חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

LUBLIN · PERI TZADIK, VAYERA

Avraham's circumcision gathers all three Patriarchs' holiness into him

Peri Tzadik

Drawing on the Zohar, the three men who visited Avraham are understood as the three Patriarchs, and drawing on the midrash, the three angels who appeared to him are read as corresponding to the three parts of the world (settled land, wilderness, and sea). Through the circumcision, Avraham's holiness comes to include that of all three Patriarchs, so that he and his descendants become the foundation for bringing the entire world into God's holiness. AI SUMMARY

"And behold, three men" (Bereshit 18:2). The Zohar says: Who are these three men? They are Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who stand over him, etc. That is, through the circumcision it was hinted to him that all the holiness of the people of Israel would come forth from him. It was also hinted that the holiness of all three holy Patriarchs, who are the root of the holiness of Israel, is included in him. As it is written (Bereshit Rabbah 68) on the verse "Yaakov is the cord of His inheritance" (Deuteronomy 32:9): just as this cord, if it has fewer than three strands, does not hold, so the Patriarchs are no fewer than three.

They also said that these were three angels, Michael, Gavriel, and Raphael, as written (Bava Metzia 86b), and it is all one. This accords with what is written (Shabbat 53b): a person says, "I have a mazal," and Rashi explains: his angel, who pleads for him. That is, there are the levels of nefesh, ruach, and neshamah (the levels of the soul). The nefesh is from the world of Asiyah, the ruach is from the world of Yetzirah, the world of angels, and the neshamah is from the world of Beriah. Therefore, by virtue of the level of ruach, every person has his angel in heaven. The three angels hint at the three Patriarchs, who are their angels. For the Patriarchs are the fathers of the world and the totality of what was intended in the creation of the world, and so are their angels.

The one who came to bring Sarah the good news is the angel of Avraham. The one who came to overturn Sodom is the angel of Yitzchak, whose attribute was the fire of holiness. When the time came for Yitzchak to be born into the world, the drawing down of the fire of holiness into the world began, and this very fire overturned Sodom. The overturning of Sodom took place on Pesach, when Sarah was given the news that Yitzchak would be born. This is what is said: "The Sodomites were enraged and were set aflame with fire on Pesach." That is to say, they were burned by the fire of Pesach itself, for Yitzchak was born on Pesach. And on that same Pesach they announced "at the time of life," etc., concerning his birth.

Gavriel is the fire above, from the side of gevurah (strength, severity), as written (Pesachim 118a) that he is the prince of fire. The angel who came to heal Avraham, and who also went to rescue Lot, as written (Bereshit Rabbah 50), was the angel of Yaakov Avinu. For the rescue of Lot was in order to bring forth from him the soul of David HaMelech, peace be upon him. This is hinted at from the side of Yaakov, whose attribute is truth. Truth is the vitality

of holiness, which endures forever in his descendants without interruption. Yaakov Avinu, peace be upon him, did not die, for by virtue of his attribute he endures forever. And in his descendants too there is a point of truth that endures forever, for every Jew has a portion in the World to Come, and that vitality, which has no interruption, does not die.

They are called "those who sleep in the dust," and in the language of the midrash (homiletic teaching) and the Yerushalmi, death is called "sleep." So too it is said (Sotah 21a) on the verse "When you lie down" (Proverbs 6:22): this is death; "and when you awake": this is the time to come. This will be revealed through Mashiach ben David, as it says, "and David My servant shall be their prince forever" (Ezekiel 37:25). Then "He will swallow up death forever" (Isaiah 25:8), and the endurance of holiness in the world will be complete, at the level of the vitality of David HaMelech, peace be upon him, who is Mashiach, as it is written, "He asked life of You," etc. (Psalms 21:5).

The expression "standing over him" (nitzavim alav) is from the term tzipui, meaning that HaKadosh Baruch Hu (the Holy One, blessed be He) looks forward to this being established. It is like the expression "and you shall stand before Me there" (Exodus 34:2), meaning that He, may He be blessed, will wait and look forward to him.

Now, Midrash Rabbah says of the angels that one appeared to him in the likeness of a sadki, one in the likeness of a navoti, and one in the likeness of an Arab. Rashi explains: sadki is a seller of bread; navoti is a sailor, the pilot of a ship; Arab is an Ishmaelite. We must understand what is hinted at in the angels' appearing in the likeness of these three, and how these three matters relate to the circumcision and to Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him.

But the midrash hints to us about the holiness of Avraham. Through the mitzvah (commandment) of circumcision he merited that the holiness of the three Patriarchs, who were the main purpose of the creation of the world, was included in him. From them came the people of Israel, for whose sake the world was created, as it is written, "Israel is holy to Hashem, the first of His grain" (Jeremiah 2:3), and they bring holiness into the entire world.

It is said in the Gemara (Chullin 91b) that an angel is two thousand parasangs and the world is six thousand parasangs, as written (Pesachim 94a), so that the angel was a third of the world. And the Tosafot in Pesachim there cites in the name of a midrash that the entire world is a third seas, a third wildernesses, and a third settled land. This is what the three angels hinted to Avraham: that the entire world exists for his sake and for the sake of Yitzchak and Yaakov, who came forth from him.

The one who appeared to him in the likeness of a sadki hints at Avraham Avinu and at the third that is settled land. Bread hints at all food that grows in the settled third, from which comes the vitality of all the creatures of the world. This corresponds to Avraham, who fed bread to passersby and thereby publicized His divinity, may He be blessed, as stated in the midrash. Now, from the side opposite holiness, the yetzer hara (the evil inclination) rules through eating and drinking, as written in the Sifrei on the verse "And you shall eat and be satisfied; beware lest," etc. (Deuteronomy 11:15-16), and there are many more sources.

But of Avraham Avinu it is written, "And he planted an eshel in Be'er Sheva" (Genesis 21:33), an inn for eating and drinking for the whole world, in order to bring them under the wings of the Shechinah (the Divine Presence). He gave food and drink free of charge, except to those who did not wish to accept upon themselves the honor of His kingship, may He be blessed. And he publicized His divinity throughout the land. As it is written, "And I will make you swear by Hashem, God of heaven and God of the earth" (Genesis 24:3), and it is said (in Bereshit Rabbah): before I made Him known to His creatures, He was God of heaven; once I made Him known to His creatures, He became God of the earth.

The one who appeared to him as an Arab, a people who dwell in wildernesses and in tents, a month here and a month there, hints at the third that is wilderness. This angel corresponds to Yitzchak Avinu. For regarding Yishmael it is written, "And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran" (Genesis 21:21), and

it says, "and he shall be a wild man" (Genesis 16:12), and it is written, "a wild ass accustomed to the wilderness" (Jeremiah 2:24). As stated above, this is because he grew up in the wilderness and has no part at all in the settlement of the world. He has no place in settled land, only in tents, a month here and a month there.

So too it is said (Sukkah 52b): HaKadosh Baruch Hu regrets having created four things, etc., among them the Ishmaelites, as it is written, "The tents of robbers are at ease" (Job 12:6). For they dwell in tents in the wilderness and rob passersby, and he makes himself ownerless like the wilderness in order to fulfill his desire and evil cravings.

In contrast, Yitzchak, peace be upon him, brought ownerlessness and wilderness into holiness. For Yitzchak, peace be upon him, hints at the Written Torah, as it is written, "a fiery law for them" (Deuteronomy 33:2), and Yitzchak's attribute is the fire of holiness, as mentioned above. The Torah was given in the wilderness, which hints that the Torah endures only in one who makes himself ownerless like the wilderness, as taught (Bamidbar Rabbah ch. 1). That is, he sanctifies himself and separates himself from the desires and cravings of this world. As it is written of Yitzchak, "and he dwelt in the land of the Negev" (Genesis 24:62), for he was dried out (menugav) of the desires and cravings of this world.

The one who appeared in the likeness of a navoti, a sailor and pilot, hints at the third that is sea. This corresponds to the holiness of Yaakov Avinu, peace be upon him, which hints at the Oral Torah. The opposite of holiness is Esav, who encompasses all the nations, as taught in the midrash, and it is written, "Woe, the multitude of many peoples, who roar like the roaring of the seas" (Isaiah 17:12). That is, he wants to spread over the entire world and cover the entire world with his evil, like water that covers the dry land by spreading. And we find (Bereshit Rabbah 2) that "on the face of the deep" is the wicked kingdom, etc.

Corresponding to him in holiness is Yaakov Avinu, whose attribute was daat (knowledge), and it is written of the future, "for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of Hashem as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). For through the attribute of daat the entire body is covered with holiness and Torah. Daat means connecting the chochmah (wisdom) of the brain with the binah (understanding) of the heart, and the entire body becomes full of holiness, as if it were entirely covered under water. This is the Oral Torah, of which it is said, "and broader than the sea" (Job 11:9). In the Zohar this hints at what is written, "the wellsprings of the great deep" (Genesis 7:11), meaning the wellsprings of chochmah below, which is a drawing down from Ein Sof (the Infinite).

This is what is said of the future, "for the earth shall be filled," etc., "as the waters cover the sea." This is what the midrash hints to us: the angels who were revealed to Avraham after the circumcision hinted to him that he and his descendants are the foundation of holiness from all three parts of the world, and that they will have the power to bring the entire world into His holiness, may He be blessed.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)