

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Vayetze

How are the Angels of the Land of Israel Different than Angels from Elsewhere?

How Do You Sense the Angels Present in Your Life?

I've always been fascinated by mystical and angelic beings, and I wish I could see them or at the very least communicate with even one. While I haven't yet been blessed with a conscious relationship with my own guardian angel, I do sense the presence of angels in my life. When my sons were young, they often did so many dangerous things somehow without injuring themselves, that it seemed like Hashem's angels were protecting them. It also regularly happens that I receive exactly what I was missing in mysterious ways as if an angel was appointed as my personal emissary. For example, several times when I prepared a fruit basket for a sick woman in our community but didn't have the time to bring it, someone – who was anyway going in the same direction – came to my doorstep at that precise moment, happy to deliver it, what an angel! Last week, for our Rosh Chodesh Kislev Retreat, I had to cook the Friday night meal for 19 people in two hours with only one kitchen helper. Somehow, we managed to prepare meat, veggies, several dips, and salads, besides a gluten-free dessert in a short time. Everything just flowed and we finished all the cooking and most of the cleaning up in the same amount of time it usually takes to cook for only two people! I truly sensed the extra helping hands of the angels. One of my friends claims to communicate with angels in her spiritual healing practice. She told me that the departed ancestors of her clients come to bring a message to help their descendants heal. To my reaction that departed ancestors aren't exactly angels, she responded that they introduce themselves as angels, and she has learned that you can never win when arguing with an angel! So, considering that the original meaning of the Hebrew word מַלְאָךְ/*malach* – 'angel' is 'messenger,' I concede that in a broader sense, anyone who carries a spiritual message can be considered an angel.

Do You Have to Be a Prophet to Sense the Presence of Angels?

I'm not going to argue with my friend's claim that she communicates with angels, despite that according to Rambam angels cannot be perceived with our senses. Rather than being physical manifestations within this world, angels are an expression of Divine Supervision. Therefore, whenever Scripture refers to 'seeing' angels, it is due to a prophetic vision (Rambam, *The Guide of the Perplexed* 2:41-44). Ramban, however, makes a radical distinction between prophecy and visions, including the vision of an angel. Not only can one 'see' an angel without being a prophet, but there exists a phenomenon where one 'sees' things and experiences things normally not experienced. The Ramban agrees that angels being spiritual, are generally invisible, nonetheless, people who aren't prophets could have visions of angels. It involves a deeper sense of seeing, as G-d "opens the eyes" of someone to enable him to see the angels that are really there. You cannot see them with normal eyes, which are sensitive to light waves, but G-d endows certain people with the special ability that allows them to 'see' angels (Based on Ramban, *Bereishit* 18:1). In defense of Rambam, we recall that the word מַלְאָךְ/*malach* – means 'messenger or agent' and angels can be understood to be G-d's heavenly agents, closely associated with Him. So, for instance, when an angel calls out to Hagar in the wilderness and tells her to return to Sarai (*Bereishit* 16:9-12), we understand it to refer to the voice of G-d. This perception is strengthened by the fact that the angel uses a first-person singular case when referring to an action of G-d. "He said to her: **I** shall greatly increase your seed; it shall not be numbered for multitude" (*Bereishit* 16:10). The same thing occurs when the angel prevents Avraham from slaughtering Yitzchak declaring "...now **I** know that you are a G-d-fearing person, for you did not withhold your son, your only one, from **Me**" (*Bereishit* 22:12). This does not imply that a malach is another name for

G-d, but rather it is Hashem's emissary acting on His behalf.

What is an Angel and What is its Mission in the World?

There are many different sorts of angels, some who more directly represent Hashem's will and others who carry out Divine retribution. Angels can manifest themselves through good or evil people who affect us. "G-d has made one corresponding to the other" (*Kohelet* 7:14). When a person sins, a destructive angel is created as it says about Bilam, when he went to curse the Jewish people, a destructive angel was created (*Bamidbar* 22:22,32). Yet, G-d's compassion is expressed even through the destructive angel who waits for the person to do teshuva before it can return back home, where it desires to be. All the more so when we perform a mitzvah, we create a guardian angel (*Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 32:6). The mission of angels of this category is threefold:

1. It saves us from harm and damage.
2. It saves us and guards us from committing any wrongdoing.
3. It goes before Hashem and recommends us for good, since the angel is created from the certain mitzvah that we performed.

(*Tiferet Shlomo on the Torah, Parashat Devarim*).

What is the Difference between the Angels of the Holy Land and Angels of Outside Israel?

In *Parashat Vayetze* we learn about the angels that escort Ya'acov when leaving the Land of Israel to build his family, and when returning back home.

ספר בראשית פרק כח פסוק יב

וַיַּחלֶם וַיהוָה סֻלָּם מִצֵּב אֶרְצָה וְרֵאשׁוּ מִגֵּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וַיהוָה מַלְאכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ:

"He dreamed and behold! a ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven; and behold, angels of God were ascending and descending upon it" (*Bereishit* 28:12).

Rashi explains that the angels who escorted Ya'acov in the Holy Land ascended to heaven, as they do not serve outside the Land of Israel. Once Ya'acov left the Land of Israel, a different category of angels descended to escort him there (Rashi, *Bereishit* 28:12). Why did Rashi explain the Torah verse differently than its simple meaning that Ya'acov dreamed about a ladder on which angels would go up and down? According to the simple level of angels coming down and going up, it should have stated, "Descending" before "Ascending" since the abode of the angels is above, and we would expect them to come down from there before going back up. Therefore, according to Rashi the Torah verse refers specifically to switching the angels of the Land of Israel with those outside of the Land. It thus makes sense that the angels of the Holy Land ascend and return on high when Ya'acov departs from there, before the new category of angels - whose domain is outside of Israel - descend to escort Ya'acov. One of the sub-commentaries on Rashi asks, why didn't the angels from outside Israel descend to be ready to protect Ya'acov before the angels of the Land of Israel left him? Then Ya'acov wouldn't be left even a moment without protection. He explains that the angels outside of Israel are on a lower level than those guarding the Holy Land. They, therefore, do not have permission to exhibit dominion in the presence of the angels of the Land of Israel, so they had to wait to descend until the angels of the Holy Land had ascended (Mashkil l'David, on *Rashi, Bereishit* 28:12). Even if we understand angels to represent Divine Providence, there is a distinction between Divine providence within the Land of Israel and outside her. This is stated explicitly in the Torah: "A Land Hashem, your G-d, looks after; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (*Devarim* 11:12). Thus, the angels - the spiritual powers of G-d's providence within the Land were taken from Ya'acov when he left the Land on his journey to Charan and were returned to him when he returned to

the Land:

ספר בראשית פרק לב פסוק ב ויעקב הלך לדרך ויפגועו בו מלאכי אלהים: (ג) ויאמר יעקב כאשר ראם מחנה אלהים זה ויקרא שם המקום ההוא מחנאים:

“Then Ya’acov went on his way, and angels of G-d met him. And when Ya’acov saw them, he said, ‘This is the camp of G-d’ and he named that place Machanaim” (*Bereishit* 32:2-3).

AND ANGELS OF G-D MET HIM - the angels of Eretz Yisrael came to greet him and escort him to the Land. MACHANAIM - Two camps, [one of the angels] outside the land, who came with him up to here, and [one of the angels] of Israel, who came to greet him (Rashi, *Bereishit* 32:2-3).

Angels of Love versus Angels of Anger

I was wondering how exactly the angels of the Land of Israel distinguish themselves and was happy to discover an interesting answer from a Chassidic perspective: The angels in Israel are distinguished above all other angels as Angels of Love, while those outside Eretz Yisrael are Angels of Anger (Shem MiShmuel *Parashat Vayishlach* 5678). This differentiation parallels the Talmudic distinction between the Torah scholars of Eretz Yisrael and Babylon.

Rabbi Oshaya said: “What is the meaning of the verse ‘And I took for Myself two staffs; one I called Pleasantness (*Noam*), and one I called Destroyers (*Chovlim*); and I tended the flock.’ ‘Noam’ refers to the scholars of the Land of Israel, who treat each other graciously when engaged in halachic debates; ‘Chovlim’ to the scholars of Babylon, who injure each other’s feelings when discussing halacha” (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 24a).

Thus, the angels of Eretz Yisrael – similarly to the scholars of the Land – are angels of love, as opposed to the angels outside the Land, who are angels of anger. Service of G-d outside the Land is on the level of “Shun evil,” of instigating the Good Impulse against the Evil Impulse. In contrast, Divine service in the Land is on the level of “Do good” – The service of G-d filled with love and graciousness (Shem MiShmuel, *Parashat Vayishlach* 5678). The angels who accompanied Ya’acov assisted him in dealing with the various difficulties he faced. At the home of the deceitful Lavan Ya’acov had to overcome Lavan’s numerous attempts to cheat him. When returning to the Holy Land, Ya’acov’s service was once again on the level of pleasantness. Therefore, he was then escorted by angels of love who helped him with grace and pleasantness. Yet outside the Land, he was accompanied by angels of anger who helped him in his struggle to protect himself and his family from the deceit of Lavan. From the perspective that angels represent Divine Providence – outside the Land, G-d’s providence was limited to saving Ya’acov from Lavan’s evil, while within Eretz Yisrael G-d’s providence over Ya’acov was complete, and he dwelt in tranquility (Based on Nir Shaul, presented by: Rabbi Mordechai Gershon, *Israel National News, Eretz Yisrael Yomi*, Nov 12, 2021).

G-d’s Providence over the Land of Israel in Our Days

Whereas one can attain levels of spirituality and Torah learning outside Israel, G-d taught Ya’acov that the levels we can achieve in Eretz Israel are higher. As Rabbi Yehudah Halevi affirms, just as a vineyard can only flourish in a place with the proper conditions and climate, so can Israel only flourish spiritually on its own land (*The Kuzari* II, 12). Abarbanel concurs that the angels of Eretz Israel are superior to the angels in Chutz la-Aretz and that this was G-d’s way of reminding Ya’acov that he must return to Eretz Yisrael, which is on a higher spiritual level. Ya’acov understood the Divine message and took an oath that he would return to his father’s house in Eretz Israel:

ספר בראשית פרק כח פסוק כ וידר יעקב נדר לאמר אם יהיה אלהים עמדי ושמרני בדרך הזה אשר

אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנָתַן לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבְגָד לְלַבֵּשׁ: (כא) וְשָׁבְתִי בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶל בֵּית אָבִי וְהָיָה ה' אִתִּי וְהָיָה ה' לֵאלֹהֵי:

“Ya’acov uttered a vow, saying, ‘If G-d will be with me, and He will guard me on this way, upon which I am going... Then I will return in peace to my father’s house, and Hashem will be my G-d (*Bereishit* 28:20-21).

Ya’acov, as we know, did return. Throughout the generations, Jews have been pursued and persecuted, and today is no exception. The merit of the Eretz Yisrael is crucial for the protection of Jews everywhere in the world. Yet, the challenges facing the Jewish people who have returned to our Holy Homeland are mitigated by the immense Divine protection we experience here. It is truly a miracle that we keep surviving! G-d’s special supervision in the Promised Land is certainly felt today more than ever, with the interception of so many missiles flying over Israel. It is undoubtedly due to G-d sending His protecting angels to guard us. May Hashem’s angels keep protecting our soldiers and may we experience even more revealed miracles in the Land as Hashem guides our leaders to let Good triumph over Evil!