

---

## MOSHE RABBEINU VERSUS THE MELACHIM

The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 88:) states that when Moshe *Rabbeinu* went up to the heavens to accept the Torah the *melachim* — angels — challenged his presence among them. Hashem ordered Moshe to respond to them. Moshe asked the angels,

“Did Hashem rescue you from Mitzraim; were you enslaved by Pharaoh; is it possible for you to worship idols; do you do work from which you must rest on *Shabbos*; are you involved in commerce; do you have parents to honor etc.?”

Moshe explained that the specifics of the Torah are only applicable to humans, not to angels. The angels were impressed and relented.

What was this debate all about? Why did the angels object to sharing the Torah with humans? Why were they so impressed with Moshe’s response — were they not aware of the specifics of the Torah?

The *Ein Yaakov* (*ibid.*) offers an insightful approach. The *melachim* understood that holiness emanates downward from Hashem to humanity. They considered themselves the conduits of *kedushah* in this holy chain of command. They wanted Hashem to bestow the blessing on them; they in turn would bestow it on humanity. Once Moshe appeared in the heavens, he was bypassing them in this chain of command. The angels knew that they were infinitely intellectually superior to man, and their understanding of Torah could vastly surpass that of man. Torah, the expression of Hashem’s thought, could certainly not be appreciated by man as much as by angels.

The Maharal (*Tiferes Yisrael* 24) explains that the Torah which is of the “*seichel elyon*” — “supreme intellect” could only be properly transmitted to a receptacle of *gashmius* — a physical entity, i.e. humans. Humans were created in the “*tzelem Elokim*” — “image of G-d.” Angels do not possess this *tzelem Elokim*. Angels are similar to machines, computers capable of supreme intellectual and physical efforts, unimaginable by man. However, the “thought of Hashem” is directed only to receptacles which are a reflection of Hashem. Only man possesses *tzelem Elokim*, the image of Hashem. Torah is communicated from its source, Elokim, to its intended receptacle, the *tzelem Elokim*. It was never intended to take any other route to man. Angels, as perfect as they are, are mere robots. They have no *bechirah* — free will — as we understand it; they see and understand events so clearly, that there is no room for doubt. Any sane human being standing on the ledge of a roof knows enough not to step off. It is manifestly clear in his mind that to step off the ledge would be fatal. Similarly, angels possess such clarity of understanding that doubt of Hashem is never a factor in their actions. Torah was directed to creatures capable of doubt; the Torah’s light is directed to illuminate the gray areas of man’s existence. An angel, due to his

clarity of thought, sees everything in terms of black and white; there are no gray areas. Man needs Torah to remove the gray areas, so that he may ascend toward the level of the angels.

The angels are described as creatures that are *omdim* — “standing still” in the *berachah* that Hashem gave to Yehoshua the High Priest (*Zechariah* 3:7). As great as they are, they have no potential for growth. Man however, is described as a “mover”: “If you walk in my statutes...” (*Vayikra* 26:3). Similarly, Shlomo *Hamelech*, in describing the spiritual journey of man uses the term:

כי הלך האדם אל בית עלמו

...so man goes to his eternal home... (*Koheles* 12:5),

denoting that man’s soul does not remain stationary, but is constantly on the move. As imperfect as man is, he possesses the potential for growth; Torah is the vehicle for that growth.

To further dramatize the great superiority of man over the *melachim*, it is necessary to analyze an astonishing *ma’amar Chazal* — statement of our Sages of blessed memory (*Shemos Rabbah* 15:6). The greatest devotion that the *melachim* can pay Hashem is the recital of the prayer “*Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh*” — “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Some say that it is said daily, some say that it is said at intervals, and others say that it is said only once in their existence. Each human being possesses the *tzelem Elokim* — a reflection of the glorious image of Hashem. The human being is an infinite cry from the vast greatness of Hashem, a mere and nearly trivial reflection. Nevertheless, upon first observing the *tzelem Elokim* of *Adam Harishon*, the angels were moved to recite the prayer “*Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh.*” They were impressed with the awesome potential of man because in man they recognized a reflection of Hashem — creative choice — a characteristic that angels do not possess. After the angels studied the great *tzelem Elokim* of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, and through his arguments they came to the realization that he possessed the soul of the righteous, it was inevitable that they would bow to his cause.

[Another very novel approach to this question has been offered by Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandel (*Toras Chemed*). The Torah, in its many intricacies, can be studied on many levels. The angels, who approach perfection, study it on a much higher level than humans can ever aspire to. The angels chant one big “*shiuur*” from the first letter of the Torah to the very last letter and they also chant other combinations of letters of the Torah (see Ramban, Introduction to Torah); readings so beautiful and complicated that humans cannot begin to comprehend them. Unlike the angels, whose study focuses on letters, we study Torah in its most elementary level by forming words. It is possible that the angels were so impressed with Moshe’s arguments because they had never considered Torah through the usage of words.]

Hashem initially articulated the Torah and *mitzvos* as a very complex intellectual spiritual discipline, a level understandable only to the angels, not to man. In order to make the *mitzvos* understandable to man, Hashem had to translate them into a corporeal form. Hence, the *mitzvos* of *sukkah*, *tzitzis* and *tefillin*, for example, are actually a mundane expression of a more complicated spiritual ideal. Man is incapable of fathoming their essence; they were therefore transformed into a simpler palpable form. The angels always understood Torah in its original lofty terms; they never considered it in its elementary human form. What impressed the angels about Moshe’s argument was the fact that the simple materialistic translation of these complex ideals demonstrated that the Torah was actually targeted for humans from its very inception.

aA