Two Confrontations with Angels: Thoughts for Parashat Vayetse

—Rabbi Marc D. Angel—

As a young bachelor, Jacob fled home to escape his brother Esau’s deadly wrath. Along the way, Jacob went to sleep and dreamed of angels ascending and descending a ladder that connected heaven and earth. When he awoke, he realized that he had had an amazing revelation. “This is nothing but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

This vision must have been a great source of strength to Jacob. He had literally seen his life in context with heaven and earth, in a vibrant relationship with God. It was the dream of a young idealist, seeking to make his way through the travails of life while maintaining a profound spiritual outlook.

At the end of this week’s Torah reading, Jacob again sees angels. But now Jacob is much older, the head of a large family. He is on the way back to his ancestral home. Just as he had fled his home in fear of Esau so long ago, he now decries confronting Esau upon returning home. “And Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him. And Jacob said when he saw them: ‘This is God’s camp.’ And he called the name of that place Mahanaim (camps).”

This confrontation with the angels was not the idealistic, hopeful experience that Jacob had experienced as a young man. This was not a group of angels who connected heaven and earth. These were angels coming to offer Jacob courage as he was about to meet Esau. Jacob called the place Mahanaim—camps i.e. a military encampment. This wasn’t a time for idealistic dreams; it was a time to prepare for war.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik commented on the difference between a camp (mahanaim) and a community (edah). A community exists as a defensive tactic. Those within the camp are surrounded by enemies; their physical existence is threatened so they come together to protect themselves.

A community, by contrast, is united not by fear of external enemies, but by a shared worship, a shared desire to live happy, good lives.

During the course of our lives, we sometimes feel that we are in an edah and we live among people we trust and like. We strive for social goals, we try to link heaven and earth by living our earthly lives with a keen sense of the spiritual. Yet, there are other times when we feel that we are in a mahanaim; we are threatened, our families are in peril. We unite in order to life we defend ourselves.

For much of our lives, whether we realize it or not, we find ourselves simultaneously in an edah and in a mahanaim. Yet, different modes prevail at different times. When things go smoothly, we feel that our angels unite heaven and earth. Life is filled with possibilities, with happiness, with societal peace. Yet, there are times—too many times—when we cannot avoid being in a mahanaim mode. We face deadly enemies, merciless killers. The angels we see are angels who warn us of the dangers all around us. We hunker down; we worry about our physical survival. We ready ourselves for war.

Jacob’s confrontation with both sets of angels is meant to be a reminder to us. We must never cease to see the angels connecting heaven and earth. We must never lose our humanity and our spirituality. We must never allow others to force us into a permanent mahanaim mentality.

Yes, but we must also be prepared to function as mahanaim when we are threatened. When we are called upon to defend our lives and our way of life, we need to know that the angels of the Lord are with us in our mahanaim.

Coming together as a mahanaim is our way of saving our lives. Coming together as an edah is our way of saving our way of life. Even when we are seemingly at peace, we must see the angels of Mahanaim be prepared to defend our lives from enemies. Even when we are in the midst of battle, we must never lose sight of the angels connecting heaven and earth.
**Kiddush Sponsors in Honor of Rabbi Angel:**
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*Listings include sponsorships submitted by Thursday, December 5.*

**DEADLINES COMING UP**

**DEADLINE TO SUBMIT PICTURES:** THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9

**Kiddush In Honor of Liz Rios**
Shabbat, December 21 | Following Morning Services
Generations of children who have passed through Shabbat and Toddler Program leader, Liz Rios. This year, we’d love to give a little back!

To thank Liz, and to find out how to contribute pictures to the gift we are planning for her, visit shearthisrael.org/liz-kiddush.

**DEADLINE: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9**

**PTTS Shabbaton & Family Beatbox Luncheon**
With special guest, champion beatboxer Mark Martin

NEXT Shabbat, December 14
Our PTTS Hebrew School students are encouraged to take center stage at Junior Congregation on this special Shabbat, and then warmly welcomed to join the exciting programming we have planned: Mark Martin, Winner of the 2016 American Beatbox Championships, will be joining us for our family luncheon after services.

Following Jr. Congregation, Mark will host a beatbox workshop for the teenagers and children, and he’ll also give a talk at the luncheon on the use of beatboxing as a tool for speech therapy.

To register or sponsor, go to shearthisrael.org/beatbox.

**JEWISH EDUCATION 5780**

⇒ Friday Night Lights | Rabbi Soloveichik
Friday Nights | Follow Evening Services

⇒ Shabbat Afternoon Class | Rabbi Soloveichik
Shabbat Afternoons | One hour before Mincha (but never earlier than 3:30 pm)

⇒ The Guide to the Duties of the Heart | Rabbi Sjimon den Hollander
Sunday Mornings | 8:45 am

⇒ The Road to Kingship | Rabbi David Silber
Sunday Mornings | 10:00 am | Registration details at shearthisrael.org/silber-kingship

⇒ Tuesday Morning Women’s Class | Rabbi Soloveichik
Tuesdays | 9:00 am | Sign up for weekly reminders at shearthisrael.org/join-our-email-lists

⇒ Bet Midrash | led by Steven Gotlib
Monday-Thursday | One hour before evening services

**RABBI SOLOVEICHIC’S UPCOMING MAJOR LECTURES**

**Mark Your Calendars and Watch Your Emails**

⇒ Following Evening Services


⇒ Wednesday, January 8: “From Mitzrayim To Manhattan: What the Metropolitan Museum Teaches Us About the Exodus”

⇒ Monday, February 10: Special History Lecture

⇒ Tuesday, March 3: Major Pre-Purim Shiar

**YOUTH CORNER**

⇒ Kiddush to Honor Liz Rios
Shabbat Morning, December 21 | See side panel for details

⇒ Brunch & Learn with Rabbi Soloveichik
Sunday, December 8 | 10:30 am | for elementary school aged children

⇒ Beatbox Luncheon
Saturday, December 14 | Following Morning Services | RSVP

⇒ Deadline: Wednesday, December 11 | register at shearthisrael.org/beatbox

⇒ Parent-Child Learning
Saturday, December 14 | One hour after habdala | for elementary school aged children | see side panel for details

⇒ Mitzvot Workshop with Z. Edinger
Sunday, January 5 | 10:00 am | for elementary school aged children

**Special History Lecture**
Rabbi Meir Soloveichik
THS Monday, December 9 | Following 6:30 pm Evening Services

“The British Chief Rabbi, Politics, and the Jews: A Reflection on An Extraordinary Otycty”

**Mark Twain In the Holy Land**
Sunday, February 2 | 11:30 am & 12:30 pm
At The New-York Historical Society

Mark Twain’s memoir of his tour of the Holy Land launched his career; his experiences are particularly fascinating when considered from the perspective of Jewish history and religion. Join Rabbi Meir Soloveichik for a tour on the final day of the New-York Historical Society’s exhibit on Twain’s trip through the Mediterranean.

Registration is currently open to sponsors only ($180) at shearthisrael.org/nys-twain.

**UWS Synagogues Present: Kooluham**
Thursday, May 21, 2020 | 7:00 pm | Ticket Price - $36
The Streicher Center at Temple Emanu-El | 5th Ave at 65th St.

The break-out Israeli musical phenomenon, Kooluham, has brought together diverse populations across Israel, South Africa and the US, to merge their individual voices into the magic of a single song. Now, for the first time, they are bringing their unique approach to music and community to Manhattan. UA-J Federation of New York and The Streicher Center are pleased to bring this event to Manhattan and Shearith Israel is proud to participate as a community partner, bringing together Manhattan synagogues and institutions for a unifying event.

Registration details to follow.

**Pre-Pay Your 2020-2021 Dues**
Through December 31
As we approach the end of 2019, and back by popular demand, we are again offering you another way to help the synagogue while potentially improving your own 2019 tax position. Full, associate, and young members may pre-pay 2020-2021 dues at our current rates. If we receive your payment by December 31, 2019, you will be exempt from any dues increase that may be implemented in the upcoming year.

To pre-pay, go to shearthisrael.org/prepay2020.

**Public Tours**
Our next public tour is this Wednesday, December 11, at 11:00 AM
Parnas Office Hours
Louis Solomon would be delighted to meet with you. Please schedule a visit at parnas@shearthisrael.org.