

Angels and Demons – Rabbi Eliezer Breitowitz – Study Notes

1) Rambam, Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah 2:3-8

All that which the Holy One, blessed is He! created in His world, is divided into three types: (a) Composite creatures of matter and form; they are beings which undergo constant changes, as the bodies of man, beasts, plants and minerals; (b) Composite beings of matter and form which do not undergo changes of either body or form as the former, but their forms remain forever set in their body unchanged; they are: the planets and the stars around them; their matter is unlike other matter and their forms are unlike other forms; (c) Beings possessed of forms but of no matter whatever; they are the angels; for the angels are incorporeal but varied forms.

And, what is this that the prophets say that they saw the angel as of fire and winged? This all is in prophetic vision and enigmatical, emphasizing that the being is incorporeal and has no gravity as other massive bodies, as, for instance it is said: "For the Lord your God is a burning flame," (Deut. 4,24). Who is not of fire but it is merely a figure of speech; and, for further instance, it is said: "He maketh His angels of winds." (Ps.104, 4).

Not being corporeal, in what do these forms vary one from the other? In that that they are not alike in their being, but each one of them functions in a lesser degree than the other, and each one derives his being from the power of the one above him; but all of them derive their being from the Power and Goodness of the Holy One, Blessed is He! and from His munificence, which is as Solomon in his wisdom pointed at and said: "For One higher than the high watcheth." (Ecc. 5,7).

What we said "in a lesser degree than the other," does not mean a degree in place, as one man sits a degree higher than the other, but as it is said of two scholars that one is greater than the other in learning, who is of a degree higher than the other, and, as we speak of the cause as of a higher degree than the thing to which it gives being. The variation in the names of the angels is based upon their degrees; they are therefore called: Holy Living Creatures, which are above all others, Wheels, Valiant Ones, Electrum, Flying Serpent, Angels, Gods, Sons of Gods, Chariot Bearers, and Men. All these ten names by which the angels are called designate their respective ten degrees; the degree which has nothing higher than itself, save only the degree of God, blessed is He! is the degree of the form which is called Living Creatures; thus it is spoken of in prophecy as being beneath the Throne of Glory. And the tenth degree is the degree of the form known as Men, which are the angels who speak with the prophets and appear to them in the vision of prophecy. Therefore they are called Men, as their degree approaches the degree of the intellect of the sons of man.

2) Babylonian Talmud, Berachos 6a

Abba Binyamin says: If the eye was given permission to see, no creature would be able to withstand the abundance and ubiquity of the demons and continue to live unaffected by them. Similarly, Abaye said: They are more numerous than we are and they stand over us like mounds of earth surrounding a pit. Rav Huna said: Each and every one of us has a thousand demons to his left and ten thousand to his right. God protects man from these demons, as it says in the verse: "A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; they will not approach you" (Psalms 91:7). Summarizing the effects of the demons, Rava said:

The crowding at the kalla, the gatherings for Torah study during Elul and Adar, is from the demons; those knees that are fatigued even though one did not exert himself is from the demons; those clothes of the Sages that wear out, despite the fact that they do not engage in physical labor, is from friction with the demons; those feet that are in pain is from the demons. One who seeks to know that the demons exist should place fine ashes around his bed, and in the morning the demons' footprints appear like chickens' footprints, in the ash. One who seeks to see them should take the afterbirth of a firstborn female black cat, born to a firstborn female black cat, burn it in the fire, grind it and place it in his eyes, and he will see them. He must then place the ashes in an iron tube sealed with an iron seal [gushpanka] lest the demons steal it from him, and then seal the opening so he will not be harmed. Rav Beivai bar Abaye performed this procedure, saw the demons, and was harmed. The Sages prayed for mercy on his behalf and he was healed.

3) Babylonian Talmud, Chagigah 16a

The Sages taught: Six statements were said with regard to demons: In three ways they are like ministering angels, and in three ways they are like humans. The baraita specifies: In three ways they are like ministering angels: They have wings like ministering angels; and they fly from one end of the world to the other like ministering angels; and they know what will be in the future like ministering angels. The Gemara is puzzled by this last statement: Should it enter your mind that they know this? Not even the angels are privy to the future. Rather, they hear from behind the curtain when God reveals something of the future, like ministering angels. And in three ways they are similar to humans: They eat and drink like humans; they multiply like humans; and they die like humans.

4) Ramban, Vayikra 17:7

Know, that just as G-d created the bodies of man, animals, plants, and minerals from the four basic elements, which he combined with a Divine power to form dense bodies which can be perceived by the senses because of their thickness and density, likewise there are creations comprised of only two elements – fire and air – forming bodies that cannot be sensed... This body by virtue of its lightness can fly, and whereas being a combination of elements is the ultimate cause of destruction, these beings die when they separate...

5) Babylonian Talmud, Bava Basra 16a

It was taught with regard to Satan: He descends to this world and misleads a person into sinning. He then ascends to Heaven, levels accusations against that very sinner, and inflames God's anger against him. He then receives permission to act and takes away the sinner's soul as punishment...Reish Lakish says: Satan, the evil inclination, and the Angel of Death are one...

6) Isaiah 45:7

I form light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil— I the Lord do all these things.

7) Pirkei Avos 6:11

Whatever the Holy Blessed One created in His world, he created only for His glory, as it is said: "All who are linked to My name, whom I have created, formed and made for My glory" (Isaiah 43:7), And it says: "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever" (Exodus 15:18).

8) Midrash Rabbah, Bereishis 9:9

Rabbi Nahman said in Rabbi Samuel's name: 'Behold, it was good' refers to the Good Desire; 'And behold, it was very good' refers to the Evil Desire.

9) Bereishis 32:25-29

Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed."

10) Rashi, Bereishis 32:25

Our Rabbis of blessed memory explained that he was Esau's guardian angel (Genesis Rabbah 77:3).

11) Babylonian Talmud, Chullin 91b

"And he said: Let me go, for the dawn has risen. And he said: I will not let you go until you bless me" (Genesis 32:27). Jacob said to the angel: Are you a thief, or are you a gambler [*kuveyustus*], who is afraid of dawn? The angel said to him: I am an angel, and from the day I was created my time to recite a song before God has not arrived, until now. Now I must ascend so that I can sing songs of praise to God.