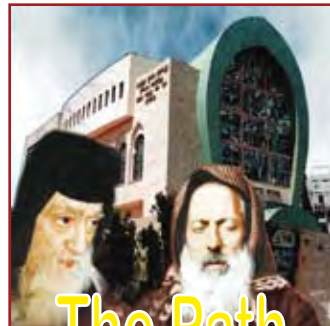


OUR FOREFATHERS COULD CONTENT THEMSELVES WITH LITTLE

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)



The Path To Follow

VA'EIRA

272

Jan. 24th 08

28 Tevet 5769

Publication

HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

RABBI DAVID HANANIA
PINTO CHLITA

11, rue du plateau
75019 PARIS

Tel: +331 42 08 25 40

Fax +331 42 08 50 85

www.hevratpinto.org

Responsible of publication
Hanania Soussan

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Why Are You Crying?

The tzaddik Rabbi Zalman, a disciple of the Vilna Gaon, was once traveling on the road with his brother the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin when they came to an inn. However the innkeeper spoke to them harshly and refused to give them a place to sleep. When they left, Rabbi Chaim saw that his brother was crying. "Why are you crying?" he asked. "Are you bothered by what the innkeeper said? I did not let it bother me at all!" Rabbi Zalman replied, "I'm definitely not crying because of the innkeeper's insults. I'm crying because I sense that I was upset at his words, meaning that I haven't yet reached the level of 'those who are insulted but do not insult, who hear themselves reviled without answering,' those concerning whom the verse says: 'They who love Him are as the powerfully rising sun.'"

— Toldot Adam

It is written, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E-I Sh-ddai, but with My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them" (Exodus 6:3). We need to understand what the expression "I appeared" is doing here, since G-d is about to reprimand Moses for having asked: "Why have You done evil to this people?" (Exodus 5:22). Furthermore, did G-d not reveal Himself to the Patriarchs using the name "the L-RD"? In fact G-d said to Abraham, "I am the L-RD, Who brought you out of Ur-Kasdim" (Genesis 15:7), and He said to Jacob: "I am the L-RD, the G-d of Abraham your father and the G-d of Isaac" (ibid. 28:13).

Our Sages cite the Holy One, blessed be He, as saying: "Alas for those who are gone and not to be found! For how many times did I reveal Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the Name E-I Sh-ddai, and they did not question My character or say to Me, 'What is Your Name?' I said to Abraham, 'Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth, for I will give it to you' [Genesis 13:17]. However when he sought a place to bury Sarah, he did not find one, but had to purchase it for 400 silver shekels. However he still did not question My character. I said to Isaac, 'Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you' [ibid. 26:3]. However his servants sought water to drink and did not find it without a dispute, as it is said, 'The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying: "The water is ours" ' [v.20]. Still he did not question My character. I said to Jacob, 'The ground upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants' [ibid. 28:13]. However when he sought a place to pitch his tent, he did not find one until he purchased it for 100 pieces of money. Still he did not question My character, nor did he say to Me, 'What is Your Name?' Yet now you say to Me, 'Neither have You delivered Your people at all' [Exodus 5:23]" (Sanhedrin 111a).

It is difficult to understand the connection between the question, "What is Your Name" and "Neither have You delivered Your people at all." Can we possibly think that Hashem would get angry with Moses for asking, "What is Your Name," but not angry for saying, "Neither have You delivered Your people at all"? In fact what is the phrase, "What is Your Name" doing here?

According to the Midrash, "May E-I Sh-ddai grant you mercy" (Genesis 43:14) means that Jacob was praying to G-d Alm-ghty and saying: "He Who said to Heaven and earth dai [enough], may He say to my misfortunes dai," for when the Holy One, blessed be He, created Heaven and earth, they continued to expand until He said, "enough" (see Tanhuma, Mikeitz 10).

It seems that the Name Sh-ddai represents reduction and scarcity, for it was through this Name that Heaven and earth were stopped from expanding further. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: "Perhaps you believe that you merited to speak with Me because I revealed Myself to you by the Name "the L-RD," and therefore you think that you can reprimand Me and learn how I direct the world. Consider that the Patriarchs, despite being great tzaddikim who overcame trials, did not ask Me for anything or try to learn how I direct the world. Because you seek to know My Name, it means that you are not content with little, as they were, for they did not ask

me if My Name was Sh-ddai or the L-RD. Furthermore, your fathers felt like foreigners in this world, for just as foreigners do not ask for anything and are satisfied with little, they did not ask for anything and were satisfied with little."

The Name Sh-ddai contains the notion of restriction, and the Sages have said: "Thus Scripture says, 'For we are like sojourners before You, and like temporary residents, as were all our forefathers' [I Chronicles 29:15]. Likewise the tzaddikim are the essential part in this world, and yet they make themselves as nothing. Thus we find that although Abraham was essential to the world, he made himself secondary, as it is written: 'I am an alien and a resident among you' [Genesis 23:4], and Jacob said: 'I sojourned [garti] with Laban' [like a ger, a foreigner]" (Agadat Bereshith 58).

The Mishnah teaches, "Whoever possess the following three characteristics is among the disciples of our father Abraham, and the three opposite characteristics is among the disciples of the wicked Bilam. The disciples of our father Abraham possess a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul. The disciples of the wicked Bilam possess an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul" (Pirkei Avoth 5:19).

Therefore what G-d said to Moses ("I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E-I Sh-ddai, but with My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them") was really a rebuke. In other words: Do not think that you can take Me to task as you try to understand My ways! Your fathers did not try to understand My ways, and there were satisfied with everything that I did to them. They were content to see and accept it, just as a servant who is told by his mater to do something: He does not ask why, but instead goes and does it as soon as he is told.

This is what constitutes "I appeared." It is why Hashem told Moses, "With My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them," for they did not seek to know it. Instead, they did everything that Hashem told them, doing so immediately and without protest.

We may also explain this by noting that the term va'eira ("and I appeared") has the same numerical value as achar ("after"). In fact the word achar appears in three places that describe the trials endured by the Patriarchs. With regards to Abraham we read: "It happened achar [after] these things that G-d tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham,' and he replied, 'Here I am' " (Genesis 22:1). Further on we read, "Behold, a ram achar [behind] caught in the thicket by its horns" (ibid. 22:13), and concerning Isaac we read, "Sojourn [gur] in this land" (ibid. 26:3). The word gur has the same numerical value as achar. This is similar to what Jacob said to Esau, "I have sojourned with Laban va'echar [and delayed] until now" (ibid. 32:5). Concerning Joseph we read, "May E-I Sh-ddai grant you mercy before the man, that he may release your achar [other] brother to you" (ibid. 43:14).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Although your forefathers endured trials before you, they were content with little and accepted My decrees without protest. You should have done the same by not protesting.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

The Power of Prayer

It is written, "I have also heard the groan of the Children of Israel, whom the Egyptians enslave" (Exodus 6:5).

A person will often pray for something, thinking that obtaining it will be beneficial for him. However the truth is oftentimes the opposite, meaning that a great deal of damage will occur if he gets what he wants. For example, when a person prays for children, it may happen that they will turn out to be evil, even wanting to kill him, just as Absalom wanted to kill his father David. Likewise if a person prays for wealth, it may be that it will be detrimental for him by making him turn away from Hashem, as the verse states: "Lest I be satisfied and deny You, saying: 'Who is the L-RD?'" (Proverbs 30:9).

This is why we must ask the Holy One, blessed be He, to do what is good in His eyes, meaning to disregard our request for doing what we want. In fact we often ask for things that are harmful for us, and the Holy One, blessed be He, must do what is good in His eyes, meaning what is truly good, not just what seems good to us. This is the difference between shava and tza'aka (two words that mean "cry"). The term shava is used to describe a person who calls for help by expressing what he wants in detail, in such a way that he asks to be saved (yoshia). The term tza'aka is used to describe a person who simply expresses his pain and the fact that he is suffering and needs help. Someone who hears this cry will know how best to help him.

In light of this, we can understand why Elazar the son of Rabbi Tzadok said that when an abbreviated prayer should be recited rather than the entire Shemoneh Esrei, it should consist of the words: "Hear the tza'aka of Your people Israel" (Berachot 29b). He did not say, "Hear the shava of Your people Israel," for the term shava would mean that we are asking Hashem to do only what we want, helping us according to the details that we have specified. Doing so would be detrimental to us because our vision is limited. That is, our lack of understanding may lead us to ask for something that may ultimately be harmful. Hence if such a request were to be granted to us, we would suffer as a result. That is why we must ask Hashem to simply hear our cry and know that we are suffering and need His help. How should Hashem help us? For this, we ask that He does what is good in His eyes – what is truly good and beneficial for us – not just to consider what we are asking for, since that is sometimes to our detriment.

– Otzarot HaTefilah

A Pearl From the Rav:

The Pharaoh of Abraham and the Pharaoh of Moses

Two kings by the name of Pharaoh persecuted Israel, one at the time of Abraham and the other at the time of Moses. When the Pharaoh at the time of Abraham detained Sarah and suffered a plague as a result, he immediately yielded and said to Abraham: "Now here is your wife. Take her and go" (Genesis 12:19). The Pharaoh at the time of Moses, despite receiving ten plagues, became obstinate and did not want to release the Children of Israel. The reason for this difference may lie in the fact that Abraham embodied the characteristic of chesed (kindness), as it is written: "Grant... chesed to Abraham" (Micah 7:20). What do we read concerning the presence of chesed in the world? "Forever will it be built with

chesed" (Psalms 89:3), meaning that the world is built and endures only on account of chesed. Therefore during the time of Abraham, the world endured by the merit of chesed. People are united when there is chesed in the world, and there is no greater unity than when someone demonstrates kindness towards the other. Because people are united, the ministering angels of the nations also yield and refrain from making accusations. Therefore when the Pharaoh of Abraham's era was punished, he immediately yielded.

As for the Pharaoh at the time of Moses, he became obstinate when he was punished. Why the difference in behavior? It is because the Children of Israel had informers among them at that time, as it is written: "Surely the thing is known" (Exodus 2:14). Here the Sages explain: "Moses was meditating in his heart, 'How has Israel sinned, such that they should be enslaved more than all the nations?'" When he heard these words, he said: 'Lashon Harah is rife among them, so how can they be ready for salvation?' Hence 'Surely the thing is known' – now I know the cause of their bondage" (Shemot Rabba 1:30). When Lashon Harah exists, unity is absent, in which case the ministering angels of the nations do not yield to mercy. They say, "Why should we show mercy when the Children of Israel do not show mercy to one another?" That is why Pharaoh became obstinate and did not yield.

Priorities

It is written, "Into you and into your people, and into all your servants shall the frogs ascend" (Exodus 7:29).

With regards to the frogs croaking in their innards, the people were afflicted before Pharaoh's servants on account of the numerous foremen who were initially appointed to persecute the Children of Israel through hard labor.

– Sefer HaParshiot

The Plague of Frogs

One verse states, "Raise up the frogs [plural]" (Exodus 8:1), while in the following verse we read: "The frog [singular] ascended." Rabbi Akiva said, "It was only one frog, but the Egyptians beat it with a stick, and each piece became a frog, until eventually all of Egypt became filled with them." Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah said, "There was only one frog. It whistled for its friends, and all of Egypt became filled with them."

The first frog that came out of the river was alone. It entered Pharaoh's house, which was located near the river. There were then so many frogs that they covered all of Egypt. Wherever water was found, even a drop, it immediately became a frog. The frogs entered the homes of the rich just as they entered the homes of the poor. In the homes of the rich, which were inlaid with marble, the marble cracked and the frogs came up from the ground beneath. They filled the houses of the Egyptians, entered their stomachs, and croaked from within. Many died on account of their pain. They entered kneading troughs and turned their bread moldy. They also jumped into their burning ovens and stuck to its walls and to the bread baking inside, thereby dying for their mission. Hanania, Mishael, and Azariah reasoned from the case of the frogs when they descended into the fiery furnace. They said, "Since with regards to the frogs, which are not commanded to sanctify Hashem's Name, it is written: 'They shall ascend and come into your house... and into your ovens, and into your kneading troughs' [Exodus 7:28] – and dough is only in the same place as the oven when the oven is hot – therefore how much more should we, who are commanded to sanctify Hashem's Name, do the same!"

– From the Midrashim

The Ten Plagues

With regards to the ten plagues, Rabbeinu Moshe ben Machir wrote that the Egyptians were struck by the four elements, namely fire, air, water, and earth. Hashem wanted to proclaim His greatness and the fact that He controls everything and does what He wishes among great and small, for strength belongs to Him alone. How did Hashem demonstrate this? The river was the source for the plagues brought about through water, namely the plague of blood and the plague of frogs. Being a simple element, water combined with another element to form blood, and the river swarmed with frogs. The plague brought about through the earth was the plague of lice, concerning which it is said: “Strike the dust of the earth” (Exodus 8:12). The plague of wild beasts was also brought about through the earth, for serpents, scorpions, and all other kinds of crawling creatures were all heaped upon the Egyptians. The plagues of boils and pestilence were brought about through fire, for they stemmed from the heat of fire. Boils came from the soot of ovens, and the pestilence came from the hand of Hashem, which burned human flesh. The plagues of hail, locusts, and darkness were brought about through the air.

For each of these plagues, Pharaoh was forced to admit that strength belonged to Hashem. For the plague of frogs he said, “Entreat the L-RD, that He may remove the frogs from me” (Exodus 8:4). He also admitted that Hashem had the power to remove them. For the plague of lice we read, “It is the finger of G-d” (v.15). For the plague of wild beasts Pharaoh said, “Entreat for me” (v.24). With regards to the boils, it is written: “The magicians could not stand before Moses” (Exodus 9:11). With regards to the locusts, Pharaoh said: “I have sinned against the L-RD” (Exodus 10:16). Hashem’s Name was therefore sanctified by these plagues.

– Seder HaYom

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Va’eira describes the mighty hand and the signs and wonders that Hashem did in order to take His people out of Egypt through His emissaries.

Before recounting how Moses and Aaron carried out their mission to the Children of Israel and Pharaoh, the parsha describes the revelation of “I am the L-RD,” a revelation destined for Israel and Hashem’s emissaries, Moses and Aaron. Their actual mission in Egypt begins with the miracle of the serpent, and it continues with the first seven plagues, from the plague of blood to the plague of hail. Aside from the plague that Hashem had already declared in Parsha Shemot (“I will slay your son, your firstborn” [Exodus 4:23]), the plagues form three groups: (1) Detzach, (2) Adash, and (3) Be’achav. In the first group, the plagues come through Aaron. In the third group they come through Moses, and in the middle group the first two plagues come directly from Hashem, while the third comes through Moses and Aaron. The first two plagues in each group come with a warning to Pharaoh to let Israel go, while the third comes without warning.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Four Terms that Designate Deliverance

The Sages say, “From where do we learn that we must drink four cups during the Seder night?” Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Benayah, “This corresponds to the four terms that designate deliverance: ‘Therefore say to the Children of Israel, “I am the L-RD, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt” ’ [even if we had remained as slaves in Egypt and our burdens had eased, we will still thank You for this deliverance, which is why we drink the first cup of salvation]; ‘I shall deliver you from their service’ [the second cup of salvation, which we drink because He completely delivered us from serving them]; ‘I shall deliver you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments’ [since He confounded and discouraged the Egyptians, which made them stop tormenting us, we drink the third cup]; ‘I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G-d to you’ [because of the greatness of these acts of deliverance, which brought us closer to Hashem and saved our souls, we lift up the fourth cup of salvation]. However we do not understand what is written afterwards: ‘I shall bring you to the land,’ for this pertains to the promise of the land, not the promise of deliverance.”

In the future as well, we find the four expressions of deliverance in the words of the prophet: “I will remove them from the peoples and gather them from the lands and bring them to their soil, and I will tend them upon the mountains of Israel” (Ezekiel 34:13).

Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel wrote that the four cups also allude to four deliverances. He said, “The Children of Israel experienced four kinds of deliverance: The first was when the Holy One, blessed be He, chose Abraham and his descendants, giving birth to the people of Israel starting from him. The second was the deliverance from Egypt. The third was when Hashem supported us during our long exile, saving us from our enemies, from those who wanted to wipe us out. The fourth deliverance is the one to come.”

Bnei Issachar wrote, “The Children of Israel merited the mitzvah of the four cups because of the four merits that they had in Egypt: They did not change their names, they did not change their language, they guarded themselves from immorality, and they did not have denouncers among them. See how great is the power of making fences, for although they became impure from every other impurity of Egypt, they were called metzuyanim [excellent] due to the fact they established these four fences, and by the merit of these fences they were saved.” – Sefer HaToda’ah

ESHET HAYIL

Marrying One’s Daughter to a Talmid Chacham

The evil inclination encourages a person to think that his daughter will not be content or go very far in life if she marries a ben Torah, something that would not happen if she married some other person. This is incorrect, for the Holy One, blessed be He, is the G-d of the entire world and provides for all His creatures, as it is written: “He gives food to all flesh.” Will He therefore deprive a person of sustenance because he studies His Torah and fulfills mitzvot? Woe to the person who thinks this of the Creator!

I am not speaking of people who have not seen the light of Torah and do not try and marry bnei Torah, since they have not tasted the sweetness of the Torah, nor have they known its pleasantness. I am amazed, however, at ba’alei batim and ba’alei Torah – people who know the Torah’s true worth – and yet show little conviction.

The truth is that each person should exert the utmost effort into cleaving to a ben Torah, even if it means spending an enormous amount of money, as the Sages have said: “Let a man always sell all he has and marry the daughter of a talmid chacham, and let him marry his daughter to a talmid chacham” (Pesachim 49a).

– Shmirat HaLashon

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbeinu Yitzchak ben Yehudah – The Ritz Geiut

Rabbeinu Yitzchak, a disciple of Rabbi Shemuel HaNaguid, was known as the Ritz Geiut (the term geiut meaning “savior”). His Halachic decisions spread throughout Spain, as the Ramban mentions in Milchamot: “We always did the same...until we saw the words of Rabbi Yitzchak Geiut, and the customs of Maghreb once again spread.” Rabbi Moshe ibn Ezra wrote about him in his book Shirat Israel: “The oldest and most enlightened among them was Rabbi Yitzchak ibn Geiut of Alisana, the city of poets. He fully understood all the mysteries of the Hebrew language, and he knew the language of the Saracens. He wrote parables and poems, greatly glorifying the Sages of his time and establishing the customs of his generation. He wrote more than almost all his predecessors in the area of ethics, prayers, poems, praises, and lamentations. The language he used was pleasant and clear to read. His poems were read and transmitted from person to person, and although the books of his which I do possess are like a drop in the ocean, they are like sparks of fire.”

Rabbi Yehudah Alcharizi wrote at length about him in his book Tachkimoni. The refrain Hamavdil bein kodesh lechol is attributed to him.

Rabbi Yitzchak fell ill at the age of 95, and his servants brought him to Cordova in order to recuperate. However not long afterwards, on Shabbat, he rendered his pure soul to his Creator. His servants went to bury him in Alisana, but when they arrived it was already night. Yet suddenly, at midnight, the sun began to shine! They understood that it was their Rav’s will to be buried immediately. They quickly dug his grave and laid his body to rest. Among the books written by Rabbi Yitzchak are Sefer HaNer, Perushei Kohelet, Piyutim VeShirim, and Piskei Halachot Mea Shearim. In Spain, it was the Rif who succeeded him.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Egypt’s Impurity Stems from Pride

It is written, “Thus says the L-RD G-d, ‘When I will gather in the House of Israel...’” (Ezekiel 28:25).

We read about Pharaoh’s pride in this week’s haftarah, Pharaoh being compared to a large crocodile crouched in the middle of the river. He says, “The river is mine, and I made it for myself” (Ezekiel 29:3). That being said, we can understand the gravity behind the commandment to eradicate even the tiniest amount of leaven before Passover, the time of our departure from Egypt. In fact the reason why the Children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt is because of their pride at that time. Thus we read, “The Children of Israel...increased and became strong – very, very much so” (Exodus 1:7), alluding to the fact that pride dwelled within them, and that they became increasingly important in their own eyes. Furthermore, they mixed among the inhabitants of the country under the rule of Pharaoh, the proudest of the proud. In fact Pharaoh was so proud that he made himself into a god. He actually believed himself to be a god, that there was no one above him. To this Hashem replied, “I have power over you. I am greater than you; I am above you; I control you – whether you want it or not. My greatness is superior to yours!” Even when he regained his strength, the haftarah tells us that Pharaoh’s Egypt “will be the lowest of the kingdoms, and it will not exalt itself again” (Ezekiel 28:15). The Children of Israel learned from Pharaoh’s ways and were acting as proudly as him, as we see with Dathan and Abiram, who insolently replied to Moses’ reprimand by saying: “Who made you a prince and a judge over us?” (Exodus 2:14). Moses then thought, “Surely the thing is known” – now I know that Israel’s enslavement is a punishment that is measure for measure. Since they do not want to yield before those who reprimand them, and since they refuse to have leaders as they should, they will be enslaved to unworthy people! Since the reason for their exile and enslavement was pride, the remedy for their redemption and liberty depended upon humility and modesty, which consists of fleeing all forms of pride and vanity. This is why we must completely eradicate all chametz (leaven) – the symbol of pride because it makes dough rise – and to eat matzah, which represents humility. – Binah Lelitim, Pesach

A TRUE STORY

Your Guarantor Repaid Your Debt

It is written, “G-d spoke to Moses and said to him, ‘I am the L-RD’” (Exodus 6:2). Rashi explains this to mean, “[I am] faithful to reward all who walk before Me.”

Rabbi Yeshaya Zuchowitz was once approached by a Jew that he didn’t know, a Jew who proceeded to ask him: “Can you lend me 1,000 gold coins for six months? I need the money to avoid bankruptcy.”

“I’m prepared to lend you this money,” replied Rabbi Yeshaya, “but only on condition that you know someone in town who will act as your guarantor.” Tears began to fill the man’s eyes, and he said: “I’m a stranger in town, and nobody in the area knows me well enough to guarantee this loan. Only Hashem knows my situation and my honesty. Only He can guarantee this loan.” Rabbi Yeshaya replied, “There is no better guarantor than Him,” and he quickly gave him the loan he requested.

Six months later, this Jew returned to Rabbi Yeshaya and joyfully said: “Hashem has helped me, for success has shined upon me. I’ve now come to repay my debt.” As the man was speaking, he placed 1,000 gold coins before Rabbi Yeshaya.

Rabbi Yeshaya refused to take them, however, explaining to the man: “Your guarantor has already repaid your debt.” Stunned by this announcement, the man asked: “How could that be?” Rabbi Yeshaya recounted what had happened: “On the same day that you borrowed 1,000 gold coins from me, Hashem presented me with a minor business deal, the profits of which came out to be exactly 1,000 gold coins. I therefore counted this profit against your debt.”

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

The Work of the Merkava

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was riding on a donkey as he was on a journey, and Rabbi Eleazar ben Arak was driving the donkey from behind. [Rabbi Eleazar] said to him, “Master, teach me a chapter of Work of the Merkava.” He answered, “Have I not taught you: ‘Nor [do we teach] the Merkava in the presence of a person unless he is a Sage and understands [it] on his own?’” [Rabbi Eleazar] then said to him, “Master, permit me to say something that you have taught me.” He answered, “Go on!” At that point Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai got off the donkey, wrapped himself [in his tallit], and sat upon a stone beneath an olive tree. He said to him, “Master, why did you get off the donkey?” He answered, “Is it proper that while you are explaining the Work of the Merkava and the Divine Presence is with us and the ministering angels accompany us, that I should be riding the donkey?” Rabbi Eleazar ben Arak then began his exposition of Work of the Merkava, and fire descended from heaven and surrounded all the trees in the field. They all broke into song. What did they sing? “Praise the L-RD from the earth, taninim and all the deeps...fruitful trees and all cedars.... Praise the L-RD.” An angel answered from the fire and said: “This is the very Work of the Merkava.” Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai then arose and kissed him on his head and said, “Blessed be the L-RD G-d of Israel, Who has given a son to Abraham our father who knows how to understand, investigate, and expound the Work of the Merkava. There are some who preach well but do not act well. Others act well but do not preach well. However you preach well and act well. Happy are you, O Abraham our father, that Rabbi Eleazar ben Arak has come forth from your loins!”

When news of this reached Rabbi Yehoshua, he and Rabbi Yossi HaKohen were on a journey. They said, “Let us also explain the Work of the Merkava.” Thus Rabbi Yehoshua began to explain it. Although it was the summer solstice, the heavens became overcast with clouds and a kind of rainbow appeared in the cloud. The ministering angels gathered to listen, like people who gather to watch bride and groom being entertained. Rabbi Yossi HaKohen went and related this to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, who said: “Happy are you and happy is she who bore you. Happy are my eyes, which have seen this. I dreamed that you and I were reclining on Mount Sinai when a heavenly voice came to us and said, ‘Come up, come up! Great banquet halls and fine dining couches have been prepared for you, because you and your disciples and your disciples’ disciples are assigned for the third class [of the seven classes that are admitted into G-d’s presence].’” – Chagigah 14b