

# PART 5: CHAPTER 1, VERSES 6-7

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

*Verse 6. "One day the sons of G-d came to stand before the Lord and Satan came among them."*

*Verse 7. "And the Lord said to Satan, Where have you been? Satan said "I've been going back and forth, and walking up and down across the earth."*

## Commentary

### Verse 6

The *Vilna Gaon* adds a new insight to the *Satan's* appearance with the children of G-d. The heavenly 'family' has a sole purpose. It is their task to advocate and safeguard the honor of G-d. To this end they convene the heavenly tribunal and judge the violators of the Divine Will. In reality the *Satan* is also concerned with protecting and promoting G-d's honor.

However, he uses a different approach. His mission is to create the obstacles and difficulties we find in fulfilling G-d's plan. When we overcome these obstacles the honor of G-d is elevated. To stumble is to defame Him.

### Verse 7

The most obvious question on this verse is why does G-d need to ask the *Satan* where he came from? Here too the *Vilna Gaon's* commentary sheds some light on the issue. The heavenly tribunal cannot begin its deliberations until given permission by G-d. This rule of court applies to the prosecution (the *Satan*) as well. He cannot begin to argue his case until granted permission to do so. G-d is not usually inclined to lend his ear to the condemnations of the *Satan* just as no parent likes to hear about the faults of his or her children. This is an expression of G-d's great love for His children. On a deeper level we can understand from this that the forces of evil are not totally free to wreak havoc upon the inhabitants of this planet. Rather, they are contained by predetermined guidelines and limitations that are established by the Master of the universe.

Let us look at one story in the Bible that demonstrates this. Most of you are probably familiar with

the story of Joseph and his brothers. Briefly (and superficially), the story goes as follows. Joseph's father, Jacob, displayed favor towards Joseph which caused his brothers to become jealous. The brothers respond with hatred. They kidnap Joseph and conspire unsuccessfully to kill him. In the end they sell him as a slave to nomads with the hope that he will never again have the freedom to interfere with their lives. As things turn out Joseph becomes the second most powerful person in Egypt and facilitates the eventual salvation from famine for his father, brothers and the entire Hebrew tribe. At the momentous occasion when Jacob is reunited with his brothers and reveals himself to them he responds with the following:

"And Joseph said to his brothers come close to me and they came close, and he said I am Joseph your brother that you sold [me] to Egypt. And now do not feel sad nor should there be cause for anger in your eyes that you sold me here because G-d sent me before you to supply you with food. Because there is already two years of famine in the land and there are still five more years that will not have any plowing nor harvesting. And G-d sent me before you in order to make a remainder of you and to sustain you that you may become a great remnant. And now, it was not you who sent me here rather it was G-d, and He made me an elder to Pharaoh, a master of his entire household and the governor of the entire land of Egypt." (Genesis 45: 4-8)

The point that Joseph was conveying to his brothers is that in the final analysis G-d exploited their wickedness by inducting it as a conduit for goodness, i.e. the salvation of their entire family and future Israelite nation. Not only does their ability to chose evil not interfere with the Divine plan for universal redemption, it helps facilitate it. Let us make no mistake, their choice to perpetrate evil is in no way exonerated by the fact that G-d exploited their wickedness in fulfilling His own agenda for the benefit of all mankind.

## Summary

The *Satan* does not have an unlimited reign over evil. He must function within the guidelines of His creator. Those guidelines are specifically geared to ultimately direct humanity towards their own redemption. G-d's query as to the whereabouts of the *Satan* is not an information seeking question. It is permission to begin the indictment against *Iyov*.

---

Text Copyright © 1996 Rabbi Y. Schwartz and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author is the Rosh Hayeshiva (Dean) of [Orchos Chaim Yeshiva](#) in Jerusalem.