

Acharon Shel Pesach - Finding Matzah in Vienna

What is better, an angel or a person?

Israeli journalist and author Tal Gilad shared his recent Passover experience on his Facebook page:

On Friday morning, Passover eve, he left Bratislava, Slovakia, for some minor arrangements in Vienna, and he took advantage of some extra time for a short walk through the city.

When he was about to return to his parking spot, his phone rang. His daughter, who is religious, called to wish him a happy holiday and to ask how he was going to spend Pesach. He replied that he will soon be in Bratislava and that there was no Jewish community or synagogue in the area.

“So where will you get matzah?” She asked.

He replied that he had no matzah, and that he does not like matzah anyway. He tries to keep the holiday to the best of his ability—but he does not want matzah.

“Please get matzah from where you can,” his daughter asked, “it’s important. It is very important to eat matzah on Passover—even one matzah, if you can get one.”

He could hear the tremor in her voice, and he realized how important it was to her. Well, in those situations he doesn’t

argue. Okay, he promised, he'll get matzah, without knowing how he would figure it out. It's Friday, three-thirty in the afternoon, and he's not in Israel. He thought to himself: What matzah? Where will he get matzah now?

Vienna has kosher stores, but by this time everything was closed, except for one store that Google said was open. A cold wind began to blow and it began to rain. He rushed to his car and navigated to the store—but the store was closed. He began to get annoyed. This was ridiculous—why was he running around Vienna looking for matzah?

Two religious Jews passed by, so he got out of the car and ran after them.

“Excuse me, maybe you know where I can get matzah?” They looked quite surprised.

“There is a Chabad house close by,” they told him, “try there.”

They gave him directions and he made his way to the Chabad house. When he entered, he met two people, one worker and one young man who arrived on a flight from Israel. “Hello, can I get matzah here?”

“One or three matzahs?” asked the young man from Chabad.

He did not know what to answer. “I need matzah,” he replied.

Someone pulled up with a supply vehicle. “Yaakov,” called the young man from the doorway. “Give him three matzahs!”

The guy from the supply opened the packages in the car and

tried to find matzah. In the first package there were only dishes, in the second, food packaged in plastic boxes. He tried looking more, he opened another package, and opened the car door from the other side.

In the meantime, everyone was standing there in the rain, trying to find some matzah for a Jew who appeared to them out of nowhere.

Then, the boy who landed from the flight said, “I have,” taking out a box of three prepackaged shemurah matzahs.

“But don’t you need it for yourself?” he asked.

“No,” he replied, “I brought it in case anyone needed it. And here, you need it.”

Tal was in shock. He did not know what to say, except to thank the boy again and again. He asked for his name.

“Ronen ben Olga,” he replied. He only told Tal, “Be careful with the matzos so they don’t get wet in the rain.”

Now he had three shemurah matzahs. He ran back to his car crying—without knowing why.

In the post, he thanks his daughter who pressured him to find matzah, and the boy, the angel who was there at that moment, and he thanks G-d for arranging everything so that on the eve of the holiday he would have three matzahs, even without planning for it.

Tal Gilad concludes his post: “Bless the angel who appeared to

me in my way.”

Angels

He called the guy who gave him the matzah an “angel.”

Indeed, Judaism believes in angels.

This is actually evident in our behavior: When one Jew meets a second Jew, it is customary to say, “Shalom Aleichem, peace-unto-you,” in the plural.

This doesn’t seem to make sense, the Rebbe asks. When you meet one person, we should say in singular form, “Shalom alecha”! In fact, the Gemara says that when a person comes to his Rabbi, he says, “Shalom alecha Rabbi,” in singular form. Why do we say “Shalom Aleichem” in the plural? The Rebbe says something amazing: Every Jew is accompanied by angels. Therefore, we say “Shalom Aleichem,” greeting his angels alongside him (Toras Menachem vol. 31 pg. 170).

Now, this boy who gave him matzah is actually greater than an angel. And not just him—but every Jewish person as well.

In Judaism, angels are called “*omdim*-those who stand,” while souls—or more accurately, souls within living bodies—are called “*mehalchim*-those who walk.”

The Tzemach Tzedek writes the following on the verse, “I will allow you to walk among those who stand” (Zecharia 3:7): “Angels are called *omdim*, as the verse says, ‘*serafim omdim*,’ and souls, before they enter this world, are also called *omdim*... But after the soul enters this world and is enclothed in a body

and animal soul, it is called a *mehalech*” (*Or Hatorah*, Bamidbar vol. 2, Behaaloscha).

The angel is a spiritual being who carries out G-d’s missions, but has no free choice. The angel cannot oppose G-d’s will. He cannot get a promotion, nor resign because he is not satisfied. He does what he is obligated to do.

A Jew, on the other hand, has a soul that is a “part of G-d above.” He is superior to an angel, because he does have free choice. G-d created man in His image—which means that just as G-d has the choice to do as He pleases, He gave this power to humankind as well.

That is why G-d called the creature that he created, “Adam—man.” Adam has two meanings: the classic interpretation is that it stems from the word *adamah*—earth. He was created from earth, from the lowest matter in creation. On the other hand, the Shaloh interprets the name to come from *adameh l’elyon*, “I am compared to that which is above.”

What exactly do these two interpretations tell us?

If a person sins, he is lower than earth, but if he does the will of G-d, he is in “in the image of his Creator,” ascending higher and higher.

Angels do not make mistakes and do not sin, because they do not have an animal soul who incites them to sin.

The Gemara says that when Moses ascended to heaven to receive the Torah, the angels asked G-d, “What is he doing up

here?”

G-d answered that he came to receive the Torah.

The angels argued, “Give us the Torah, we will keep it perfectly.”

G-d told Moses to give them an answer. Moses turned to the angels and asked, “What does it say in the Torah? Don’t kill, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal... Do you have any evil inclination?”

The angels immediately acknowledged that he was right (Shabbos 89a).

A person has a good inclination and an evil inclination. He could fall to the lowest depths, and he could rise to the greatest heights—far beyond the angels. Therefore, the Alter Rebbe says in Tanya, when ten Jews—even children—are gathered together, the *shechinah* rests there to such an extent that “if an angel would be standing there, he would become totally nullified” from the intensity of the Divine revelation.

Yizkor

This difference is also reflected in this holiday, the seventh day of Passover.

We read in the Torah about the parting of the Red Sea. The Gemara says that at the parting of the Sea, “the angels asked to sing praise to G-d. Said G-d, ‘My creations are drowning in the sea and you want to sing?’”

Why not, indeed?

The Gemara adds, “G-d is not happy with the downfall of the wicked” (Sanhedrin 39b).

On the other hand, we read the Song of the Sea right afterwards in the Torah, “Moses and the people of Israel sang...”! This means that the people of Israel did sing!

There are a few explanations why the Jews were celebrating even though the angels were forbidden. But the bottom line is that somethings that are forbidden to angels are permitted to the people of Israel. Why? Because we are superior to the angels.

When a Jew performs a mitzvah, he elevates not only his body and environment—but also his G-dly soul. Through the mitzvah, the soul also reaches a higher level. Moreover: it elevates not only his soul, but also the souls that passed on.

How does this work?

Deceased souls cannot observe mitzvos. In heaven no one is hungry and needy for charity. In heaven, no one needs shmurah matzah. It is precisely we, physical people in the physical world, who can keep the commandments. And so, when we do a mitzvah in honor of someone in heaven, we are able to elevate his soul.

This is what is behind the prayer of Yizkor. In the prayer, we pledge to give charity for the soul we pray for, and in doing so, we do that soul an amazing favor—doing a mitzvah that the

soul could not have possibly done itself. And in turn, the soul prays for us and G-d blesses us with everything we need.