

As the soul of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz ascended through the heavens

As the soul of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz ascended through the heavens, a great cacophony was unleashed. This one wanted to be the first to receive him, and that one too wanted to receive him first.

The Vilna Gaon pushed himself forward and proclaimed: "I want to welcome the man who opened up the Talmud to the entire world." Then Maimonides pushed ahead and proclaimed: "Here is the man who studied and reflected upon my works and incorporated them into his Talmud. I should be the one to receive him first."

Next came Rashi to plead his case to be first to greet Rabbi Steinsaltz: "He is my study partner – my *chavruta*. Our labors appear side-by-side on the Talmud's pages. My *perush* in the inside side of the page, aimed for those already steeped in the ways of the Beit Midrash, while Rabbi Steinsaltz *perush* is on the outside part, open in all its profundity to everyone."

And so it went. Everyone pushed ahead: The knights of the Talmud and their adjutants, the great Bible commentators, the leading rebbes of Hasidism, the Rishonim and the Acharonim, and the authors of the *responsa* – each made their argument why they should be the ones to receive Rabbi Steinsaltz into Heaven.

There were others still.

The Amoraim and the Tannaim – the late ancient rabbis from Babylon and Eretz Israel who had written the Mishna and Gemara – insisted that they be first to welcome Rabbi Steinsaltz to heaven. He, they said, had made their esoteric life's work accessible before the whole world. Rabbi Adin knew where to place every comma, period, colon and question mark. He knew how to contextualize and verify every citation throughout our works. He reinserted material which had been censored under duress and he restored unintended omissions. He breathed life into the study of law and the Talmud and the Bible.

Then suddenly, the sound of the *Shechinah* was heard: "Make way. Make way for my dear rabbi, Adin. Together let us receive this gentle soul. He who refreshed, revived and reinvigorated the Torah in the land of Israel."

And with that, they all fell into rows forming a path leading to the gates of heaven.

Rabbi Adin and the angel, Adiel, sent to accompany the rabbi's soul as it ascended to heaven, walked along at a gradual pace. Stooped and modest, as was his way in life, the rabbi entered the outer gate of heaven. And he was awed by the radiance and by the distinguished assemblage that had gathered.

Out of diffidence, he would have preferred to hide or even disappear. But the divine angel Adiel, who walked devotedly alongside him, held his hand and paved the way toward the ineffable, eternal radiance of the Holy Shechinah.

"What is the meaning of all this commotion?" the rabbi asked the angel Adiel. "It is in honor of the Torah – in honor of the Torah," Adiel repeated. "If it is in honor of the Torah then I must accept this decree," sighed the rabbi.

Step by step, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz and the angel Adiel advanced along the path, as the rows of venerable sages in unison recited the blessing: "Welcome in the name of the Lord, welcome in the name Lord."

To which the rabbi with head bowed replied diffidently: "God's blessings be upon you, God's blessings be upon you." Then he added, "But you needn't have troubled yourselves with such a welcome."

All the while, he scrutinized those around him. Here was the Rash'ba who, he realized, could elucidate a point of Torah that he had not fully understood. "Here is the Great Eagle who will reply to all my questions! And there is Rashi, master-teacher of the Jewish people!" He contemplated whether they could now sit and study that *sugya* in *perek hamafkid* that had long baffled him.

Next, he spied Babylon's brilliant sages alongside their counterparts from Eretz Israel who had revitalized and reenergized Judaism's ancient traditions. There, too, were the scrupulously pious sages of Tiberias, and the liturgical poets, and the Amoraim who illuminated the Talmud – here they were: Abaye, Rava, Resh La-Kish, and rabbi Yohanan, Rav and Shmuel, Rabbi Hiyya, bar Kapra, and – in all his majesty – architect of the Mishna Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi!

The celebrated assemblage did not end there.

Here, too, were Rebbe Yehuda and Rebbe Meir, Rebbe Ishmael and Rebbe Akiva, Rebbe Eliezer, and Rebbe Yehoshua – the sages of the *Kerem De'Yavne* – in the forefront Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai. Off in the distance, Rabbi Steinsaltz noticed, were the rabbis of the Sanhedrin, Shemaiah and Abtalyon. And there too were the Rabbis of the Great Assembly – altogether, a gathering of the glorious and the majestic!

The angel Adiel glanced at Rabbi Steinsaltz, walking at his side. Adin's intelligent eyes scanned, hither and fro, the faces of the assembled. At first, he proffered a respectful nod to this one and that one. Yet, as his gaze shifted from one person to the next, the nods increased and his gaze wandered. Sensing the rabbi's unease, the angel turned and asked: "What is it you seek?"

They halted and the rabbi replied: "I am looking for Aryeh, for Aryeh Tweig, my childhood friend who fell in the Yom Kippur War nearly 50 years ago – it's him I am searching for."

The hustle and bustle of the august heavenly gathering went abruptly silent. From on high a hushed voice was heard. Lightning flashed from the *Shechinah*. Adiel and the rabbi stood still. Beyond the row on their right, over the horizon, emerged a figure at once bright and not bright, approaching with tentative steps.

"Aryeh," the rabbi cried out suddenly.

"Adin," came the reply as the figure approached.

They fell into each other's arms, reveling in delight. And all the gathered angels, and all the sages of the generations, and the great scholars of the Torah, stood in awe and amazement.

"Where's Moishe," asked Adin. "And where's Rafi, Shlomi, Gabi, and Tzahi?"

"They're all here," Aryeh replied. "They're *all* behind me."

Sure enough, a long line of the fallen and martyrs trailed behind Aryeh. And above them, was an illuminated strip of fiery white-on-

black letters representing the Hebrew years in which they had lost their lives: 1973, 1967, 1948, 1943-44, 1929, 1902, 1648-49, 1096, and on and on.

The following day, quiet and tranquility returned to paradise. And the heavenly study halls returned to their routine of Torah learning. In all manners, ages and clusters, they joyfully engaged in learning – Tannaim, Amoraim, rabbis from the Middle Ages to those of the early modern period, Hassidim and Mitnagdim – each according to their way of learning.

But where was Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz?

He was not to be found with the Acharonim, so of course he must be studying with the Rishonim. But no, he was not there either.

Similarly, the sages Rashba and Maimonides wondered: where could he be? It's obvious, suggested the Catalan rabbi Hameiri – he must be with the Geonim. However, Rabbi Adin was not among the Geonim, nor was he with the sages of the medieval era, nor with the Amoraim, nor with the Tannaim.

Even Rashi had no idea where he was.

As they inquired of each other about the rabbi's whereabouts, it became apparent that he was nowhere to be found and they went out to look for him.

"If he can't be found anywhere," said one, "perhaps it means that he is studying Torah with Moses in the presence of the Shekhinah as on the day the Torah was handed down."

"But the Tora is not in heaven," someone else countered.

"Of course he is here in paradise – however, he is 'hidden' from plain sight because, as is his way, he does not want to draw attention."

Having exhausted their search within the various schools of learning, they combed the streets of paradise.

Sure enough, there he sat learning with Aryeh Tweig and his band of friends, all of them fully engaged in a discussion of Torah that

encompassed science, language, Jewish history, archeology, and liturgical poetry.

Nor were they alone. With them were Rabbi Yehuda Amital, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, Rav Nachum Rabinovitch, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, Professor Ze'ev Lev, Prof. Jacob Nahum Epstein, Prof. Saul Lieberman, Judge Menachem Elon, and the historian Gedaliah Alon.

There were also many other pious scientists and ordinary working people – all of whom shared a love of learning and engagement with the revival of Eretz Israel Torah studies.

And nearby were Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog, Rabbi Hayim David HaLevi, the poet Hayim Nahman Bialik, and the Zionist theoretician Ahad Ha'am – all looking in and wistful for their youthful days in the study hall.

Finally, everyone understood Rabbi Adin's new mission in the supreme heavens.

And gradually, the very nature of the heavenly study halls was transformed. No longer were study halls organized along generational, sectarian, or doctrinal lines: according to the Tannaim, the Amoraim, the Rishonim, and so forth.

Now, discussion was according to the *sugya* or the subject of interest and every method of learning, research and human understanding was employed. The study halls indeed became *Shalhevet-Ya* (blazing flames) open to all: scholars and laypeople, rabbis and research scientists, Torah experts and authorities on secular subjects, intellectuals and doers, philosophers and leaders – all contributed in their way and their era to the revival of the people of Israel in the Land of Israel.

The academies-on-high inspired study halls on earth. All focused on the renewal of Torah study in the Land of Israel just as in days gone by.

”אין עושין נפשות לצדיקים. דבריהן הם הם זכרונם.”

The righteous do not need elaborate tombstones – their teachings and deeds are their legacies.

May the memory of Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) be for a blessing generations upon generations.

Mehalkei Hamayim

Translation from Hebrew by Elliot and Lisa Clayton Jager.