

Kedushah, Shema, and the Difference Between Israel and the Angels

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Introduction

Rich images of angels are contained within the holy scriptures and prayers of all three western religions. The Hebrew Bible contains depictions of God's heavenly entourage in several places in Ezekiel and Isaiah, and the *trisagion* prayer, which invokes the angels' triple declaration of "Holy" from Isaiah 6:3, is a part of the modern Jewish prayer liturgy. In both the Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, the angelic *trisagion* is part of the Divine Liturgy service, echoing the angels' cries in Revelation 4:8. A similarly themed hymn, Sanctus, is recited in the Roman Catholic Church as a prelude to the Eucharistic Prayer. Belief in angels is one of the six Articles of Faith of Islam, which are the fundamental requirements of belief for every Muslim.

What is the function of these angelic depictions? Why are angels important? What message do they convey to the person of faith who reads their exploits in the respective holy scriptures and who utters prayers that mimic their pronouncements?

Angels provide a source of emulation. They are depicted as heavenly, holy beings, worshipping God or doing God's bidding. A searching person of faith can read of the angels and learn what it means to be a true servant of God. Imitation of the angels provides a sense of kinship with holy beings and instills in the worshipper the feeling that he or she is praying the right and holy way, the way the angels do it.

But there may be another function to angelic depictions and prayer. Reading of these extremely transcendent beings who are devoid of sin and imperfection can be humbling for the parishioner who is struggling to stay afloat in the prayer service. Thoughts of the angels may cause one to conclude: I am but a speck of a creature in comparison to the holy *Hayot* and

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Seraphim of Isaiah. While I am clumsily uttering my prayers in the pews, fiery beings of God's inner entourage are heaping eloquent praises that far transcend my human capabilities. From this perspective, instead of being a source of emulation, the angels stand in the mind of the religious individual as an abasing reminder of how inadequate his or her religious service is.

This paper explores various Midrashic and mystical Jewish texts that depict the angels' worship activities, and how these depictions are filtered into the Jewish prayer known as "Kedushah." It will be argued that there is no single and uniform lesson about the angels with which the Talmudic and Hekhalot literature unanimously resounds; sometimes the message is that humans are meant to emulate the angels, while other times they are meant to engage in service that is distinctly different from the angels', precisely because of the innate differences between the two.

Kedushah

"Kedushah" (lit., "Holiness") is the name given to a portion of prayer that is rabbinically legislated to be recited communally in the contemporary Jewish prayer service, at least twice daily. This short prayer has fascinated Jewish thinkers for centuries. Based on verses from Isaiah and Ezekiel, it depicts the celestial angels surrounding God in heavenly worship and trepidation, and is meant to inspire the worshipper to emulate the angels in their fervent dedication.

As well known as the Kedushah is to so many Jews who pray regularly, its text remains mysterious for a number of reasons:

- (1) The traditional Talmudic and Midrashic sources, while commenting extensively on other portions of the prayer liturgy, are quite sparse in their detailing of this section of prayer.¹
- (2) The divergence of customs regarding the text of Kedushah is not merely a word here or there; whole sentences vary from *nusah* (version) to *nusah*, and it appears that thematic differences exist between the different versions of the same prayer (some of which are detailed below).

¹ See Ezra Fleischer, "Kedushah ha-Amidah (Ush'ar ha-Kedushot): Hebetim Historiyim Liturgim v-Ideologiyim" in *Mikra'ah be-Heker ha-Tefillah (Likutei Tarbitz 6)*, ed. Hananel Mack (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2003), 202. See also Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 54.

- (3) Normally, study of angelology and other such esoteric and transcendent theological pursuits are reserved for an elite class of Jewish scholars engaged in the esoteric/mystical dimension of the heavens and their contents. One would expect that these more esoteric ideas would not be imposed upon the general populace as part of a standard curriculum of Judaism. The angels' worship depicted in the Kedushah is a highly structured and stylized angelology that indicates an uncharacteristically mystical influence upon a popular and public prayer meant to be recited by all Jews, regardless of their familiarity with these esoteric concepts.²

These puzzling aspects of Kedushah have been discussed in detail by several scholars, most extensively by Joseph Heinemann³ and Ezra Fleischer.⁴ An additional mystery may be added, one that is even more basic and essential to an understanding of the Kedushah prayer:

As Fleischer has observed, the angels in heaven and Israel in this world are essentially engaged in the same activity; that is, they both sanctify and coronate God as the singular, unique ruler of the world and its contents. The angels fulfill this mandate by reciting the *trisagion*, the words from Isaiah 6:3:

קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה יְהוָה יְהוָה מְלֵא כְּלֵי-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ:

“*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*” etc. [Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of hosts, the entire world is filled with His glory].

Israel fulfills the mandate differently, by reciting the Shema prayer twice daily, opening with the words from Deuteronomy 6:4:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

“*Shema Yisrael*” etc. [Hear, Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One].

² When commenting on why historically the *Kedushah d-Yotzer* (the Kedushah recited within the Shema blessings) was not originally part of the daily order of the Palestinian prayer service, Joseph Heinemann notes: “The Talmudic Sages, it would seem, did not favor the infiltration of mystical elements into the public statutory liturgy, not so much out of opposition to the mystical doctrines themselves, but out of their conviction that such esoteric matters should not be popularized” (Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud*, (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1977), 232).

³ *Prayer in the Talmud*. 230–233, and Joseph Heinemann, “Kedushah u-Malkhut shel Keriat Shema u-Kedushah da-Amidah” in *Iyunei Tefillah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), 12-21.

⁴ In “Kedushah ha-Amidah.”

The sameness of purpose between Israel and the angels is one of the probable reasons that these two declarations are intertwined at different points in the prayer service. The pre-Shema blessing of *Yotzer Ha-Meorot* of the morning liturgy (*Shaharit*) contains the *Kedushah D-Yotzer*, the *trisagion* declaration of the angels. Furthermore, a recitation of Shema is contained in the *Kedushah* recited in the *Mussaf* (additional, post-morning) prayer on Sabbath and festivals.⁵

If so, why are the texts of the prayers of angels and humans so different? Why do the angels sanctify God with the words “*Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh*,” while Israel performs the same duty with the words “*Shema Yisrael*,” etc.? Furthermore, why in *Kedushah* does Israel emulate the angelic formula of the *trisagion*, whereas the angels are never found to be emulating the human formula of “*Shema Yisrael*” in their worship of God, neither in scripture nor in Talmudic, Midrashic, or Hekhalot literature?⁶

While it is true that Talmudic and Midrashic literature generally portrays the angels as having contempt for man—who is corporeal and flawed⁷—this in itself is not enough of a reason to explain why the angels would not want to recite *Shema*. There seems nothing flawed or corporeal about the prayer, which merely affirms God’s unitary existence. Why would the angels not seek to recite the Shema just as man seeks to recite the *trisagion*?

Once these questions are answered, a series of other curiosities about the *Kedushah* will be explained. Toward that end, the following arguments are presented in this essay:

- The *Kedushah* prayer is based on a number of mystical texts describing angelic behavior, including Hekhalot texts.
- The difference in *nusah* between the Palestinian and Babylonian communities that cropped up in the Gaonic era was based on two

⁵ Fleischer and Heinemann disagree fundamentally as to the origin and evolution of the *Kedushah d-Yotzer* and how these two prayers became intertwined, but they both agree to the common themes of these two prayers.

⁶ There *is* one Hekhalot text that has the angels reciting the Shema. See Synopese §406 (Hekhalot Rabati 4), which describes a daily routine of the angels whereby all of the heavenly “Sarim” turn to a Haya angel whose name is “Israel,” and say to it, “Hear, Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One.” I do not count this, however, as an example of angels worshipping God with the Shema. Rather, it appears that the angels are exhorting an angel who represents the Jewish nation in the heavenly realm to get the people on earth whom he represents to do their job and recite the Shema.

⁷ See Michael D. Swartz, “Like the Ministering Angels: Ritual and Purity in Early Jewish Mysticism and Magic,” *AJS Review*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1994): 135–167.

opposing traditions that coexist within the same Hekhalot and Midrashic corpora of literature:

- one, that Israel and the angels must, by virtue of their essentially differing natures, worship God differently from each other;
- the other, that Israel must worship God in a way that is as emulative of the angels as possible.
- The intertwining of the *trisagion* and the Shema that appears in both the Kedushah prayer itself and in other sections of the Jewish liturgy is reflective of the Palestinian tradition that Israel and the angels worship God differently from each other.
- Liturgy that describes coronating God with a crown is reflective of the Babylonian tradition, depicting a form of worship that is commonly shared by Israel and the angels.

The objective herein is not to trace the historical origins and evolution of the Kedushah prayer; rather, some of the thematic differences that exist within the different *nusḥa'ot* [liturgical versions] of the Kedushah prayer will be identified, and an explanation of the difference between Shema and Kedushah will be offered. These observations will then be related back to the central issue of the differences and similarities between man and angels.

Two Communities, Two Kedushahs

The Kedushah prayer is curious in that its variation in custom and *nusḥah* dates back to the Gaonic period, where two traditions formed—Babylonian and Palestinian—regarding the correct formula for the Kedushah and the frequency of its recitation in the prayers. It is well documented that in Palestine the custom was to recite Kedushah only on Sabbaths and festivals.⁸ This custom is echoed in *Masekhet Sofrim*, which tended to reflect the customs of the Jews of Palestine in the post-Talmudic era:⁹

ותני ר' חייא, כל יום שיש בו מוסף יש בו קדושה, אין בו מוסף אין בו קדושה, חוץ מן החנוכה, שאף על פי שאין בו מוסף יש בו קדושה, מפני מה, מפני שיש בו הלל, ויש אומרים אף בפורים, מפני שיש בו מגילה.

Rabbi Chiya taught: Any day in which there is no Mussaf prayer, there is no “Kadosh,” except for Chanukah, for even though it does not have

⁸ See Eliezer Levi, *Yesodot ha-Tefillah* (Tel Aviv: Bitan ha-Sefer, 1947), 152–154.

⁹ *Yesodot ha-Tefillah*, 151.

Mussaf, it nevertheless has “Kadosh,” since it does have Hallel. Some say that even on Purim [there is “Kadosh”] since it has the Megillah.¹⁰

By contrast, the Jews of Babylon recited Kedushah daily. Pirkoi ben Baboi, the 8th-9th century Babylonian Gaonic student, records that great pressure was brought upon the Jews of Palestine to change their custom, until the Babylonians finally prevailed upon the Palestinians and convinced them to recite it daily.¹¹ The reason that ben Baboi was so emphatic about the need to change the *minhag* (custom) of Palestine was because he maintained that the Palestinians’ custom was based upon external pressures that made it impossible for these Jews to gather on a daily basis for prayer. They were therefore restricted from reciting the Kedushah, whose recitation requires a *minyan* (quorum) of worshippers. According to ben Baboi, the Jews of Palestine were under religious persecution (*shemad*) for a period of time and were not permitted to assemble on any day other than the Sabbath and holidays, and even then their scrutinized gatherings were held under the pretense of singing holiday hymns. Within the singing of these hymns the Palestinian Jews were able to sneak in recitations of the Shema and Kedushah, two vitally important prayers.

Pirkoi ben Baboi’s writings must be read with a grain of salt, in that by his own admission there were many struggles for power regarding whose customs would prevail, Babylonian or Palestinian. One way of polemically deprecating the Palestinian *minhagim* was to argue that they came about only as a result of *shemad*, and therefore were not legitimate customs; once the *shemad* was over, it was incumbent upon the community to do away with a practice that was instituted only under duress.¹²

Consistent with this skepticism, another reason has been offered for the custom of reciting Kedushah only during holy days, one that is intrinsic to the Kedushah. The Tosafot commentary to Talmud Bavli states:

מכנף הארץ זמירות שמענו - כתוב בתשובת הגאונים שאין בני א"י אומרים
קדושה אלא בשבת דכתיב (ישעיה ו) גבי חיות שש כנפים לאחד וכל כנף
הוא אומר שירה אחת ביום בששת ימי החול וכשיגיע שבת אומרים החיות

¹⁰ Masekhet Sofrim 20:7.

¹¹ See Louis Ginzberg, *Ginzei Schechter*, vol. 2 (New York: Harmon Press, 1969 (reprint from 1929)), 551.

¹² See also Encyclopedia Judaica, entry “Pirkoi ben Baboi,” <http://www.jewish-virtuallibrary.org/jsourc/judaica/ejud_0002_0016_0_15821.html> (accessed September, 2013)), for more on the polemical nature of his writings. Fleischer notes that even some modern-day scholars have concluded that the inclusion of the Shema into Kedushah is historically due to *shemad*, but suggests that this is only because they weren’t able to provide any other logical reason for its inclusion: the *Shemad* theory is “almost automatic any time scholars are unable to find an explanation to an unusual phenomenon” (*Kedusbat ha-Amidah*, 227).

לפני המקום רבש"ע אין לנו עוד כנף והקב"ה משיב להם יש לי עוד כנף
אחד שאומר לפני שירה שנאמר מכנף הארץ זמירות שמענו.

In a Gaonic responsum it is written that Palestinian Jews recite Kedushah only on the Sabbath, as it says in relation to the Ḥayot [one type of angel] (Isaiah 6:2): “Six wings for each one.” Each wing recites *shirah* (song) for each of the [six] weekdays. When the Sabbath arrives, the Ḥayot say before the Omnipresent: “Master of the Universe! We do not have an extra wing [with which to sing on this day].” The Holy One, Blessed is He, responds to them: “I have an extra wing that can recite *shirah* before Me,” as it says (*ibid.*, 24:16), “From the wing of the land did we hear songs.”¹³

The Tosafot’s Gaonic source indicates an effort to assert a non-*shemad* basis for reciting the Kedushah only on the Sabbath, namely, the Jewish people are called upon to recite Kedushah only when the angels are unavailable to do so. This is clearly different from the Babylonian custom that eventually prevailed upon all of Jewry, calling upon Jews not only to emulate but also to synchronize with the angels’ recitation of Kedushah (as derived from the Talmudic and Hekhalot sources cited below); that is, humans on this earth are meant to recite it when the angels above are reciting it.

This difference in custom may account—at least partially—for the great divergence in the formulations of the opening phrase of the Kedushah of the Sabbath and festival Mussaf Amidah. This opening sentence is worthy of note, since it is arguably the best definition of the Kedushah’s theme; it is the introduction to the Kedushah recited in the synagogue when the largest gathering of parishioners is assembled. Jewish law, in fact, recognizes that the Mussaf service is the best place to make public declarations because it is when the largest crowd is assembled.¹⁴

The Palestinian version,¹⁵ which was adopted by Ashkenazic communities, reads:

נעריצך ונקדישך כסוד שיח שרפי קודש המקדישים שמך בקודש...

We will exalt and sanctify You like the secret of the conversation of the holy Seraphim who sanctify Your name in holiness...

¹³ Tosafot to T.B. Sanhedrin 37b, s.v., *Mi-Kenaf ha-Aretz Zemirot Sham’anu*.

¹⁴ See, for example, *Shulḥan Arukh Orah Ḥayyim* 114:1-2. See also *Tur* and commentary of *Beit Yosef* ad loc.

¹⁵ As cited by *Yesodot ha-Tefillah*, 151.

By contrast, the Babylonian version,¹⁶ which eventually became the Sephardic tradition, reads:

כתר יתנו לך ד' אלהינו מלאכים המוני מעלה ועמך ישראל קבוצי מטה יחד
כולם קדושה לך ישלשו...

They will give You a crown, Lord God, the angels, the multitudes of above, and your nation Israel gathered below; together they will all recite holiness thrice...

Note the emphasis in the Babylonian version on the fact that the nation of Israel recites Kedushah *together* (*yahad*) with the angels. No mention of this joint recitation exists in the Palestinian version. If anything, it suggests that Israel's recitation of Kedushah is merely "like" (*KE-sod*) the mysterious recitation of the Seraphim, but not necessarily performed together with them. This is consistent with the Palestinian tradition of reciting Kedushah at a time different from that of the angels' recitation.

Another "erroneous" custom of the Palestinian communities recorded by ben Baboi is that the Jews of Palestine unnaturally inserted the Shema into their Kedushah prayer because of *shemad* that was occurring in Palestine at the time. The imperial authorities forbade its recitation during the normal prayer service, as it was an affront to their polytheistic sensitivities, and so the Jews had to find a way to say it surreptitiously. They therefore snuck it into the Kedushah, a place in the service the pagan authorities did not think to scrutinize.¹⁷ The reason they continued the practice even after the persecution ceased was as a reminder of the historical *shemad* that the Jews of Palestine had experienced.

Just as Ben Baboi's reason for the Palestinian community's recitation of Kedushah on the Sabbath alone is suspect as polemical rhetoric, it may also be offered that the recitation of Shema in Kedushah has a more significant basis than persecution alone. It will then be necessary to examine why the Babylonian school (or at least a portion of it¹⁸) was so opposed to its recitation. These issues are examined in the following section.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Ginzei Schechter*, vol. 2., 524.

¹⁸ See Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 81-82, where the author cites a Sar Shalom Gaon narrative that argues to preserve the Shema in the Babylonian Kedushah, but to move it from the Shaḥarit Amidah—where the Palestinians recited it—to the Mussaf Amidah's Kedushah. This clearly conflicts with ben Baboi's account. For other problems with the Ben Baboi account, see Fleischer, "Kedushat ha-Amidah," 227-228.

What Song Does Israel Sing?

Thus far a difference in custom has been noted between the Babylonian and Palestinian communities regarding *when* Israel is meant to recite the Kedushah prayer; Israel is either meant to recite Kedushah at the same time as the angels or at a distinctly different time from that of the angels. For both communities, however, Israel is engaged in a form of worship that is similar to the angels' worship, namely, the communal recitation of praise at a specified time. But now a different question: how similar to or dissimilar from the angels' is Israel's actual prayer? Is the very same *trisagion* utterance of the angels befitting to the mortal community of Israel, or is man meant to be reciting something unique to man in his Kedushah, leaving the *trisagion* prayer as a unique prayer for the angels?

A number of Talmudic and Midrashic sources cite that, while angels are the holiest of creations, it is the human being who is higher in importance to God. One way this notion is expressed is by means of the assertion that the angels may not sing their Kedushah in heaven above until the Jewish people recite their *shirah*¹⁹ on earth below. The Talmud states:

אין מה"ש אומרים שירה למעלה, עד שיאמרו ישראל למטה, שנאמר: ברן
יחד כוכבי בקר, והדר: ויריעו כל בני אלהים!

The ministering angels do not say *shirah* above until Israel says *shirah* below, as it says (Job 38:7), "When morning stars [read: the Israelite people] sing in unison—" only then, "—do all the sons of God [read: angels] shout out."²⁰

This position is further elaborated upon in Hekhalot Rabati:

כשמגיע זמנם של מלאכים לאמר שירה וזימרה לפני ה'קב"ה יהוה שמעיא"ל המלאך קשר הגדול והנכבד והנורא עומד על חלוני הרקיע התחתון לשמוע ולהקשיב כל שירות וזמירות ותשבחות העולות מן הארץ ומן כל בתי כנסיות ומדרשות להשמיע להם לפני ערבות רקיע. ומפני מה הוא עומד על ערבות רקיע מפני שאין להם רשות למלאכי השרת לומר שירה תחילה מלמעלה עד שיפתחו ישראל את פיהם בשירה מלמטה, שנאמר רוממו ה' אלהינו (והשתחוו להר קדשו, אלו מלאכי השרת), וכל מלאכי השרת וכל מלאכי רקיע ורקיע ששומעים קול שירות ותשבחות שאומרים ישראל מלמטה, הם פותחין מלמעלה בקדוש קדוש קדוש.

¹⁹ "Shirah" literally means song. Throughout the paper, however, I have left this word in its original Hebrew, since it is the word's ambiguous meaning that I seek to address.

²⁰ T.B. Ḥullin 91b.

When the time comes for the angels to recite *shirah* and song before the Holy One, Blessed is He, YHVH-Shem'ael the angel, that great, venerated, and awesome bond, stands at the windows of the lower firmament to listen and pay attention to all the *shiroi* (songs), and praises that ascend from the earth and from all the synagogues and study halls, in order to cause them to be heard before the heavens of the firmament. Why does he stand on the heavens of the firmament? Because the ministering angels do not have permission to recite *shirah* above until Israel open their mouths in *shirah* below, as it says (Psalms 99:9): “Exalt the Lord our God (and bow to His mount of holiness”—this [latter section] refers to the ministering angels). All the ministering angels and all the angels of each firmament who hear the sound of *shiroi* and praises that Israel say below, then open their mouths above with “Holy, holy, holy.”²¹

There is an ambiguity in this text: Which prayers or songs are the Jewish people reciting below that prompt the angels to sing *shirah* above? One would be tempted to assume that Israel is reciting the same *shirah* as the angels; in order to get the angels to recite “Holy, holy, holy,” Israel must recite the same *trisagion* in their synagogues.

However, the above Hekhalot text seems to indicate the contrary. Note how it only makes mention of the *trisagion* in connection with the angels, but states generically that Israel recites “*shiroi*, songs, and praises” to instigate the angels’ *trisagion* recital. It seems from this text that Israel is *not* reciting the *trisagion* but something different, something more appropriate for human praise than the words “Holy, holy, holy.”

This, however, is not the only Hekhalot text that deals with the angels responding to Israel’s prayer stimulus. In the following text it appears that Israel *is* credited with reciting the *trisagion* as the stimulus for angels:

...כי במאה ושמונים וחמשת אלפים רבבות פרסאות אין כל בריה יכולה
ליגע באותו המקום מפני זוחלי אשות שטורדין ויוצאין מפי הכרובים ומפי
האופנים ומפי חיות הקודש שפותחין פיהם לומר קדוש (קדוש קדוש)
בשעה שישראל אומרים לפניו קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' וגו'.

...For a distance of 1,850,000,000 parsah’s, no creature can approach that place because of the flashes of fire which are drawn out and emanate from the mouths of the Cherubim, Ophanim, and holy

²¹ Synopse §178-179 (Hekhalot 43). (Throughout this paper I reference Hekhalot texts using the numbering system of Peter Schäfer in his *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981). The citation accompanying it in parentheses is the source as it appears in older compendiums of Midrashic literature, such as *Otzar Midrashim* (ed. J.D. Eisenstein, 1915)).

Ḥayot who open their mouths to say “Holy” at the same time that Israel says before Him, “Holy.”²²

Based on this text that has Israel reciting the *trisagion* every time the angels do, Ithamar Gruenwald has surmised that the author of this text must have subscribed to the Babylonian custom of Jews reciting *Kedushah* on a daily basis.²³ The only rejoinder to this undoubtedly correct conclusion is that the entire corpus of Hekhalot texts does not seem to be by one author; as has been demonstrated from the previous Hekhalot citation, the angels are responding to a prayer of Israel that is *not* the *trisagion*. The author of that Hekhalot passage is not bound to subscribe to the Babylonian tradition.

As Peter Schäfer has noted, the corpus of literature known as Hekhalot is “an extremely fluctuating literature that has been crystallized in various macroforms, which are nonetheless interwoven with one another on many different levels.”²⁴ By the term *macroform*, Schäfer means to connote that the unified literary appearance of the Hekhalot texts is purely fictional. The individuated texts may share common themes, but they were not originally compiled together, and, indeed, their authorship may have spanned several centuries. It should therefore not be surprising to find contradictory attitudes regarding specific angelic teachings. It is as natural to find conflicting views on the angels in the Hekhalot corpora as it is to find differing opinions between one Midrashic or Talmudic text and another.

This is relevant to this discussion, because another Hekhalot text will soon be cited that will be important for the Palestinians.

Shema as a *Shirah*

Two traditions are reflected in the Hekhalot texts, both indicating that Israel’s *shirah* is the stimulus for the angels’ *shirah* of the *trisagion*. One tradition is that Israel says the same *trisagion shirah* as the angels, and the other is that they recite some other “human” *shirah* to prod the angels. What is this human *shirah*?

²² Synopse §101 (Hekhalot Rabati 4:1). See also §161 for a similar citation. See also §163, in which it is clear that the *trisagion* is uttered by Israel on a daily basis.

²³ Ithamar Gruenwald, “Shirat ha-Malakhim, ha-Kedushah u-Bayat Hiburah shel Sifrut ha-Hekhalot,” in *Perakim be-Toldot Yerushalayim Bimei Bayit Sheni: Sefer Zikaron l-Avraham Shalit*, ed. A. Openheimer, et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, 1981), 474.

²⁴ See Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 6, and esp. fn. 14.

From the Babylonian Talmud in Hullin it would seem that this *shirah* is the Shema recitation (Deut. 6:4), “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.” The full text reads:

חביבין ישראל לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא יותר ממלאכי השרת, שישראל
 אומרים שירה - בכל שעה, ומלאכי השרת אין אומרים שירה אלא - פעם
 אחת ביום, ואמרי לה - פעם אחת בשבת, ואמרי לה - פעם אחת בחודש,
 ואמרי לה - פעם אחת בשנה, ואמרי לה - פעם אחת בשבוע, ואמרי לה -
 פעם אחת ביובל, ואמרי לה - פעם אחת בעולם; וישראל מזכירין את השם
 אחר שתי תיבות, שנאמר: שמע ישראל ה' וגו', ומלאכי השרת אין מזכירין
 את השם אלא לאחר ג' תיבות, כדכתיב: קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבאות; ואין
 מה"ש אומרים שירה למעלה, עד שיאמרו ישראל למטה...

Beloved are Israel more than the ministering angels. For Israel recites *shirah* constantly, whereas the angels recite *shirah* only once a day; and some say, only once a week; and some say, only once a month; and some say, only once a year; and some say, only once every seven years; and some say, only once every fifty years; and some say, only once in all of time. Furthermore, Israel mentions the Name after only two words, as it says, “*Shema Yisrael YHVH*,” etc., whereas the ministering angels may recite the Name only after three words, as it says, “*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh, YHVH Tzevaot*.” Furthermore, the ministering angels do not sing above until Israel sings below...

It seems quite apparent from this Talmudic passage that the song that Israel “sings below” as a stimulus to the angels refers to the Shema that had just been referenced before it. Surprisingly, in a footnote from his book, *Keter*, Arthur Green maintains that despite the apparently direct connection between Shema and *shirah* in the above passage, the word “*shirah*” does *not* refer to the recital of Shema, because “recitation of *Shema* is not referred to as *shirah*” anywhere else in the Talmud.²⁵ However, this text as well as other passages cited below indicates that the *shirah* is, indeed, the Shema, in contradiction to Green.

In response to Green’s claim that Shema is not referred to as *shirah*, it may be observed that Shema has two functions, one normative and the other non-normative. Its normative function, by which it is known throughout the Talmud, is as a Biblically mandated prayer recited twice daily by Israel, as cited throughout the first part of Tractate Berakhot (first through third chapters). Its non-normative—and less well-known—function is as a stimulus to the angels to recite their angelic praises. Only when

²⁵ Arthur Green, *Keter* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 39, fn. 15.

it comes to the Shema's non-normative function as a stimulus to the angels would it logically be referred to as *shirah*. The fact that Shema is not readily associated with *shirah* is because, with the exception of this section in H_{ullin}, it is never referenced in the Talmud in this context of being the stimulus for the angels' *shirah*. It is therefore not surprising that Shema is not referenced functionally as a *shirah* elsewhere.

Another indication that Shema is a *shirah* recited by Israel that parallels the angels' *trisagion* is from the following section of Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer:

ושני שרפים עומדים אחד מימינו ואחד משמאלו, שש כנפים שש כנפים לכל אחד ואחד, בשתים מכסים פניהם שלא יביטו פני השכינה ובשתים מכסים רגליהם שלא יראו לפני השכינה לשכוח עמידת רגל העגל, ובשתים מעופפין ומקלסין ומעריצין ומקדישין, זה עונה וזה קורא, וזה עונה ואומר קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבאות, והחיות עומדות אצל כסא כבודו ואינן יודעות מקום כבודו, ועונות ואומרות בכל מקום שכבודו שם ברוך כבוד ה' ממקומו, וישראל שהם גוי אחד בארץ מיחדים שמו הגדול בכל יום ואומ' שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד, והוא משיב לעמו ואומ' אני ה' אלהיכם המציל אתכם מכל צרה.

Two Seraphim stand, one to the right of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and the other to His left. Each angel has six wings; with two they cover their face so as not to gaze at the face of the Shekhinah; with two they cover their legs to cause forgetfulness of the Golden Calf's leg standing; and with two they fly. They exalt and sanctify His great Name. One responds and the other calls out, and they say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Hosts, the whole world is filled with His glory." The Ḥayot stand near His glory yet do not know His place of glory. They respond and say, "Wherever His glory is, 'Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place.'" Israel, who is a unique nation in the land in that they unify His name constantly, every day, respond and say, "Hear Israel, the Lord is our God the Lord is one." He responds to His nation Israel, "I am the Lord your God, who saves you from all travail."²⁶

This Midrash presents two separate but parallel forms of worship: the angelic practice of the *trisagion*, and the mortal practice of the Shema. Fleischer cites this Midrash as proof to his quite dramatic claim: the entire custom of Israel reciting the *trisagion* in their Kedushah in the Amidah prayer is a big mistake. It is based on the mistaken early "folk interpretation" that the third blessing of the Amidah, which refers to the angels'

²⁶ Pirkei d-Rebbe Eliezer, end of ch. 4.

recitation of their *shirah*, was also a reference to Israel. The ambiguous language of this blessing, which talks about “holy ones” (*kedoshim*) praising God, was misunderstood as a reference to both the angels and Israel when it was meant only as a reference to the angels.²⁷ While Fleischer seems to have overstated his case,²⁸ it is clear that some traditions have Israel reciting the *trisagion* like the angels and in sync with the angels, while others have Israel reciting the Shema as a stimulus for the angels’ recitation of “Kadosh.”

It seems that the debate over whether Israel’s *shirah* is Shema or the *trisagion* is part of the same debate between the Babylonian and Palestinian communities. Both the issue of the frequency of the Kedushah’s recitation—daily vs. on the Sabbath only—and the issue of including the Shema in the Kedushah are directly related to this issue.

The connection to the Palestinian custom of including the Shema in Kedushah is now quite apparent: the Jews of Palestine subscribed to the texts—such as T.B. Hullin and Pirke d-Rebbe Eliezer above—that have Israel reciting Shema as a stimulus to the angels. Accordingly, the inclusion of the Shema is an explanatory component of the Kedushah, in that it is incomplete to mention the angels’ *shirah* without making mention of Israel’s *shirah* that stimulated them to song in the first place.

Also explained by this stimulus connection is the practice of *Kedushah d-Yotzer*, the portion of the Shema liturgy where the Kedushah is mentioned. As an introduction to the Shema, it is appropriate to reflect on the prayer’s importance not only to the individual, but also to the cosmic impact it will have upon the celestial realm, in that once Israel begins its Shema recitation, the angels will then be able to recite their Kedushah.

This argument, however, may be challenged by the order of these prayers. Both the *Kedushah d-Yotzer* and the regular Amidah Kedushah position the Shema *after* the recitation of the *trisagion*. According to these above Midrashim, however, Israel’s recitation of Shema is the stimulus

²⁷ Fleischer, “Kedushah ha-Amida,” 235.

²⁸ See Israel Ta-Shema, “Mekomah shel ha-Kedushah ba-Tefillah,” ch. 7 of *Ha-Tefillah ha-Ashkenazit ha-Kedumah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2003), 113, fn. 7. One of the reasons that Fleischer may be so convinced that the tradition of Israel using the *trisagion* as a stimulus to the angels originated through misunderstanding is because he had little regard for Hekhalot literature and its influence upon the liturgy. See Fleischer’s essay, “Tefillat Shemoneh Esrei: Iyunim b-Ofiyah, Sidrah, Tokhanah, u-Magamoteha,” in the same *Mikra’ah be-Heker ha-Tefillah (Likutei Tarbitz 6)*, 200-201. Meir Bar-Ilan, on the other hand, argues to the contrary, that Hekhalot texts have a profound impact on this portion of liturgy. See his “Kivui Yesod le-Hithavutah shel ha-Kedushah ve-Gibushah,” *Da’at* 25 (1990): 5–20.

and *antecedent* to the angels' *trisagion*! If so, would not one expect to see the Shema recited *before* the *trisagion*?

It may be suggested that the purpose of putting the *trisagion* before the Shema in the *Kedushah D'Yotzer* is to remind those worshippers, who are about to recite this stimulus mantra, that what they are about to recite has important repercussions not only for themselves but for the angels as well. By positioning the *trisagion* before the Shema, the worshippers are now mentally prepared to recite the Shema with the proper *kavanah* (mental awareness), knowing that their words will enable the angels to begin reciting their *trisagion*. Because the prayer was composed for humans, and it was meant as a prelude to their cosmic recitation, it was important to detail how the Shema would impact the angels before the Shema's actual recitation. One might even imagine that were there a parallel prayer composed for the angels, the Shema would be the prefatory prayer to the angels' recitation of their *trisagion*, as a way of reminding the angels to wait for their cue from the humans.

Regarding the connection between the Palestinian custom to recite the Kedushah only on the Sabbath and the issue of Israel's *shirah*, it is clear that if Israel recites the *trisagion* only on the Sabbath—specifically when the angels are *not* reciting the *trisagion*, as per Tosafot—then their once-weekly *trisagion* cannot be the stimulus for the angels' daily *trisagion*. Israel must have something different that they recite to prompt the angels on a daily basis, which is what leads the Midrash and Talmud to cite the Shema.

But if Israel does recite the *trisagion* on the Sabbath, it is because, as Tosafot had stated, the angels lack sufficient “wings” to recite the *trisagion* themselves on this holy day. Why, then, should the Shema be included in the Sabbath Kedushah even according to the Palestinian tradition? If the whole purpose of the Shema is to stimulate the angels' *trisagion*, the angels do not recite the *trisagion* on the Sabbath, so why recite the Shema at all?

As mentioned above, the Mussaf Amidah on the Sabbath and Festivals is the one time when the largest number of Jews is assembled for prayer in the synagogue. While Israel's Shema on the Sabbath does not act as a stimulus for the angels on this day, it is nevertheless appropriate to reference it in the Kedushah at a time when as many Jews as possible will be able to reaffirm their belief that the Shema prayer—when recited during the week—has a stimulus effect upon the angels.

Furthermore, recall that the Palestinian custom was to recite Kedushah only on the Sabbath and festivals. Thus, the only Kedushah prayer in which the Palestinian community even had an opportunity to connect the *trisagion* to the Shema was the Sabbath Kedushah. It was there as a reminder of that which is *normally* a stimulus for the angels' *trisagion*, and

to affirm that it has value even on the day when such stimulus is not needed.²⁹

From this perspective, the Palestinian view of the angels is that they are completely separate creatures with a completely different mode of divine worship. It may be that the Palestinians viewed the angels as so vastly different from themselves because angels are perfect, non-corporeal beings and, unlike man, have no “demons” that they must contend with internally. Thus, man has no business trying to emulate their mode of worship.

By contrast, the Babylonian custom strives to connect man’s mode of worship with the angels’ mode of worship as much as possible. Thus, man recites the *trisagion*—the very same *shirab* as the angels—at the same time as—and even as the stimulus for—the angels’ recitation of the same *shirab*.

It would appear that the basis for the difference between the two communities’ customs is rooted in how far each community was invested in a certain form of mystical tradition, a tradition that is found in some Hekhalot texts. This genre of literature is known as “ascension” or “*Yordei Merkavah*” literature, texts that describe great rabbis ascending to heaven, and recording angelic behavior in the angels’ respective chambers. Accordingly, it was considered appropriate for the holy ascenders, known as the *Yordei Merkavah* (descenders to the Chariot), to strive to emulate the behavior that they witnessed when ascending through the various chambers.³⁰

As Rachel Elior writes about the themes of the Hekhalot tradition:

The ceremony that the angels perform before the throne of glory, including immersion, the offering of praises, the singing of hymns, recitation of prayers, binding of crowns, and mention of the Name,

²⁹ Actually, there may even be greater value to referencing the Shema prayer in the Kedushah specifically on the day when it is not being used as an angelic stimulus. Perhaps it was instituted so that Israel could reaffirm that their declaration of the Shema is not solely for the purpose of stimulating the angels’ *shirab*, but is also being recited independently as devotional worship to God. This may be why the line right before the Shema’s appearance in the Kedushah reads, “From His place (*Mimkomo*) will He shine forth with mercy, and will show favor to the nation who unify His name evening and morning, [by] every day constantly, twice with *love*, reciting the Shema.” This is an affirmation that Israel recites the Shema daily, out of love of God and for no other reason, regardless of whether or not there is stimulus benefit to the angels.

³⁰ Attempts have been made to reconcile the paradoxical terminology of *Yordei Merkavah*, which literally means *descending* to the Chariot, with the concept of heavenly *ascension*. See, for example, Schafer’s *Hidden and Manifest God*, 2, fn. 4.

is conceived as the basic ritual structure that the Yordei Merkahah want to learn and imitate.³¹

Elior later elaborates:

Those who descend to the Merkabah, who seek to ascend to celestial realms and to gaze upon the worship taking place before the Throne of Glory, imitate the worship of the angels, identify with them, and aspire to emulate them. The descenders of the Merkabah intone the angelic hymns, which they learn during their ascent to the heavens, and which they teach to the members of their circle, while emphasizing their angelic source. All of the prayers of the authors of the Hekhalot, which are recited during mystical ecstasy, are acquired, according to their testimony, from the prayers of the angels before the Throne of Glory.³²

The Babylonian community may have been more immersed in this genre of literature. Their opposition to the insertion of Shema into the Kedushah may have therefore been due to their desire to retain the mystical import of Kedushah, that is, to emulate the angels' *shirah* of the *trisagion*. For these mystics, there is no place for the Shema—whose primary theme is of personal faith affirmation, not the cosmic theme of sanctifying God and the universe—in this mystical schema.

There are scant indications that the Babylonian community emphasized a mystical bent in prayer any more than the Palestinian community. However, as Arthur Green notes, there was most probably a post-Temple circle of mystics who engaged in merkavah mysticism, and who used the Tetragrammaton pronunciation of God's name even outside the Temple during their esoteric and private prayer services. Rav Hai Gaon addressed these mystical prayer groups in a responsum to his Babylonian community, limiting the utterance of God's name to rare conditions. This indicates that there was some form of mystical worship extant in Babylon (although this admittedly does not prove that they were practicing ascension to celestial chambers through these divine names).³³

For the Jews of Palestine, by contrast, imitating the angels was never the mandate given to the Jewish people by God in the Torah. The non-mystic sees no connection between his own worship of God and that of the angels', other than the visionary inspiration of a heavenly being in the midst of its own completely different mode of worship.

³¹ Rachel Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology: The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature," *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, vol. 1 (1993): 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 48.

³³ See *Keter*, 47-48, and fn. 22.

Ithamar Gruenwald has argued that the daily recitation of Kedushah in Babylon was due to a greater subscription to the mystical tradition of Hekhalot Rabati, the source for Israel's reciting the *trisagion*, quoted above. He posits that the Palestinian community did not accept this mystical genre of Kedushah based on the community's adherence to the Mishnah in Hagigah (2:1) which prohibits any public exposition of Merkavah mysticism. For Gruenwald, not only was there no need for Israel to recite the *trisagion* during the weekday in their prayer service; it was moreover prohibited to do so, because reciting it publicly was a tacit admission that the congregation is mystically mimicking the angels, which was akin to teaching Merkavah mysticism publicly.

Furthermore, Gruenwald suggests that the Palestinian communities had another very simple reason for not subscribing to a mystical tradition of Israel reciting the *trisagion* as their shirah: that practice, after all, was a Babylonian custom, and the Palestinians did everything to distance themselves from Babylonian customs!³⁴

As already mentioned, it should *not* be inferred that all sections of Hekhalot literature are monolithic in the belief that angels and man are essentially the same in their service. As suggested below, even the Palestinian custom for Kedushah is based on sections from Hekhalot literature. Rather, as with many writings of this period, there are many voices that speak in the Hekhalot corpus. Only one of the many themes contained therein is the goal for the mystic to emulate the angels.

But this is where the original question resurfaces, namely: Regardless of whether one is Babylonian or Palestinian, one thing is clear: Shema is an integral prayer for the Jewish nation, and is, arguably, as a Biblical commandment,³⁵ of greater importance in the liturgy than Kedushah. Why, then, is the recitation of the Shema the *sine qua non* for the Jew and *not* the *trisagion*? Why do the angels have a different mantra of worship? Most importantly, what is inherent in their respective recitations that makes Shema appropriate for man and "Kadosh" appropriate for angels?

The Dual Function of Worship for Man

Why does God want man to worship Him? More specifically, who benefits from the worship—man or God? While there are certainly passages in Talmudic literature that depict God as pining for Israel's worship,³⁶ a major Talmudic theme in its approach to the reasons for the command-

³⁴ See "Shirat ha-Malakhim," 475-476.

³⁵ As detailed at the very beginning of T.B. Berakhot.

³⁶ See, for example, T.B. Berakhot 3a and Bava Batra 74a.

ments is that God gave the Jewish people the Torah and its commandments (*mitzvot*) not for His own sake, but rather so that man might be purified through this service. One such example:

רבי חנניה בן עקשיא אומר רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות שנאמר (ישעיה מ"ב) ה' חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, sought to purify/provide merit for³⁷ Israel. He therefore increased for them Torah and mitzvot, as it says (Isaiah 42:21), "YHVH desires for the sake of His righteousness, to increase Torah and make it strong."³⁸

Accordingly, man's required affirmation of his belief in God's mastery is not primarily for God, but rather to strengthen man's faith so that he may be a better servant. This is evidenced by the oft-quoted dispute between Moses and the angels that took place when Moses ascended to heaven to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. The Talmud records that the angels were vehemently against lowly and corporeal man receiving such a precious gift. God then instructed Moses to defend man's right to the Torah. Moses argued:

אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, תורה שאתה נותן לי מה כתיב בה - אנכי ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים. אמר להן: למצרים ירדתם, לפרעה השתעבדתם, תורה למה תהא לכם? שוב מה כתיב בה - לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים, בין הגויים אתם שרויין שעובדין עבודה זרה?

"Master of the Universe: What is written in the Torah that You are giving me? 'I am the Lord your God who took you out of Egypt'" (Exodus 20:2). He said to the angels: "Did you go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Why should you receive the Torah? Furthermore, what does it say? 'You shall not have other gods before Me' (ibid. 3). Are you dwelling among the other nations who worship idols?"³⁹

After discussing the first two of the Ten Commandments, Moses then proceeded to demonstrate that the angels have no corporeal form which would allow them to fulfill the bodily commandments contained within the rest of the Ten Commandments. But just as the first two commandments (the commandment to believe in God and the prohibition against idolatry) are commandments of faith and belief, the first two arguments

³⁷ The Hebrew word, "lezakot," is translated both ways.

³⁸ Mishnah Makot 3:16.

³⁹ T.B. Shabbat 88b.

are similarly not based on the angels' inability to perform physical mitzvot. Rather, the arguments are that angels do not need to affirm their belief in the one God of Israel since they, unlike the Israelites, were never placed in the compromising position of being enslaved to a pagan empire or living among heathens.

This principle is even more explicit in the Pesikta's version:

מיד נתחזק והחזיר תשובה למלאכי השרת, אמר להם כתוב בתורה אנכי ה'
אלהיך (שמות כ' ב') כלום אלהים יש לכם, כתוב בתורה לא יהיה לך אלהים
אחרים (שם שם / שמות כ' / ב') חלוקה יש לכם שתי רשויות יש לכם

Moses said to them: "It says in the Torah, 'I am the Lord your God [Elohekha].'⁴⁰ Do you even have an *Elohim*?⁴⁰ It is written in the Torah, "You shall not have other gods before Me." Is there any plurality of deity among you? Is there any duality among you?"⁴¹

Man's need for a Torah—and certainly the affirmation of "the Lord is one," which is an affirmation of the first two of the Ten Commandments—is because man dwells among idolaters and dualists who constantly bear down on his faith and attempt to weaken it.

The angels, by contrast, have no need to reinforce affirmations of faith. Their service, like that of the priests in the Temple,⁴² is merely to serve God without gaining personally from that service. That the angels do not need divine sanctification for themselves is evident in the fact that they do not preface their *trisagion* with the words "Hear angels" in the same way that the Shema begins with "Hear Israel." The need for Israel to "hear" is because Israel needs to strengthen itself.⁴³ The angels, however, do not even need to listen to their own words of praise—their words are unidirectionally heaped upon God.

⁴⁰ M. Friedmann in his Magen David commentary to Pesikta Rabati (in the 1880 Vienna edition, 98a) explains that the word *Elohim* describes a God who interacts with the physical universe, and thus the angels do not know God by this name. One's ability to comprehend God's true essence is thus far more compromised for man than it is for angels, because of the murky view that man has of God from man's corporeal vantage point.

⁴¹ Pesikta Rabati 20:3.

⁴² Rachel Elior opines that the Hekhalot mystics were simply transferring the Temple service from the defunct physical Temple to the heavenly realm. The analogy between angels and *kobanim* is thus quite apt. See "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 43–51.

⁴³ See Bahya ibn Pakuda's *Hovot ha-Levavot* (*Duties of the Heart*, 11th century), beginning of "Gate of Unity": "The word 'Shema' refers not to a listening of the ear, but rather to a belief in the heart and an acceptance, such as (Exodus 24:7), 'We

It is precisely the name “Israel” —given to Jacob because (Genesis 32:29) “you have striven with God and with men and you have been victorious” —that indicates the constant state of challenge and conflict that man is in and his constant need to continue his struggle to affirm his faith. That is why the Shema begins with this name (“Hear Israel”), because its function is to provide man with a reinforcing affirmation that will help him in his struggle. The angels experience no such conflict. Instead, their recitation of “Kadosh” is merely to sanctify and elevate God and His world.

In the previous citation of T.B. *Hullin*—where the Shema is chosen as Israel’s *shirah*—the Talmud also states that Israel is superior to the angels, because “Israel mentions the Name after only two words, as it says, ‘Shema Yisrael YHVH,’ etc., whereas the ministering angels may recite the Name only after three words, as it says, ‘Holy, holy, holy, YHVH of Hosts.’” The reason that Israel’s service is more important to God—as evidenced by His name being inserted after only two words—may now be understood based on the aforementioned. Unlike that of the angels, Israel’s mantra serves a dual function: not only to worship and sanctify God but also to perfect the worshipper. This, then, is the reason that the angels must defer to Israel’s *shirah* before they can say their own. They must wait for those whose *shirah* fulfills a dual purpose to finish their worship before the angels may begin theirs.

The Secret of the Seraphim

Having now established that the Palestinian custom for Kedushah is rooted in the belief that men are not angels and angels are not men, this argument may be advanced by noting another curiosity about the opening phrase of the Mussaf Kedushah. The Palestinian/Ashkenaz *nusah* reads:

נעריצך ונקדישך כסוד שיח שרפי קודש...

We will exalt and sanctify You like the *secret* of the conversation of the holy Seraphim...

What is so “secret” about the Seraphim’s conversation? Again, a Hekhalot text sheds some light:

ולמה נקראו שמן שרפים? מפני שהם שורפים פנקסאות של שטן. בכל יום ויום השטן יושב עם סמאל שרה של רומי ועם דוביאל שרה של פרס וכותב עוונותיהם של ישראל על פנקסאות ונותנין אותם לשרפים להכניס אותן

will do and listen (*nishma*),’ and (Deut. 6:3), ‘You shall listen (*ve-shamata*), Israel, and you shall be careful to do...’ All instances like this that use this verb are conveying the imperative to believe and accept.”

לפני ה'ב'ה' לאבד את ישראל מן העולם, והשרפים יודעים ברזי ה'ב'ה' שאינו רוצה שתפול אומה זו של ישראל, מה עושין שרפים בכל יום ויום? נוטלין אותן מיד השטן ושורפין אותם באש יוקדת שכנגד כסא רם ונשא כדי שלא יכניסן לפני ה'ב'ה' בשעה שהוא יושב על כסא הדין ודן את העולם כולו באמת.

Why are they called “Seraphim”? Because they burn (*sorpbim*) Satan’s ledgers. Every day, Satan sits with Samael the archangel of Rome and with Dubiel the archangel of Persia, and writes down Israel’s sins on ledgers. They give these ledgers to the Seraphim to bring them before the Holy One, Blessed is He, in order to eradicate Israel from the world. The Seraphim know the secrets of the Holy One, Blessed is He, in that He does not desire that this nation, Israel, suffer a downfall. What, then, do the Seraphim do every day? They take [these ledgers] from the Satan and they burn them in a blazing fire that is opposite the high and exalted throne, in order that they not be brought before the Holy One, Blessed is He, during the time when He is sitting on His Throne of Justice and judging the entire world with truth.⁴⁴

This text is informative about the Kedushah text, particularly the Mussaf Kedushah. A number of traditional Siddur commentaries observe the differences between the Shaḥarit Kedushah (the Kedushah recited in the morning prayer service) and the Mussaf Kedushah (the Kedushah recited in the additional service, said after Shaḥarit). In the Shaḥarit Kedushah, one of the lines is written in the second person, beginning with the word “*Mimkomkha*”—“From *Your* place, our King, You will shine forth...” By contrast, the same word is invoked to begin a description of God’s shining forth in the Mussaf Kedushah, but this time it is in the third person: “*Mimkomo*”—“From *His* place, He will shine forth...”

The Talmud (I.B. Avodah Zarah 3b) states that God’s “work day” is divided into four parts. During the first quarter of the day, God is engaged in Torah study. During the second quarter of the day, God is sitting in judgment of the world. The Tosafot commentary (*ad loc.*) cites an opinion that because Mussaf is usually prayed in the synagogue during the second quarter of the day, the time when God is sitting in judgment, it is appropriate to invoke the word “*Mimkomo*,” in the third person, which is suggestive of a transcendent God who is no longer immanent and close to

⁴⁴ Synopsis §42 (Metatron 12).

mankind and Torah study, but is instead sitting on a stern throne of judgment, far removed from our world.⁴⁵ Israel's prayer during Kedushah is for God to move ("shine forth") from His throne of justice to His throne of mercy.⁴⁶

With this explanation of what is happening during the Mussaf Kedushah, it may be understood why the Seraphim need to burn the ledgers of the other nations' prosecuting angels. Because God seeks to judge Israel during this time, Israel needs the assistance of the Seraphim specifically now to destroy any prosecuting evidence against them. This is the "secrets of the Holy One, Blessed is He," referenced in the above Hekhalot text, which coincides with the "secret" mentioned in the first line of the Palestinian Kedushah.

It would appear that the Palestinian *nusah* of Kedushah seeks to accentuate this role of the Seraphim. It is a role that, while very helpful to the Jewish people, is in no way related to Israel's role of divine service. Indeed, this function of the Seraphim is not even related to verbal worship but instead involves a metaphysical disposal of Israel's sins from God's presence.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ God's transcendent and removed status during His period of judgment also explains the following line in the Mussaf Kedushah: "His glory fills the world; His servants ask each other: Where is His place of glory? Opposite them they say, *'Barukh.*'" The emphasis on the angels' not knowing God's place is based on this idea that God is now in a very lofty place sitting in judgment of the entire world.

⁴⁶ Tosafot ad loc., s.v., *Sheniyot yoshev vedan*. See also Moses b. Abraham Przemysl, *Mateh Moshe* (Cracow, 1591), §872. This, he expounds, also explains why on Yom Kippur every Kedushah—including that of Shaḥarit, Minḥa, and Ne'ilah—are of the Mussaf Kedushah genre, with the word "Mimkomo." God is uniquely in continuous judgment throughout Yom Kippur, and Israel must therefore appeal to His attribute of justice throughout the day.

⁴⁷ Although the first line of the Ashkenazic Kedushah does refer to the "siaḥ"—the conversation—of the Seraphim (which would indicate that the angels are using speech as their worship), it may be observed in the Talmud that angels don't always use their mouths to speak; sometimes they emit fire from their mouths. See, for example, the story cited above from T.B. Shabbat 88b. Earlier in that narrative, Moses had expressed to God his fear of entering into disputation with the angels, "lest they incinerate me with the fire of their mouths." Furthermore, the word "siaḥ" is an unusual word to describe the prayers of the angels and appears rarely in the liturgy. "Siaḥ" has a second translation, though, completely unrelated to speech: trees or forest vegetation (see, for example, Genesis 21:15 and Job 30:4). Perhaps the liturgist sought to invoke the imagery of those fiery Seraphim taking the Satanic ledgers and burning them in a huge pyre like dry brush burning in a bonfire.

The Palestinian communities sought to delineate the distinction between the angels and man. Man worships God with his faith affirmation in the Shema, and through his worship he elevates himself in the process. The angels worship not for their own elevation or perfection, but rather to sanctify God. Part of that sanctification involves making sure that God's people, the nation of Israel, remains secure in its station in this world, free from the persecution of Rome and Persia. In this way, the angelic mode of divine service is completely different from man's. Even when Israel does say those same words of the *trisaqion* as the angels, it is only on the Sabbath, precisely the day when the angels are *not* saying it, since the angels' *trisaqion* has a completely different function from man's.

By contrast, the Babylonian/Sephardic version of the opening to the Mussaf Kedushah emphasizes the commonalities between Israel and the angels. As already mentioned, it emphasizes the fact that Israel recites the *trisaqion* in unison (*"yabad"*) with the angels. It furthermore begins with the word "Keter," crown:

כתר יתנו לך ד' אלהינו מלאכים המוני מעלה ועמך ישראל קבוצי מטה...

They will give You a crown, Lord God, the angels, the multitudes of above, and your nation Israel gathered below...

Why was the crown chosen as the icon of common worship for Israel and the angels? It may possibly be because the crown represents a focal point of worship for both the angels and Israel. Throughout the Hekhalot and Midrashic texts, the angels are depicted as placing crowns upon God, coronating Him through their angelic worship.⁴⁸

Man also creates crowns through his prayers, as in the following Midrash:

א"ר פנחס בשם ר"מ ור' ירמיה בשם ר' חייא בר אבא בשעה שישאל מתפללין אין אתה מוצא שכולן מתפללין כאחד אלא כל כנסיה וכנסיה מתפללת בפני עצמה, הכנסת הזו תחלה ואח"כ הכנסת האחרת, ומאחר שכל הכנסיות גומרות כל התפלות המלאך הממונה על התפלות נוטל כל התפלות שהתפללו בכל הכנסיות כולן ועושה אותן עטרות ונותן בראשו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שנאמר עדיך כל בשר יבאו ואין עדיך אלא עטרה שנאמר (ישעיה מט) כי כלם כעדי תלבשי, וכה"א (שם /ישעיהו מ"ט/) ישראל אשר בך אתפאר, שהקב"ה מתעטר בתפלתן של ישראל שנאמר (יחזקאל טז) ועטרת תפארת בראשך

⁴⁸ See Pesikta Rabati 20:3 and T.B. Hagigah 13b. In Hekhalot literature, see: §46, §71, §267-268, §275, §321, §654.

Said Rabbi Phineas in the name of Rabbi Meir, and Rabbi Jeremiah in the name of Rabbi Hiyya b. Abba: At the time when Israel prays, you do not find them all praying in unison, but rather each congregation prays individually—this congregation prays first, followed by the next. Once the entire congregation completes all the prayers, the angel in charge of all the prayers collects all those prayers they prayed in all their respective congregations, and makes them into crowns. They place these crowns on the head of the Holy One, Blessed is He... because the Holy One, Blessed is He, crowns Himself in the prayers of Israel, as it says (Ezekiel 16:12), “And the crown of splendor is upon Your head.”⁴⁹

One Hekhalot text describes the crowning of God as a joint exercise between the angels and Israel:

מי כמוך יוי אלהי ישראל, בעל גבורות יוי אלהי ישראל, יכרעו וישתחוו עליונים ותחתונים לפניך יוי אלהי ישראל, יהדרו שרפים (ויברכו) ויביעו רננות לפניך יוי אלהי ישראל, יהללך כסא כבודך ולך יתן גאות ורבות עוז ותפארת לפניך יוי אלהי ישראל, משרתיך יכתרו לך כתרים וישירו לך שיר חדש וימליכוך נצח ותקרא אחד לעולם ועד.

Who is like You, YVY God of Israel, Master of powers, YVY God of Israel. Upper creatures and lower creatures will bow and prostrate before You, YVY God of Israel. The Seraphim will return and express exultation before You, YVY God of Israel. Your throne of glory will praise You, and will give You majesty, great strength and glory before You, YVY God of Israel. Your servants will crown You with crowns, will sing before You a new *shirah*, will coronate You forever, and You will be called One for all eternity.⁵⁰

Whereas usually Hekhalot literature depicts the behavior of the angels as distinct from human behavior, this synopsis depicts a joint behavior of both man and angels. This may very well be why the Babylonian authors chose to use the Keter (crown) as the icon for joint service of man and angels.

The crown also represents a deeply intimate mystical experience, which, as Elliot Wolfson explains, is akin to an intimate ecstasy. As Wolfson states, “By seeing the crown, the kabbalist becomes the

⁴⁹ Shemot Rabbah 21:4.

⁵⁰ Synopsis §268 (Hekhalot 35). I am grateful to the 14th century Siddur commentator, David Abudraham, for citing this Hekhalot text in connection with the Kedushah of “Keter.”

crown,”⁵¹ becoming one with the divinity within his vision. This, too, may be alluded to by the Babylonian communities, who sought to embed within the Kedushah an esoteric mystical experience in order to reinforce the mystical tradition of the Merkavah mystic’s emulation of the angels.

Conclusion

As has already been observed by scholars, there is a distinct connection between Israel’s declaration of the Shema and the angels’ declaration of the *trisagion*, and this is why sections of the liturgy contain mentions of both.⁵² Two distinct traditions exist regarding the relationship between Israel and the angels. The Babylonian tradition was for Israel to emulate the angels to the greatest degree possible—by reciting the *trisagion* with them—based on the Babylonian community’s greater investiture in those portions of Hekhalot literature that emphasize mystical ascension, where the mystic is depicted as trying to imitate the angels he confronts all around him. The Palestinian community, by contrast, saw the worship of Israel and the angels as two distinct modalities of worship. Worship for a human being—as embodied by the Shema declaration—involves primarily self-improvement and reinforcement from the dark forces around oneself, and only secondarily as a way of elevating and sanctifying God. The angels’ worship, on the other hand, is exclusively for the purpose of sanctifying God, since angels require no spiritual reinforcement.

⁵¹ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 396-7.

⁵² An as-of-yet-unexplored additional section of liturgy that links the Shema to the *trisagion* is a small section of prayer at the end of the Tahanun service, which is recited most weekdays after the Amidah prayer. Tahanun is a supplicatory prayer that beseeches God to protect the Jewish people from their enemies and to redeem them from exile. It seeks to reason with God not to destroy the remnant of Israel in the Diaspora, based upon God’s promise to His people and based upon the redeeming qualities of Israel. The supplementary section to the Tahanun starts with three sentences, all starting with the word “*Shomer*” (Protector), and reads as follows: “(1) Protector of Israel, protect the remnant of Israel. He will not destroy Israel, who say, ‘*Shema Yisrael*.’ (2) Protector of one nation, protect the remnant of one nation. He will not destroy one nation, who unify Your name, ‘YHVH our God, YHVH is one.’ (3) Protector of a holy nation, protect the remnant of a holy nation. He will not destroy a holy nation, who thrice recite three holinesses to a Holy One.” The first two lines refer to the Shema, while the last line refers to the *trisagion*.

The respective *nusbaot* of the Kedushah that emerged in the Babylonian and Palestinian communities reflect this difference of ideologies between the two communities.

Various rabbinic texts, both in the traditional Talmudic and Midrashic sources, as well as in various Hekhalot texts, provide basis for each tradition, and there does not seem to be within any one body of literature a consistent subscription to one ideology over the other.

The Kedushah recited in modern-day synagogues on Sabbaths and festivals is still divided, today among Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities. The Sephardic tradition uses the liturgical model of the Babylonian community, and therefore one who recites the Kedushah is affirming that he or she seeks to emulate the angels in unison with them.⁵³

The Ashkenazic tradition, which follows the Palestinian community, is a bit more complicated. The Sabbath and festival Mussaf Kedusha cites the angels' mode of worship but does not call upon the mortal worshipper to recite the *trisagion* concurrently with the angels, since, as seen from Tosafot, Israel recites the *trisagion only* on the holy days when the angels are *not* reciting it. However, historically the Babylonian community prevailed upon the Palestinians to recite Kedushah daily, and this has carried over to the weekday Ashkenazic prayer service. If so, it appears that the Ashkenazic tradition follows the Palestinian custom on Sabbaths and festivals, but during the weekday the worshipper is called upon to be emulative of the angels in reciting the *trisagion* concurrently with them. At face value, then, it is difficult to reconcile the Ashkenazic weekday recital of Kedushah with the Sabbath recital of Kedushah. This difficulty is left unanswered.

It is appropriate to conclude with the opening comments about the purpose of angels in religion in general. For some, thinking about angels may be an inspiration for angelic emulation. For others, it only serves as a reminder of the stark differences between the human being and his or her celestial counterpart. The underlying tension between the two traditions discussed in this paper is whether man's job is to emulate the angels in divine worship, or to forge a unique and distinct mortal path for worshipping God.

Ultimately, the tension in Jewish liturgy and theology is left unresolved; granted, each liturgical tradition subtly embeds its respective message, but there is no clear and explicit mandate in either the Talmudic writings or the liturgical texts to determine whether man should be like an

⁵³ Less clear is why the Sephardic *nusab* also contains the Shema, when according to the Babylonian tradition there is no place for the Shema in Kedushah. See my citation of Hoffman in footnote 18, above.

angel or be uniquely human. There are advantages and disadvantages to each choice: Choosing to be like an angel may be setting oneself up for an inevitable and disappointing falling short of an impossible goal, whereas choosing to be human may not impel the worshipper to work hard enough. Perhaps this is precisely the reason that the tension is unresolved: so that man can conclude that neither path, when chosen to the exclusion of the other, is optimal. ❧