

Shalom Aleikhem

Study Session

November 2004

KOACH
on campus



The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Contents

- 1) Text Sheet Handout
- 2) Background Materials
- 3) Facilitator Guide
- 4) Additional Resources

The following materials have been created by **KOACH** for the enhancement of your on-campus programming. They are designed to be adjustable based on your interests and the available time. Each packet contains: a copy-ready text sheet, background materials and a facilitator guide. The background materials and facilitator guide will help you build conversations around the text and create connections between the text and contemporary life.

Questions? Send them to: estrin@uscj.org.

Shalom Aleikhem

Shalom Aleikhem

Peace be unto you,
O ministering angels,
messengers of the Most High
the King of Kings,
the Holy One, blessed be God.

שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵיכֶם,
מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת,
מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיוֹן,
מִמְלַךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים,
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא:

May you come in peace,
messengers of peace
messengers of the Most High
the King of Kings,
the Holy One, blessed be God.

בּוֹאֲכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם,
מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם,
מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיוֹן,
מִמְלַךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים,
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא:

Bless me with peace,
messengers of peace
messengers of the Most High
the King of Kings,
the Holy One, blessed be God.

בְּרַכּוּנִי לְשָׁלוֹם,
מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם,
מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיוֹן,
מִמְלַךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים,
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא:

May you depart in peace,
messengers of peace
messengers of the Most High
the King of Kings,
the Holy One, blessed be God.

צֵאתְכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם,
מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם,
מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיוֹן,
מִמְלַךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים,
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא:

Talmud Shabbat 119b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת קיט:

תניא, רבי יוסי בר יהודה אומר: שני מלאכי השרת מלוין לו לאדם בערב שבת מבית הכנסת לביתו, אחד טוב ואחד רע. וכשבא לביתו ומצא נר דלוק ושלחן ערוך ומטתו מוצעת, מלאך טוב אומר: יהי רצון שתהא לשבת אחרת כך. ומלאך רע עונה אמן בעל כרחו. ואם לאו, מלאך רע אומר: יהי רצון שתהא לשבת אחרת כך, ומלאך טוב עונה אמן בעל כרחו.

It was taught, R. Jose son of R. Judah said: Two ministering angels accompany a man on the eve of the Sabbath from the synagogue to his home, one good [angel] and one evil [angel]. And when the man arrives home and finds the lamp burning, the table laid and the couch [bed] covered with a spread, the good angel says, 'May it be even thus on another Sabbath [too],' and the evil angel against his will responds 'amen'. But if not [If those things are not prepared] the evil angel says, 'May it be even thus on another Sabbath [too],' and the good angel against his will responds, 'amen'.

Background Materials

Shalom Aleikhem

Shalom Aleikhem is about hospitality and one's readiness for Shabbat. After taking the time and effort to prepare our homes, our tables, and ourselves for Shabbat it is time to welcome our guests, earthly and otherwise. The phrase "Shalom Aleikhem" is used not only to greet the angels on Shabbat but also to say hello to a fellow Jew.

Originally recited in the home on Friday evenings upon returning from the synagogue, today, **Shalom Aleikhem** is most often sung at the beginning of the Shabbat evening meal. This hymn, first printed in Prague in 1641, was introduced by the kabbalists based on a Talmudic teaching that two angels accompany man home from the synagogue on Erev Shabbat, to determine the readiness of the family for Shabbat (Talmud Shabbat 119b).

According to one tradition, it is customary to say each stanza three times in order to elevate the greeting offered to the angels. Sephardim add an additional verse, *be Shivtekhem l'shalom* (When you sit in peace) after *Barkhuni l'shalom* and conclude with *be Tzaytkhem l'shalom*.

Facilitator Guide

The Facilitator Guide is designed to guide through several discussion options. Although it is designed as a progression, you need not follow from beginning to end. Each section can stand on its own or be combined with another. Use the packet in its entirety or choose components based on the time you have available and the students in your group.

Section One – Shalom Aleikhem, the text: (front page of text sheet)

Take just a few minutes to read and translate the text in *hevruta* (pairs), small groups, or as a large group to ensure that everyone is beginning together. Sometimes we take things for granted when using “familiar” texts.

A possible way to open could be to ask the group to share thoughts and memories they associate with **Shalom Aleikhem**.

Point of interest:

- *L'shalom*. Although almost universally translated more idiomatically as “in peace” the Hebrew word literally it means “to peace”. Does this change the meaning? The Talmud recommends the use of *l'shalom* for leaving a friend (Jethro to Moses, Exod 4:18) and *beshalom* when leaving one who will either die shortly or is already dead (David to Absalom, 2 Sam. 15:9).

- **Section Two - Talmudic Background:** (back page of text sheet)

Shalom Aleikhem is based on a talmudic passage concerning a good angel and an evil angel which accompany one home from the synagogue on Friday evenings. If they find the house in good order and ready for Shabbat, the good angel says: "May the next Shabbat be as this one." If, on the other hand, they find the house neglected, the evil angel says: "May the next Shabbat be as this one":

"Learn" the text in hevruta or small groups. Encourage the students to think about what the text is teaching, what jumps out at them as odd, do they have questions or problems with the text. You might want to point out some of the ideas from the "discussion points" below to guide them in considering the text.

Discussion Points

- There is an assumption that if every Jew is accompanied home by two ministering angels, it is only proper that one should greet them, bless them, and seek their blessing. What do you think?
- The Talmud identifies three items that should be prepared for Shabbat ahead of time, the candles, the table and the bed. Why these particular three? What do they represent? Do they work in our lives? Are there other things that would be a better representation of our readiness to begin Shabbat? What special preparations do you make for Shabbat?
- Who would "traditionally" be preparing these three items? According to tradition the primary responsibility for lighting Shabbat candles falls upon the wife. It is likely that the same would be said for the other two as well. Does that mean the ability to receive the blessing of the angels is dependent upon the *wife*? Or, is it up to the *husband* to oversee that this will happen? Remind the students that when this text was written that was how the world was but challenge them to discuss the possibilities. What about now? What do they think? How would they respond? Based on their understanding of the text in the time it was written can they then derive three things that would follow that logic but work in their world?
- The two angels have also been interpreted to represent the good impulse (*yetzer tov*) and the evil impulse (*yetzer ra*) that are understood as wrestling in perpetual conflict within our heart. Brainstorm with the group what that notion might mean in the context of the Talmudic passage and what that might mean in our lives today.

Section three – Take your discussion further

Tzaytkhem l'shalom (May your departure be in peace) – should we say it?

There are those who oppose reciting the final of the four stanzas, *Tzaytkhem l'shalom* (May your departure be in peace), arguing that one should not hurry to dismiss the angels. Two commentaries to the *Shulchan Arukh*¹ note opposition to the stanza.² Both of these commentators reinterpret the verse to read WHEN the angels go, they should go in peace.

Some say that this stanza reminds us of the angels of Jacob. Just as Jacob had two camps of angels; those that accompanied him in the land and those that remained with him while he was outside the land, some say that there are “weekday angels” and “Shabbat angels”. We are saying *Shalom Aleikhem* to the “Shabbat angels” and only after they have arrived do we say *Tzaytkhem l'shalom* to the “weekday angels.”

- There are various ways to approach the difficulty (not reciting at all, reciting quietly, singing in a different tune, saying the last verse as a part of havdallah). Ask if any of the students have done any of them. What kind of an impact does it have?

Hakhnasat Orhim – welcoming the stranger

From the moment Abraham and Sarah welcomed strangers (strangers who are referred to as angels) into their tent, the principle/mitzvah of *hakhnasat orhim* (hospitality) has been an important part of Judaism. During the Passover *seder* we sing *Ha Lahma Anya*, inviting all who are hungry to come and eat. In the same way, *Shalom Aleikhem* welcomes not only the angels, but also guests into our homes on Shabbat.

- Brainstorm with the group other examples of *hakhnasat orhim* in Judaism.
- Discuss how they, as students, are the providers or recipients of *hakhnasat orhim*.

¹ The *Shulchan Aruch* ("Set Table") is a compendium of those areas of the halachah -- Jewish religious law -- that are applicable today. It was composed by Rabbi Yosef Karo of Safed (Israel) in the 1560's, and became generally accepted as authoritative after Rabbi Moshe Isserls of Cracow (Poland) supplemented it in the 1570's with notes (known as the *Mappah* - "Tablecloth") giving the rulings followed by Ashkenazic Jews.

² *Sha'arei T'shuvah* (Chaim Mordecai Margalioth 18-19th century) and *Machatzit Hashekel* (Samuel Halevi Kolin, 1770-1806).

Shalom Aleikhem – the greeting.

The words “Shalom Aleikhem” are used not only to greet the angels on Shabbat but also to say hello when one Jew meets another. The proper response is “Aleikhem l’Shalom”
The great Yiddish author of short stories describing Jews he met on his travels chose the pseudonym Shalom Aleichem.

- Have the students try greeting each other with “Shalom Aleikhem”, peace be upon you and responding “Aleikhem l’Shalom”, upon you may there be peace. How does it feel? Is it different from “hi”, “hello”, yo, etc?

The Angels

Many Jews find talk of angels strange. Angels are frequently misunderstood as being a Christian concept. In reality, the Bible is filled with references to the angels. They interact with the characters of the Tanakh when they speak to Abraham, Moses, Hagar, and Jonah. What do we do with these angels?

The Rabbis were careful to show that the angels were subservient to God and without free will. Philo of Alexandria (1st century)³ saw them as incorporeal and immortal souls, “never craving things of the earth”, hovering in the air waiting to serve when God does not want to act directly. Rambam⁴ saw the angels as personifications of God’s powers and attributes.

- Have the students share their thoughts about angels.
- How do they feel singing to the angels at the beginning of Shabbat? Is it appropriate? Should we be praying to God alone?
- If the angels do not have free will then why do we ask for their blessing? They have no ability to choose to give it.
- Compare these concepts with the story of Jacob struggling with the “*ish*” (*man*, thought by many classical commentators to be an angel).

³ Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenized Jew, is a figure that spans two cultures, the Greek and the Hebrew. Philo produced a synthesis of both traditions developing concepts for future Hellenistic interpretation of messianic Hebrew thought. Philo’s primary importance is in the development of the philosophical and theological foundations of Christianity.

⁴ Rav Moshe ben Maimon was born in Cordova in 1135, the Rambam is best known as the author of Mishne Torah, and Sefer HaMitzvot.

Additional Resources

- A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice by Isaac Klein. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America. 1992.
- The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer by Macy Nulman. Jason Aronson Inc. 1996
- My People's Prayer Book - Shabbat at Home edited by Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman. Jewish Lights Publishing. 2004
- The Art of Jewish Living: Shabbat by Dr. Ron Wolfson. Jewish Lights Publishing 2002.
- A Day Apart: Shabbat at Home by Noam Sachs Zion and Shawn Fields-Meyer. Shalom Hartman Institute, Israel. 2004.
- <http://www.uscj.org/shabbat/what.htm>
- <http://headcoverings-by-devorah.com/OrachChayim/ShalomAleykhem.html> - downloadable music of several versions of Shalom Aleikhem.