

LIKE AN ANGEL

by Rabbi Label Lam

And HASHEM said to Moshe: 'Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them: "To a (dead) person he shall not become impure among his people..." (Vayikra 21:1)

Say to the Kohanim...and you shall say to them: The Torah uses the double expression of "say" followed by "and you shall say" to caution the adults with regard to the minors. (Rashi)

The Kohanim - the Priestly cast are to play an important role as living examples of holiness and purity for the entire nation. Therefore they are saddled with extra restrictions and responsibilities. We also discover here that the Kohain parents must make it clear to their children and see to it that they maintain their spiritual innocence as well. How are the Kohanim to accomplish this second task?

Tractate Moed Katan (17A) states the following fascinating explanation of a verse in Malachi, "What is the meaning of that which is written, "For the lips of the Kohen should safeguard knowledge, and (people) should seek wisdom from his mouth, for he is (like) an angel of the G-d of Hosts" and if he is not (like an angel) they may not seek Torah from his mouth." Can a Rebbe, a teacher really be like an angel? That's a tall order. Angels don't need to eat or drink or sleep. I assume angels don't have mood swings either. They are perfectly reliable and entirely obedient, while a human being requires material maintenance. How can teacher possibly be expected to live up to this standard?

The Vilna Gaon in his commentaries on Mishlei writes the following about the human condition, "A man is called a "goer" (holech) because he must constantly go from level to level, and if he does not progress he will fall way down, Heaven forbid, for it is impossible for him to remain on one level". An angel, on the other hand is static. He is like a parked car in comparison to those on the move. It seems there is a greater advantage and albeit a risk to being a human being. Why then should a Rebbe, a teacher be like an angel, who is anchored to a certain wrung on the ladder of life and for all practical purposes stuck!?

On the way to the famous event of the Akeida, when Avraham was to sacrifice his beloved son Yitzchok, a certain key phrase is employed twice to indicate the eagerness each had to fulfill what was perceived then as the absolute ratzon-desire of the Almighty. "The two of them walked together!" The first time, Rashi explains, is an expression of praise about Avraham who kept pace with Yitzchok's excitement, even though he knew clearly what (who) he going to give up. The second time it says, "The two of them walked together!" is meant as a tribute to Yitzchok since he became aware of his role in the sacrifice he continued with unwavering enthusiasm, step by step

with Avraham.

Ultimately, thankfully, The Almighty thwarted it and both were credited with the highest of spiritual achievements. They were willing to give up everything dear and valuable, reputation, fatherly love, desire for earthly life, future promises, etc. We are still noshing, thousands of years later, from the residual merits that great "willingness to do" generated.

Under the radar, and not so easy to detect because it is overshadowed by the towering heights of its near neighbor is a much less decorated expression of Avraham's spiritual stature. It says again after the Akeida, "and they went together". This time Avraham after having just exited that all-time achievement went on the way with his two disqualified escorts who remained in the parking lot till the event was over.

I heard from Rabbi Hershel Mashinsky ztl., a master teacher for more than 50 years, that this "going together" was greater than the first ones. He was able to remain humble and connected humanly even after the heights of the Akeida!

Rabbi Noach Orlowick explains in, My Disciple My Child, by lowering the level of his learning, and making his sole concern the welfare of his student a Rebbe is likened to an angel. Outside the classroom the he must be stretching higher, but in the teaching mode he must be willing to sacrifice his level just **like an angel**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.