

MAN, WHAT AN ANGEL

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

"See, I am sending an angel before you to guard you along the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Take heed of him, and listen to him. Do not exasperate him, because he will not pardon your disobedience, since My Name is in him." (Shemot 23:-20-21)

This is one of those verses that we read and should take at face value. "Okay, whatever You say, G-d. If You say that Your Name is in him, then it must be true. Never mind the fact that we have no idea how that is possible, how Your Name, which is completely G-dly and can be in an angel which is not completely G-dly, but we're sure that You have that detail worked out..."

Kabbalah doesn't work that way. It asks the questions and very often provides the answers. To begin with, Rashi quoting the Talmud mentions a very important clue:

MY NAME IS IN HIM: Our rabbis have said that he is the angel Mattatron whose name is like the Name of his Master; Mattatron is equal in gematria to Shaddai (Sanhedrin 38b)

Who is "Mattat" (we don't usually pronounce his full name)? According to tradition, he is the "Minister of the Interior" — the Sar HaPanim, the angel over all the angels. However, he was not always in that position. In fact, he was not always an angel, having started off as a man. But which man?

This man:

Chanoch lived 65 years and he fathered Metushalach. Chanoch walked with G-d for 300 years after he fathered Metushalach, and had sons and daughters. Chanoch lived for 365 years. Chanoch walked with G-d, and he wasn't, because G-d took him. (Bereishit 5:21-23)

Wait, doesn't G-d take everyone at some point or another? And, if not G-d Himself, then the Angel of Death, right? And what is this "and he wasn't" business? He wasn't what? Well, that is a story unto itself, a very fascinating one to be sure, but one with implications for all of us as well, even if we don't become angels as Chanoch did.

The Midrash explains that Chanoch used to waver from being a complete tzaddik to doing very not nice things. There were periods of time when he acted righteously, and periods of times when he acted in just the opposite way. So, G-d took him early, during one of his periods of righteousness, and that's what it means when it says, "and he wasn't". Not quite our idea of a tzaddik.

It is complicated. The first thing you have to know is that there are two different types of spiritual natures in this world, and they each have a very different impact on the way we live our lives. And, it is important to know that G-d takes this into account when judging us on Yom HaDin (the Day of Judgment). For, though one aspect (the side of Chesed) makes it easy for a person to have all the right character traits, the other aspect, the side of Gevurah means that the person is going to be struggling with his yetzer hara on an ongoing basis.

And, as the Leshem explains, when it comes to war, there are times when one side wins, and there are times when the other side wins. There are victories and there are losses, and that was the story of Chanoch's life. He was at battle all of his life against his yetzer hara with never a moment of respite, and therefore, G-d waited for the pendulum to swing in the direction of righteousness, and then took him at that stage.

Acher, Elisha Ben Abuya was not as fortunate. He was the rabbi who entered "Pardes" with Rebi Akiva and suffered great spiritual damage as a result (Chagigah 14b). Apparently, he lost one too many battles with his yetzer hara, and a very big battle at that. As a result, he became the quintessential epikorus (heretic), and had Rebi Meir, his main student, not have prayed fervently for him, he might not have been forgiven even after death.

SHABBAT DAY:

"Happy is the one whose sin G-d does not consider..." (Tehillim 32:2)

Even though G-d's Name is in him, nevertheless, the main part of him always remains an angel, and is not Elokut at all. For, though the Shem Hovayah is in him, it never unifies with him, G-d forbid, as it does in Atzilut. Thus it says, "Do not exasperate (Tav-Mem-Raish) him" [the letters Tav-Mem-Raish can also spell a word that means "to exchange"], meaning: do not confuse him with Me, and don't make Me His replacement. For, the "enclothement" of the Shem Hovayah in him is referred to as "Temurah" (TAV-MEM-Vav-RAISH-Heh) ...because His light, so-to-speak, became enclothed in another form, the angel Mattat who is not Elokut at all; he's only an angel... he merited the "Zehira lla'a" of Adam HaRishon that had been taken from Adam as a result of the sin. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, p. 105)

The fundamental difference to which the Leshem refers is that when the light of G-d actually unifies with something, that thing ceases to be physical on any level; it turns into Heavenly light, a level that is higher than even the angels, including Mattat. It is like the soul inside of our body that never really becomes one with our body, otherwise our body would turn into pure light, just like the actual soul. Rather, our soul "drives" the body, but never actually becomes one with it, at least at this stage in history.

Nevertheless, just to go from being a flesh-and-blood individual to an actual angel in which the Shem Hovayah can be enclothed, is beyond our comprehension. What did Chanoch do to actually warrant such a holy transformation?

Mattat merited this high level because of his actions and his righteousness, as it says in Heichelot d'Rebi Yishmael, Ch. 5. The Torah testifies to this when it says "Chanoch walked with G-d for 300 years after he fathered Metushalach", meaning that for 300 consecutive years he remained completely righteous. We find in the Midrash Aggada that for those 300 years he was in the Garden of Eden learning with the angels. The Arizal said that the Zehira Ila'a (a very high level of soul) that was removed from Adam HaRishon because of the sin, remained between the walls of the Garden of Eden for 300 years until Chanoch came along. For those 300 years Chanoch rectified and separated out the Name "Elokim"; the Name Elokim became purified through him. He rectified what went wrong because of Adam HaRishon, and therefore, he took the Zehira Ila'a of Adam HaRishon, and so he never tasted death, but was instead transformed into an angel... (Ibid.)

The question is, if he could be so righteous, then how could he have also been so evil at times?

Rav Eivo said, "Chanoch was someone who flip-flopped, so sometimes he was righteous, and sometimes he was evil. The Holy One, Blessed be He said, 'I will take him while he is righteous'." This was because the soul came from the side of Gevurot, though he had a very great soul. However, souls that come from this side have a predisposition to sin, and such people are always at war with their yetzer hara; they are in very great danger. For, the Chitzonim (forces of spiritual impurity) are jealous of people with such souls and always try to overcome them since they are "quarried" from the same source, as it is known... Therefore, Chanoch was always at war with his yetzer hara, and in war sometimes a person is victorious, and other times he is not. With respect to such people it says, "Happy is the one whose sin G-d does not consider" (Tehillim 32:2), for The Holy One, Blessed is He, does not play games with His creations, and during the times that he is successful, his sins turn into merits. (Ibid.) Thus, the angel to whom the verse refers is the angel Mattat, who once was Chanoch, and in him is G-d's Name, but not to the extent that the angel is one with it.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

It is a very interesting point to consider, and it goes to show you once again how difficult it is to judge a person by his actions. Indeed, if one does not know the nature of the soul of another person, how can they possibly know how great his or her actions truly are, or how bad they are? For a person with a soul from the side of Gevurah, a simple act of chesed may be a monumental task, and getting angry may be the most natural reaction in the world. On the other hand, if his soul comes from the side of Chesed, then a small chesed may be underachievement, and losing one's temper may be inexcusable.

This does not mean that one can rationalize doing a sin, or that one can accept underachievement. It does mean that one can create a personal profile, and take stock of his "natural" tendencies when it comes to certain mitzvot and sins. Furthermore, there are some people who feel as if every conscious moment is a battle on some level, and they worry about themselves since they see others who do not have the same battles. They can think that they are losing their minds when in fact it is

the nature of their soul that is creating the battles for them that others do not have.

Even so, one might say, it hardly seems fair. Who determines who gets which soul and why? Life is a big enough gamble as it is, and now it seems that some people have the cards stacked against them! There must be a good side to all of this, and indeed there is, as we learn from Chanoch.

If people with souls from the side of Gevurot succeed at channeling their energy in a meaningful way, and if they win enough victories in the war against their yetzer hara, can become some of the greatest, most motivated people in society. And, if in their battle to be moral they happen to fail temporarily, they can recover big time the next time they take control of themselves and live righteously.

This is what the Leshem explains elsewhere regarding Elisha-Acher. Yes, he became the quintessential heretic. But, says the Leshem, if anyone had been capable of achieving the tikun necessary at that time of history, it was Acher. And though he failed at his task, which was a huge task, others with lesser struggles have succeeded and have gone on to become great heroes.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Nefesh HaChaim, Ch. 20 The following is an explanation of the process of rectification and rejoining that occurs through teshuvah.

When a person damages the level of Nefesh, or G-d forbid, causes the severance (karet in the Torah) of its nine sefirot from Chochmah down, and as a result sinks to the depths of the impure forces, then, through verbal confession from the depths of his heart, and as a result of moving his lips on the level of the Nefesh of the Ruach, his words reach high up and cause an emanation of additional light from G-d.

[This is called "viduy", and the Nefesh HaChaim is telling us this is the power and the impact of such a simple thing is like sincere, verbal confession.]

At first, this light reaches the root of his Neshamah, and from there it reaches the Neshamah, and then his Ruach. The Ruach then emanates the great light that it received to the level of Nefesh, that remains attached (i.e., the severance is not absolute) in order to eliminate the evil and all levels of impurity, and to free all of its levels, so that they can rejoin the level of Ruach as before.

The same is true of the damage done on the level of Ruach, through improper speech or any of the other types of transgressions that affect the level of Ruach; wasting time instead of learning Torah is as bad as the entire category. This, in turn, strengthens the forces of impurity, G-d should save us, which also effects his Nefesh, since it receives its light and life force via the Ruach.

However, sincere regret and embitterment over the enormity of the transgression, as referred to in the verse, "The cry of their hearts to G-d" (Eichah 2:18), and by contemplating teshuvah in his mind, the dwelling place of the sparks of the light of his Neshamah, then he also arouses compassion from

above and causes an emanation of additional holiness and light into the root of his Neshamah, and from there to the Neshamah itself, which in turn illuminates the level of Ruach [as it says,] "the sacrifices of G-d is a broken spirit".

This breaks the force of spiritual impurity that was strengthened from the transgression, and purifies the level of the holy Ruach so that it can rejoin with the level of Neshamah as before. As matter of course, the Nefesh then becomes perfected as before.

The same is also true if a person transgresses with impure thoughts, G-d forbid. This causes the radiant sparks of his Neshamah to withdraw, which up until then, emanated light to his head. However, through involvement in Torah and by seeking greater understanding he can cause the light to be increased at the Root of his Neshamah, which will emanate light to his Neshamah so that it can return to providing its light, so that the person will be able to gain additional understanding of the holy Torah from within its pure depths. The added holiness and light then will make its way to his Ruach and Nefesh to perfect them.

For this reason, the rabbis said:

All who answer, "Amen. Yehei Sh'mei rabbah m'vorach" (in Kaddish) with all his strength causes his judgment to be torn up. Even if he has become sullied through idol worship, still he will be forgiven. (Shabbat 119b)

Now, the main point of this prayer is to praise the One who emanates supernal light to all four worlds, Atzilut, Beriyah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. Yehei sh'mei rabbah m'vorach praises G-d who emanates and increases light and holiness to the world, that is, to the world called Atzilut; to "the worlds," that is, the two worlds, Beriyah and Yetzirah; to "the world," that is, the world of Asiyah. They are the root of the four levels of man, the root of the Neshamah, and the Neshamah, Ruach, and Nefesh. In other words, the various mention of worlds in the above prayer alludes to the four worlds, and how light gets drawn down through them as we say them.]

When a person concentrates in holiness while saying these words of praise in order to cause increased holiness and blessing at the root of his Neshamah, and from there to his Ruach and Nefesh, then this will expunge any residue from the transgression that had affected any of these three levels; it will make them as if they had never been affected by its impact. This is the essence of teshuvah, and why all of his transgressions will be forgiven.

This is also what they were speaking about here:

The ox that Adam sacrificed, its horns preceded its hooves. (Avodah Zarah 8a)

It had been his intention to rectify his violation, to rebuild that which had been destroyed, to draw close that which had become distanced, to unify that which had become fractured. First, he elevated his thoughts in purity and holiness, in order to cause an emanation of light and holiness to his upper level, compared here to the "horns", which is the root of his Neshamah and his Neshamah itself; from

there to his Ruach and Nefesh, in order to purify every limb from his head to his feet. For, as the verse "If you will (eikev) certainly listen" (Devarim 7:12) alludes, some commandments are "tread" upon by the heel of man, which is considered to be the "hooves" of his animal soul.

This is also what the rabbis were hinting at with the teaching:

The sun's brilliance was dimmed by his heel. (Vayikra Rabbah 2; Kohelet 7)

Have a great Shabbat,

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Text

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