

GIVING SATAN WHAT HE REALLY WANTS

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

At the conclusion of the struggle between Yaakov (Jacob) and a strange man - which the Medrash clarifies was Satan himself, functioning as the Guardian Angel of Yaakov's brother Esav (Esau) - the Angel of Evil begs Yaakov to allow him to depart. "Then [the angel] said, 'Let me go, for dawn has broken.'" (Beraishis/ Genesis 32:27). The Talmud (Tractate Chulin 91b) explains that Yaakov initially asked him if he was a thief or a gambler, since he feared the break of dawn. The stranger replied, "I am an angel, and from the moment of my creation I have never had the opportunity to sing Shira (song of Divine praise) until now!" Why did this angel, just defeated and disgraced, and never before allowed to sing Shira, have to sing right now?

Michtav Me'Eliyahu (collected writings and discourses of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1891-1954) of London and B'nai Brak, one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement) elucidates that, while every creation has the potential to sing Shira, indeed, it is only sung when that creation reaches its loftiest spiritual levels, when it achieves perfection in its purpose. The Children of Israel, who witnessed the splitting of the Red Sea (see Shemos/Exodus 15), had the most profound, intimate appreciation of G-d's presence in the Universe - the Medrash Yalkut Shimoni explains that a maidservant at the Sea beheld visions of the Divine Glory that the great prophet Yechezkiel/Ezekiel was never able to envision - therefore, at the conclusion of this fantastic miracle they sang Shira, the Song of the Sea. Similarly, the Angel of Esav, at the moment he was defeated by Yaakov in the ultimate external expression of man's internal fortitude to quash his inclination for evil, fulfilled his Divine mission of enabling and facilitating the spiritual growth and elevation of the G-d fearing Jew. His G-d given charge now accomplished, he was now - as never before - suited to sing Shira.

Thus, the Yetzer Hara (the evil inclination: Satan's personal tampering with one's thoughts creating each individual's temptation to sin and do wrong) finds success in failure and failure in success. As a servant of the King of Kings, he serves with gusto, always trying to pull the Jew away from G-d. But his success in our failure ultimately serves to detract from G-d's glory, a phenomenon that pains him immensely. As relentless as he is to gain in his objective of stunting our spiritual growth, he wishes he would lose the battle. His true Divine objective is to challenge us to fail so that we may overcome him and grow from that challenge. Ultimately, when he loses, he wins.

And just how does Satan thrive with such a backward assignment? Because it is only through him that creation has purpose. Without him there is no "choice" in the world, no reason to want to do

anything but fulfill G-d's will. But such service would be empty and devoid of meaning. G-d's essential expression of kindness in creation is His allowance for us to develop and grow in our "G-d consciousness", to actively foster a relationship with Him through fulfillment of the mitzvos (Divine commands) of His Torah while resisting the tug of the Yetzer Hara to do otherwise.

Intellectually, we know the Yetzer Hara would love nothing more than to fail. The least we can do is work to accommodate him.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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