the *Eved Ivri* / the Jew who is sold into servitude to another Jew. The Torah states that the *Eved Ivri* shall go free after six years. However (21:5-6), "If the servant shall say, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children--I shall not go free,' then his master shall bring him to the court and shall bring him to the door or to the doorpost, and his master shall bore through his ear with the awl..." Why his ear? The *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 22b) explains: The ear that heard at *Har Sinai* (*Vayikra* 25:55), 'For to Me *Bnei Yisrael* are servants,' yet its owner went and procured for himself another master shall be pierced!"

R' Reuven Sasson *shlita* (rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Ramat Ha'sharon, Israel) writes: We refer to Egypt as "*Bet Avadim*" / "The house of slavery." We must understand that our ancestors' slavery in Egypt was all encompassing; it was a state-of-being that they internalized. Even a prison with walls up to the heavens does not restrict a person as much as *Bnei Yisrael* were restricted in Egypt, because *Bnei Yisrael* learned in Egypt to think and feel like slaves. This bound them to Egypt such that, repeatedly during their years in the desert, they yearned for Egypt and wished to return there.

In contrast, after the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah, we are free to make choices about our spiritual futures. This, writes R' Sasson, explains why the law of *Eved Ivri* is taught right after the Ten Commandments. The Torah is teaching us that a person who could say, "I love being enslaved," has missed the message that was taught at *Har Sinai*. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Be'or Panecha* p.380)

Shabbat

Two *Malachei Ha'sharet* / Angels that serve [*Hashem*] accompany a person home from the *Bet Ha'kneset* on *Shabbat* eve--one good and one bad. When they come to his house and find a candle lit, the table set, and his couch prepared, the good angel says, "May it be so on another *Shabbat*," and the bad angel answers "*Amen*" against his will. If the house is not prepared, the bad angel says, "May it be so on another *Shabbat*," and the good angel answers "*Amen*" against his will. (*Shabbat* 119b)

R' Yitzchak Yosef Chazan z"l (Poland; 1841-1927) writes: Many associate this *Gemara* with the hymn, "*Shalom Aleichem*," in which we welcome the angels into our homes. However, there are a number of points that require clarification:

- In *Shalom Aleichem*, we address the angels as "*Malachei Ha'shalom, Malachei Elyon*" / "Angels of peace, angels of the One on High." This seems inconsistent with one of them being a "bad" angel.
- Many have the custom after *Shalom Aleichem* to recite the verse (*Tehilim* 91:11), "He will command His angels to you, to protect you in all your ways." Again, this does seem appropriate if one of the angels is "bad." - **Continued in box inside** -

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“Behold! I am sending an angel before you to protect you on the way, and to bring you to the place that I have made ready. Beware of him--listen to his voice, do not rebel against him, for he will not forgive your willful sin--for My Name is within him.” (23:20-21)

R' Aryeh Shapira *shlita* (Yerushalayim; prolific author of works based on the writing of *Ramchal* and the *Vilna Gaon z"l*) writes: The outcomes of all of our choices and all of our Divine service are governed by the laws of the Torah and by our *Mitzvot*, for they are the spiritual roots of everything in the universe. Angels, too, are governed by these rules, such that their actions are merely responses to our Torah study and *Mitzvot*. This is why our verse says that an angel cannot be forgiving; there is a direct cause and effect relationship between our choices and the angels' responses.

(*B'shimcha Esa Kapi* p.9-10)

“He took the Book of the Covenant and read it in earshot of the people, and they said, ‘Everything that Hashem has said, Na’aseh ve’nishma / we will do and we will obey (literally, “we will hear”)!’” (24:7)

R' Meir Margulies *z"l* (1707-1790; rabbi of Ostrog, Ukraine; one of the earliest disciples of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*) writes: A *Tzaddik* is rewarded even for those *Mitzvot* that he never had the opportunity to perform, because it is clear to *Hashem* that the *Tzaddik* would do them wholeheartedly given the chance. Perhaps, continues R' Margulies, this is the meaning of “*Na’aseh ve’nishma*”--“*Na’aseh*” / We will do those *Mitzvot* which we are able to do; those which we are not able to do, “*Nishma*” / We will listen carefully when we are taught their laws and we will accept them upon ourselves so that it can be considered as if we did them.

(*Yachin U'Bo'az* ch.1)

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 88a) relates that when *Bnei Yisrael* said, “*Na’aseh ve’nishma*,” *Hashem* exclaimed, “Who told My children the secret of the angels, of whom it is written (*Tehilim* 103:20), ‘Bless *Hashem*, angels--the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word.’”

R' Shlomo Wolbe *z"l* (1914-2005; a pre-eminent figure in the *Mussar* movement) writes: The *Gemara* calls *Na’aseh ve’nishma* a “secret” because it reflects a fundamental, very deep idea. What is that idea? It is that wisdom and holiness result from the action of performing *Mitzvot* (“*Na’aseh*” / “We will do”), not from abstract study detached from performance. Thus the angels are praised as those who “do His bidding.”

R' Wolbe adds: This is the meaning of the *Mishnah* (*Avot* ch.3), “If one’s wisdom is greater than his deeds, he is like a tree with thick foliage but few roots; any wind that comes along will topple it.” Wisdom is the goal, but the action of performing *Mitzvot* is the root of all spiritual accomplishments.

(*Alei Shur* II p. 584-585)

“And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them.” (21:1)

R' Nosson Lewin *z"l* (1857-1926; rabbi of Rzeszów, Poland) writes: The ordinances that *Hashem* commands are holy and are not like the laws enacted by any other society. The latter may keep a society functioning smoothly, but the former, the Torah’s ordinances, do that and also promote holiness.

He continues: The *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 31a) asks, “What is the meaning of the verse (*Tehilim* 138:4), ‘All the kings of earth will acknowledge You, *Hashem*, because they heard the words of Your mouth?’” The *Gemara* answers: When *Hashem* gave the first four of the Ten Commandments, the nations of the world said dismissively, “He is saying that for His honor!” However, when He said, “Honor your father and your mother,” they acknowledged the validity of the other commandments as well. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

The nations of the world, explains R' Lewin, could understand why G-d would give commandments that define the relationship between man and G-d. However, the idea that G-d would regulate the relationships between people--the subject of “Honor your father and your mother” and the subject of the ordinances in our *Parashah*--was a novel idea to them.

It is to drive this message home that these ordinances follow so closely after the Giving of the Torah.

(*Petach Ha'bayit to She'eilot U'teshuvot Bet Yitzchak: Choshen Mishpat*)

– Continued from back page –

- Why do we call the angels “*Malachei Ha'sharet*” in the first stanza and “*Malachei Ha'shalom*” thereafter?
- Our Sages say that a Jew is accompanied by two angels wherever he goes. Why would he have two guardian angels all week, but only one good angel on *Shabbat*?
- In the second stanza, we say, “*Bo'achem Le'shalom.*” Usually, *Tanach* uses “*Le'shalom*” to connote continued movement toward future perfection, while “*Be'shalom*” refers to existing perfection. Are not angels already as complete as they will ever be?

R' Chazan answers these questions as follows: These angels are called “*Malachei Ha'shalom*” because their mission is to check whether *Shalom* / peace reigns in a person’s home. On the way to the home and when they first arrive, they are called “*Malachei Ha'sharet*” / angels serving G-d, because they do not yet know if they will find *Shalom* in the home. Thereafter, they are called “*Malachei Ha'shalom.*”

We are taught that our deeds create angels that reflect the quality of those deeds. Thus, we bless these angels, including the bad angel, that the *Shalom* in our homes will turn them into *Malachei Ha'shalom*. How perfect they will be depends on the degree of *Shalom* that pervades our homes, thus, they are “coming” and then “departing” “*Le'shalom*” / toward peace. They are not yet complete. [In whatever state we help them attain, they accompany us all week.]

(*Torah Mi'Tziyon* Year IV, Volume 4, ch.22 (1898))