



Discover the Joy of Shabbos

Explore the deeper meaning of the Zemiros, Tefillos and Hanhagos of Shabbos.



The Mystery of the Malachim

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E6)

Where did the song Sholom Aleichem come from?

What is it based on? Why do we refer to three different types of angels? Why do we send them away after welcoming them?

Hidden in plain sight

There is hardly a home where the Shabbos meal is not introduced with the recitation of Sholom Aleichem. It is so ubiquitous that few have stopped to analyze it.

Everyone says it, every week. It has been sung to countless tunes. How could it be that so little is known about it? It seems hidden from view in plain sight!

Origins of Sholom Aleichem

We do not know who wrote Sholom Aleichem. We find it already appearing in the late 1600's. It likely originates with the Mekubalim in Tzfas. But the way it has been received, it is as if Klal Yisroel wrote it.

Angels abound

The Gemara¹ relates that two angels, one good and one bad, accompany a person to his home on Friday night. If the home has been readied for Shabbos the good angel blesses the home with the prayer that it be this way in the coming week as well. The bad angel is compelled to affirm the blessing and says אמן. If the home has not been prepared for Shabbos the bad angel curses the home with the prayer that there be disarray

the coming week as well and the good angel is compelled to affirm the curse and says אמן.

These good and bad angels are advocates and reporters. The good angel advocates for the performance of Mitzvos and seeks to report on high that Hashem's Mitzvos are being fulfilled. The bad angel tries to lobby against the performance of that Mitzvah and then reports on high that the Mitzvah was not performed.

Every Mitzvah has such a pair of angels, making every

Mitzvah precious and consequential. But because Shabbos is so central and vital to the spiritual life of a Jew, the stakes of how these angels relate to the Shabbos that they see is pivotal. One cannot overstate the importance of the moment when man joins with Shabbos. Everything about the home and the dweller, physically and spiritually, even the table and the beds, attest to how a

person feels about being a living testimony to Hashem as the Creator.

*I am not only
welcoming
the Shabbos
– I am
greeting the
bride.*

Even the couches

The Halacha draws from this Gemara that one should take care to arrange the table and beds before the onset of Shabbos. While this certainly includes the beds for sleeping, the Gemara is likely referring to the couches on which they would eat. In the modern parlance, we would say that one should prepare the table and the chairs.

Welcoming the angels

¹ שבת קיט:





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It seems clear that this Gemara provides the backdrop for our Sholom Aleichem song. We greet the Malachim (first stanza), we invite them in (second stanza), we request their Brochos as above (third stanza), and we bid them farewell (fourth stanza).

Three references to the Malachim

In Sholom Aleichem we refer to the Malachim with three descriptors. They are first called מלאכי השרת – angels that serve; next they are מלאכי עליון – angels on high; and thirdly they are called מלאכי השלום – angels of peace.

The list might be taken from the way we describe the angelic praises in Shacharis. After describing the praises that emanate from the heavenly luminaries, we turn our attention to the praises of the angels. התברך לנצח – May our Creator and Redeemer be extolled, He Who Creates the holy ones (the angels). He fashions משרתים – attendants, a reference to the מלאכי השרת... those who stand at the highest places (a reference to מלאכי עליון) and sound their praises together. They join to accept Your Sovereignty, lovingly giving permission to one another to harmonize in praise – מלאכי השלום, angels of peace.

Another perspective

Another way of looking at Sholom Aleichem and its accompaniment, Eishes Chayil, is by thinking of our relationship with Shabbos and that of Chosson and Kallah where Shabbos is the Kallah and Klal Yisroel is the Chosson.

Everything appears in pairs, except...

The Midrash² describes how Hashem made everything in pairs. Heaven and Earth, Sun and Moon, Man and Woman, this world and the Next, everything has its mate. The only exception is the One Himself, a unity, alone and without any pairing. That is our declaration when we say שמע ישראל – we declare that Hashem is absolutely One and He does not share that Unity with anything else in His Creation.

With that in mind we can understand the petition that Shabbos raised before the Creator.³ Shabbos saw that each of the days of the week has a partner, a pair if you will. Sunday has Monday, Tuesday has Wednesday, and Thursday has Friday. But Shabbos felt alone, in a world where everything has a pair. The Midrash says that Hashem accepted the petition. Shabbos would be given its pair – כנסת ישראל היא בן זוגך – the Klal Yisroel will be your partner, your pair.

This is alluded to by the instruction that we are to remember Shabbos לקדשו – implying קירושין – marry her. Make her uniquely yours; cherish her as a husband would cherish his beloved wife.

The world is filled with imperfections and strengths. The strengths of one compensate for the weaknesses of the other. But Shabbos is perfect, and its perfection can only be paired with the totality of the Jewish People.

Another allusion to the marriage we are speaking of can be drawn from the first words of the Amidah on Friday night, the first 'Shmoneh Esrei' of Shabbos. There we read אתה קדשת את יום השביעי – while literally meaning 'sanctified' can also be understood as 'You gave

² דברים רבה ב: לא

³ בראשית רבה יא: ח' מובא בחיד"א



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Shabbos to us (Klal Yisroel) for the purpose of Kidushin – that we should marry the Shabbos.

Similarly, the paragraph that we recite three times on the eve of Shabbos, ויכלו, can be parsed to see the word כלה – bride – hidden within.

And if the eve of Shabbos is a marriage between Klal Yisroel and Shabbos, then the two escorting angels are the witnesses needed to affirm the union. And if the wedding ceremony takes place upon a man's entry into his home, then אשה חיל, a song of praise to the wife, both literal and proverbial, is certainly in order.

Saying goodbye right after saying hello

The Rebbe Rayyatz (the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe) explained why we take leave of the Malachim so soon after inviting them. It is a matter of proper respect. One should not eat in front of those who are unable to eat. And so, as we are about to partake of our meal, we bless the Malachim and bid them farewell, not to impose on them to stay while we eat, and they will not.

The שערי תשובה offers the explanation that we are not sending them away. We are limited as humans and we cannot see the Malachim. Thus, we do not know when they are going to leave. We bless them farewell such that whenever they choose to leave, they should go with our blessings of peace.

The חיד"א offers that these two angels parallel the pair who escort a חתן to his Chuppah. Having done their job, the חתן gives them a blessing.

Takeaway: When I think of the onset of Shabbos, I will try to recognize that I am not only welcoming the Shabbos, but I am greeting our bride. It is not only Good Shabbos; it is also Mazal Tov!