

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter XXXI: Emor (Lev. 21:1–24:23)

Essay 8. The angels wait for Israel to be the first to praise G-d

ראש השנה פרק ד' אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה רבונו של עולם מפני מה אין אומרים לפניך ישראל שירה בראש השנה וביום הכיפורים, אמר להם אפשר מלך יושב על פסא דין ונספרי חיים ונספרי מתים פתוחים לפניו וישראל אומרים שירה עכ"ל?

In tractate **Rosh Hashana**, the fourth chapter, the Gemara explains why Hallel is not recited on Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur. “Rabbi Abbahu said, **‘The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, for what reason don’t the Jewish people recite a song of praise, i.e., Hallel, before You on Rosh Hashana and on Yom Kippur? That is, on the other holidays, Jews read Hallel, so why aren’t they doing so on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur? He said to them: Is it possible that a King is sitting on the throne of judgment and the books of life and the books of death are open before Him, and the Jewish people are reciting a song of praise?’**” I.e., Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are somber days of judgment whose mood is incompatible with the recitation of Hallel, which is a joyous prayer. (Rosh Hashana 32b).¹

כולי עולמא מקשים מה איכפת להו למלאכים בנה. ותירץ בעל עיון יעקב לפי דאיתא בחולין (דף צ"א) ששמלאכי השרת אין אומרים שירה למעלה עד שיאמרו ישראל למטה, ואם כן שואלים הטעם למה אין ישראל אומרים שנה גורם שגם הם אינם יכולים לומר עכ"ל.

Everyone asks what difference this makes to the angels. The author of the Iyyun Ya’akov² solves this according to what is brought in tractate Chulin (page 91b)³ that the ministering angels don’t recite a song of praise in Heaven above until Israel recites it on the Earth below, and if so, they are asking the reason why Israel is not saying it, for this causes them also to be unable to say it.

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¹ See Essay 17, which also discusses this quotation from Gemara.

² Rabbi Jacob ben Joseph Reischer (Bechofen) (1661–1733), Austrian rabbi and halakhist. The Iyyun Ya’akov (Wilmersdorf, 1729) is a commentary on the Ein Ya’akov (which is a compilation of the Aggadic material in the Talmud).

³ The first edition had “page 92.”

אָבֵל קִשָּׁה דְּבַעֲרָכִין (דף יו"ד) כְּתָבוּ הַתּוֹסְפוֹת וז"ל, אָבֵל לֹא קָאָמַר מִפְּנֵי מָה אֵין אָנוּ אוֹמְרִים לְפָנֶיךָ שִׁירָה מִשְׁמַע שְׁמֵלְאָכִי הַשָּׁרֵת אוֹמְרִים שִׁירָה אֶף בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה וְיוֹם הַכִּיּוּפּוּרִים וּמִכָּאֵן הִנֵּה אוֹמֵר ר"י שְׁאֵין לְדַלֵּג וְהַסִּיּוֹת יִשְׁוֹרְרוּ וּכְרוּבִים יִפְאָרוּ וְכוּ' עכ"ל. אֵלָּא שְׁבָאָמַת קִשָּׁה עַל הַתּוֹסְפוֹת הֵיא דְחֻלִּין שְׁאֵין מִלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת אוֹמְרִים שִׁירָה עַד שִׁיאָמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

But it is difficult that in Arachin (page 10b), the Tosafot write, “But it’s not said, ‘Why don’t we say a song of praise before you,’” with the meaning being that the ministering angels do recite a song of praise even on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. From here, the Ri⁴ used to say that one must not skip over the insertion in the blessing before reciting the Shema, “And the Chayot sing, the Cherubim glorify . . .” Rather, in truth, a question on this Tosafot is that per Chulin 91b, the ministering angels don’t say a song of praise until Israel says them.

וְנִשׁ לֹאמַר דְּאִיתָא בְּמִדְרָשׁ עַל פְּסוּק "וְנִקְרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה", שֶׁהַמְּלָאָכִים נוֹהֲגִים כְּבוֹד זֶה לְזֶה. וְהַקְּטוֹן אוֹמֵר לְגָדוֹל לְהַתְחִיל, וְזֶהוּ "וּמִקְבְּלֵי דִין מִדִּין" כְּלוֹמַר מִי שְׁאוֹמֵר הַשִּׁירָה מְקַבֵּל הַהַזְמָנָה מִתְּבִירוֹ. וְשֵׁם בְּחֻלִּין אִיתָא חֲבִיבִין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנֵי הַקַּב"ה יוֹתֵר מִמְּלָאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת שִׁישְׁרָאֵל מְזַכְרִין אֶת הַשֵּׁם לְאַחַר שְׁתֵּי תִיבוֹת, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּמִלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת אַחַר שְׁלוֹשׁ תִּיבוֹת, וְאֵין מִלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת אוֹמְרִים שִׁירָה לְמַעַלָּה וְכוּ'. דְּמִשְׁמַע וְדֹאֵי שֶׁהַטַּעַם שְׁאֵין מִלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת אוֹמְרִים שִׁירָה עַד שִׁיאָמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא מִפְּנֵי שִׁישְׁרָאֵל גְּדוֹלִים מִמְּלָאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת וּמִלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת מְכַבְּדִים אוֹתָם שִׁיְהִי הֵם תְּחִילָה.

It can be said that it’s brought in a midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, remez 404) on the verse, “And one would call to the other, “Holy, holy, holy! The L-rd of Hosts! His presence fills all the earth!” (Isaiah 6:3), that the angels treat each other with respect. The lesser tells the greater to begin, and this is the meaning of, “They received [sanction] one from the other,”⁵ as if to say that one who recites a song of praise receives the invitation to recite the praise from his fellow. There in Chulin 91b it is brought that Israel is more endeared to the Holy One, Blessed be He, than the ministering angels, for Israel mention the Name [of G-d] after two words, *Shema Yisrael*,⁶ whereas the ministering angels only mention the Name of G-d after three words, i.e., per Isaiah 6:3, after the words, “Holy, holy, holy.” Another reason that Israel is more endeared is that the ministering angels don’t recite a song of praise in Heaven above until Israel recites it on the Earth below. The meaning is certainly that the reason that the ministering angels don’t recite a song of praise until Israel says them is because Israel is greater than the ministering angels, and the ministering angels honor them that they should be first in singing praises of the L-rd.

⁴ Isaac ben Samuel the Elder (“the Ri ha-Zaken”) (c. 1115 – c. 1184), French Tosafist; a son of Rabbeinu Tam and thus a great-grandson of Rashi.

⁵ Targum Jonathan on Isaiah 6:3, “*And they received [sanction] one from the other* [וּמִקְבְּלֵי דִין מִן דִּין], and they were saying, ‘Holy in the highest and exalted heavens is the house of His Shechinah, holy upon the earth is the work of His might, holy forever, world without end, is the L-rd of hosts, the whole earth is full of the brightness of His glory.’”

⁶ Deut. 6:4, “*Hear, O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one.*”

וְזֶה נִיחָא בְיוֹם שְׂאוּמְרִים שִׁירָה בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבֵין הַמַּלְאָכִים, אָבָל אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָם אוֹמְרִים שִׁירָה בְּאוֹתוֹ יוֹם אַז שְׁפִיר הַמַּלְאָכִי הַשְּׂרֵת יְכוּלִים לומר הֵם. וּמִשּׁוֹם הָכִי מִתְּתָה הָיוּ רוֹצִים לְהַמְתִּין שְׂיֹאמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל תְּחִלָּה, וּכְשֵׁרוֹאִים שְׂיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָם אוֹמְרִים אוֹתָהּ שׁוֹאֲלִים הַטַּעַם לְהַקְב"ה. וְלֹאֲסַר שֶׁהַשֵּׁיב לָהֶם שְׂיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָם יְכוּלִים לְאוֹמְרָהּ בְּאוֹתוֹ יוֹם אַז אוֹמְרִים הֵם הַשִּׁירָה בְּדַבְרֵי הַתּוֹסְפוֹת דְּעֶרְכִין הַנ"ל.

This is fine on a day in which both Israel and the angels recite a song of praise, but if Israel does not recite a song of praise on that day, then it would be nice if the ministering angels are able to say them. For this reason, from the beginning [the angels] wanted to wait for Israel to recite a song of praise first, and when they saw that Israel was not saying it, they asked the reason of the Holy One, Blessed be He. After He answered them that Israel is not able to say [Hallel] on that day,⁷ then they recited the song of praise according to the words of the Tosafot in Arachin above.

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⁷ The reason may be because Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are solemn days of judgment, and it is not proper on such days to offer joyous songs. See Essay 17 for Zera Shimshon's view of why it would be inappropriate for Israel to recite Hallel on those days.