חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

RADOMSK · VAYERA, TIFERET SHLOMO

Why did the angels withdraw when they saw Avraham?

Tiferet Shlomo

Drawing on the Zohar, the angels who once asked "What is man that You remember him?" were sent to Avraham to see his righteousness, since the world was created for the sake of his merit; Rashi's remark that the angels withdrew when they saw him "permitting and forbidding" is read here as their recognition of his scrupulousness beyond the letter of the law and of his abstinence. A supplementary passage, drawing on Sefer HaKanah and Recanati, reads the same phrase as alluding to Avraham's refraining from Sarah until his circumcision, a discipline that astonished even the angels. AI SUMMARY

"He saw and ran toward them." Rashi explains: When they saw that he was "sharei ve'asar" (permitting and forbidding), they immediately withdrew from him; "and he ran toward them." To understand this ingenious comment according to its plain sense, there is no explanation for it.

But it is explained in the Zohar that these angels are the very ones who, at the beginning of the creation of man, said, "What is man that You remember him?" Hashem, may He be blessed, answered them that the whole world was created so that one tzaddik (righteous one) named Avraham would come forth, as is known regarding the verse "behibaram," which is "be-Avraham." Therefore these angels were sent to him, to see his righteousness, that the world is worthy of being created for his merit, because he is greater than the angels.

This is the meaning of "when they saw that he was permitting and forbidding": that is to say, they observed that he is scrupulous in the mitzvot (commandments) beyond the letter of the law, so that even what is permitted he forbade to himself. "They withdrew from him": that is to say, they learned from him the greatness of abstinence. And that suffices for one who understands.

[Omitted passage] In Rashi's comment, "When they saw that he was permitting and forbidding, they withdrew from him," the allusion appears to be as follows, based on the words of Sefer HaKanah, Sefer HaMitzvot, p. 59, which says: "And now, my son, listen and understand the matter of circumcision and the foreskin. For as long as Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, had not been circumcised, he did not come to Sarah, because he took a lesson from the first Adam, who drew out his foreskin and would bring it into the House of Hashem, and he was expelled from there; and he felt his sin and repented in teshuvah (return, repentance). Likewise, after Avraham Avinu was circumcised, he emitted holy, pure, and clean seed, and Yitzchak came forth from him, for Avraham did not draw near to Sarah before he was circumcised (but certainly it is so, as written)." Likewise in Recanati, Parashat Lech Lecha, it says: "And behold, Avraham Avinu, before the circumcision, was not fit to emerge by way of the foreskin." See there.

This is the allusion in the words of Rashi, of blessed memory, "he was sharei ve'asar": that is to say, as long as her name was called Sarai, he forbade her to himself, not to touch her, because then he had not yet been circumcised. "They withdrew from him": they learned abstinence from him.

For even in the eyes of the angels it was a wonder how a human being could exert himself in this matter, since earlier it is written about the angels, "the sons of God saw the daughters of man," and so on. And understand.

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