

Taste of Talmud

Do angels keep the Mitzvos of the Torah? No, they do not. They do not have parents, they do not have jealousy, nor do they have idols to worship, etc. G-d created them pre-programmed to be angelic and therefore they do not follow the precepts of the Torah, as they do not need the Torah to perfect themselves. Humans, on the other hand, need the Torah. It is this very argument that *Moshe Rabbeinu* used to wrest the Torah away from the angels when they challenged the acceptability of giving Torah to mankind (Shabbos 89a). Our sages teach us that G-d said: I created the evil inclination and I created the Torah as its antidote. The Torah was given to us to purify us as it says in the *Medrash*, “*Lo nitnu haMitzvos elah letzareif bahen es Habrios*” (*Bereishis Rabba* 44:1), the *Commandments* of the *Torah* were given for the express purpose of purifying mankind. Rabbi *Moshe Chaim Luzatto* asks, “If G-d wants us to be pure why did he not just create us angelic from the start?” The answer he gives is that if we would have been created perfect without any challenges then we would not fully enjoy the benefits of being angelic. He calls this concept *Nahama Dekisufa*, the bread of embarrassment. We can understand this very well when we compare the satisfaction felt when we are successful in earning a livelihood, after we exert effort and energy, in comparison to the embarrassment a beggar feels when his daily bread comes from a hand-out. By growing from our challenges in this world, and thereby achieving some semblance of angelic behavior, we rightfully earn our portion in the world to come and are able to enjoy it to the fullest.

Taste of Halacha

The day we received the Torah, all of our utensils were deemed “*Traif*”. So, on the day we received the Torah we did not eat meat which requires extensive preparations by means of many vessels. This is one reason cited by the *Mishna Berurah* (O.C. 494:3:17) for the custom to eat a dairy meal on *Shavuos*. There is a hint to this custom in the numerical value of *Chalav*, the *Hebrew* word for milk, which equals 40, which is the number of days *Moshe Rabbeinu* stayed on *Har Sinai* to receive the Torah. By drinking *kosher* milk, we also invoke the merit of *Moshe Rabbeinu* - who refrained from drinking the milk of a non-Jewish woman on this day (exactly three months after his birth). The Holy *Zohar* (*Parsahas Mishpatim* 125a) writes another fascinating reason for this custom. Meat and milk together is angel food as seen by the angels’ visit to *Avraham Avinu*. On this day, when we received the Torah, which enables us to become as angelic as we are capable of being, we partake of both milk and meat (albeit not together as one meal). The *Toras Chaim* (*Chulin* 83) wanted to abolish the custom of eating dairy on *Shavuos* since there were some people who erroneously took this concept too far and literally mixed meat and milk together for their *Shavuos* meals. Indeed, the *Mishna Berura* concludes that everyone must be very careful in all the laws of meat and milk on this day. As the adage goes: *Halacha* supersedes *Kabbalah*!

Taste of Parasha

Why do the verses go through such an extensive and detailed description of Israel’s encampment in the desert? The *Ramban* answers that all of these details are to teach us the honor and glory of our nation. In a small way, our encampment mirrored the encampment of the angels in heaven, whose groupings are based upon the ideas of the four images that are upon G-d’s *Kisei Hakavod*, the throne of glory; a lion, a man, an ox and an eagle. In the east was the tribe of *Yehudah* whose emblem was the lion representing the vital element of kingship and direction in this world. Next to him was the tribe of *Reuvain*, whose picture was that of a flower, also depicting the upright posture of a man with the essential ability to do *Teshuva* and continuously grow from his challenges. Following him was the group led by the tribe of *Yosef* whose mission is conveyed by the image of an ox. This includes the achievement of having the presence of *Hashem* rest upon us when we lower *our* neck to accept the yoke of heaven. Finally, the tribes of *Dan*, *Naftoli*, and *Asher* jointly help each other to soar above the earthly pull of physicality to achieve the blessings of the Holy One Blessed is He, much as an eagle soars majestically above the earth.

By giving us the Torah and the glorious configuration of our encampment, G-d shows each of us special and unique ways with which to perfect ourselves and become as angelic as possible.

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*Have A Great Shabbos !!*

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