



Finding G-d (day 1)

How do angels look? It depends on your perspective.

The Amazing Story

Good Yom Tov!

Several years ago, there was an amazing story going around about the Holocaust, in the form of a children's book entitled "Angel at the Fence." The story is about a boy named Herman Rosenblat and his family, which was thrown out of their house into the Buchenwald Ghetto. Herman Rosenblat was 12 years old when his father died of an infection. But then, when his mother died a short time later, she came to him in a dream and said to him, "I'm going to send you an angel."

The next morning, on the other side of the camp's fence, he saw the girl who would later earn the nickname, "My Angel." Her name was Roma Radzicki. The Radzicki family considered itself Catholic (even though they were Jewish). They lived in a village near the Ghetto, and Roma was working on a farm next to the Ghetto fence on the day she threw one of the apples she was carrying on her over the fence to the starving boy on the other side.

The same thing happened the next day, and the next, and the next, and the days turned into weeks, then months.

"I went by every day," Roma would later recall. She would throw. He would catch. And then they'd both run off wildly, each to an absolutely different reality. Fear of guards kept them silent. They exchanged not

a word. But when Herman realized that they'd be transferring him and his family (or what was left of it) to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, he approached the fence and told her that he wouldn't be coming back.

Well, they both survived the Holocaust. Roma Radzicki immigrated to Israel and Herman Rosenblat ended up in London. And with the passing days, memories of apples and fences slowly faded along with efforts to erase the horrors of the war from their hearts.

Herman Rosenblat eventually immigrated to New York. One fine Sunday afternoon, one of his friends called him and said that he wanted him to meet someone. The still-single Mr. Rosenberg wasn't too excited, but he agreed.

To his joy, the date was very pleasant—the young lady was pretty and gentle-mannered, and the conversation opened up and they got to the point where they started sharing wartime experiences.

Herman Rosenblat was talking about the camps he'd been in, when she suddenly shared that she had spent the war hiding from the Nazis. Then she started talking about a boy she would regularly visit, about apples, about what he looked like, and how he was sent to the death 3 camps... and Herman Rosenblat burst out, "That was me! I got the apples from you on the other side of the fence!"

Rosenblat knew at that very moment, almost 15 years since they last saw each other, that he would never leave her again. He proposed to her that same day. She thought that he was a bit crazy, but two months later, she agreed. And so, in 1958, the two were married in a Bronx synagogue.

Well, what do you know, but the story got to the celebrity interviewer, Oprah Winfrey. She had the Rosenblats as guests on her show twice. She described the story of their meeting anew on a blind date in

Coney Island 15 years later as “most unique love story of its kind” that she had encountered in her 22 years of doing her show.

Herman Rosenblat later signed a book contract and even started working on a movie based on the amazing story entitled “The Flower at the Fence.”

But after the story got widening exposure through the media, historian Kenneth Waltzer of the University of Michigan (and others) began investigating the veracity of the story. Dr. Waltzer interviewed Holocaust survivors of the Polish ghetto that had been taken along with Herman Rosenblat to the extermination camp. They testified that there was no technical way for anyone to approach the camp’s fence from outside, since it was both electrified and also well-guarded— and besides, there was an S.S. base just outside the camp, not a forest as Herman Rosenblat had claimed.

Herman Rosenblat was forced to admit that he had indeed made up the story after his late mother appeared to him in a dream while he was recuperating in the hospital. He had been shot and injured in a violent home invasion, and in his dream, his mother had told him to tell his story as a Holocaust survivor in a way that would leave an indelible impression on his grandkids.

His publisher, Penguin Books, now said that they would not be printing the book, and also demanded that he return the advance payment that they gave him. His movie producer, Harris Salomon, who had starting working on a film based on the story, announced that he would be continuing with the project—but would make it clear that it was a fictional story. Herman Rosenblat agreed to donate all his profits from the movie to organizations that help Holocaust survivors.

How Do Angels Look?

What do real “angels” look like?

There are two Prophets in the Tanach that describe angels.

The first is the Prophet Yeshayahu (Isaiah), who in the beginning of Chap. 6 tells us: “I saw the L-rd sitting on a high and exalted throne...”, and then proceeds to briefly describe the angels around G-d: “Seraphim stood above for Him, six wings, six wings to each one; with two he would cover his face, and with two he would cover his feet, and with two he would fly.”

Why do angels need six wings? Rashi explains, “with two he would cover his face: so as not to look toward the Shechinah”; “and with two he would cover his feet: for modesty, so as not to bare his entire body before his Creator.” “And with two he would fly: to carry out G-d’s missions” (Ibn Ezra).

The Prophet heard the angels praising the Creator. Do you know what they said? “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.”

We read this chapter of Yeshayahu for the Haftarah of Parshas Yisro, in which we are told about the revelation at the Giving of the Torah and the hearing of the Ten Commandments by the entire Jewish Nation.

The City Man vs. the Villager

On the holiday of Shavuot, we celebrate and mark the sixth of Sivan as the day on which the Torah was given. And for the Haftarah, we read the Vision of Yechezkel (Ezekiel).

The Prophet Yechezkel is the “Prophet of Exile”—he was exiled to Bavel (Babylon), and he opens his book with a lofty vision very rich with imagery. It’s very different than Yeshayahu, who was very limited in his descriptions—by contrast, Yechezkel describes at length.

The Sages (Talmud, Tractate Chagigah 13b) describe the two as a city

person and a villager— Yeshayahu is the city person since he comes from the royal household and is accustomed to seeing the king; so he keeps his descriptions short. On the other hand, Yechezkel is the villager who is seeing the king for the first time, so he goes into lengthy detail.

Yechezkel says: “And it was in the thirtieth year... and I am in the midst of the exile... the heavens opened, and I beheld visions of G-d.”

He starts to describe what he saw, at great length and in detailed detail. He sees wind, cloud and fire, and inside all that he sees four animal-angels. He describes them as having four faces and four wings. So while Yeshayahu saw angels with six wings, Yechezkel saw angels with four. And the Talmud (Tractate Chagigah 13b) explains: “There’s no difficulty: One was while the Temple existed and one was while the Temple no longer existed; so to speak, the animal-angels’ wings were reduced.”

Yechezkel continues describing the angels as having legs that were “straight.” From here we learn a halachah (Jewish law) that when a person recites the Amidah prayer, he must put his legs together. As the Yerushalmi Talmud puts it, “One standing in prayer needs to straighten his legs... like the Ministering Angels, as the verse states, ‘and their legs were a straight leg.’”

Then Yechezkel describes each of the “holy chayos” as having four faces: the face of a human, the face of a lion, the face of an ox and the face of an eagle. Man is the crown of Creation. The lion is the King of Beasts. The ox is the King of (domesticated) Animals and the eagle is the King of Birds. And each of the angels had these four same faces.

And then, after the lengthy description, the Haftarah ends with a verse in which Yechezkel relates what he heard the angels saying: “And a wind lifted me and I heard behind me the sound of a great noise,

‘Blessed is the Glory of G-d from His Place.’”

So while Yeshayahu heard, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory,” Yechezkel heard, “Blessed is the Glory of G-d from His Place.” Now you know the sources for these verses that every Jew knows, even if he only rarely visits a synagogue.

But what really is the difference between these two verses?

Where is G-d?

Sometimes a person wakes up in the morning and feels that G-d is with him. He feels the Divine Providence in everything he does; he sees G-d’s Hand. And wherever he goes, he declares, “The whole earth is full of His glory!” G-d is everywhere.

On the other hand, there are times when the same person gets up with a heart that feels like stone; “because of blockage of the mind and blockage of the heart, he doesn’t feel the concept” (see Toras Menachem Vol. 10, pg. 124). He doesn’t see and feel G-d near him. He feels lost, like he’s walking in the dark. He believes in G-d, but in a manner of “Blessed is the Glory of G-d ‘from His place’”—G-d exists, but in “His place,” in a place that is far away from him.

Yechezkel, who was in Bavel, was the “villager”—he was the one who said, “Blessed is the Glory of G-d from His place.” Yeshayahu, on the other hand, was a Prophet in the Land of Israel—so he was the “city person” who said, “The whole world is filled with His Glory.”

It’s All Our Perspective

My friends: Exile and redemption are not just geographical conditions describing whether a person is physically located in Bavel (modern-day Iraq) or Israel. One could be physically located in the modern-day Holy Land but still be in exile, or be physically located anywhere else in the Diaspora but still experience redemption. That’s because exile and redemption are spiritual states.

“The Land of Israel” means a state in which a person knows and feels that everything depends on G-d. About the Land of Israel, the Torah (Devarim 11:11) says, “From the dew of heaven shall you drink water”—the farmer knows and feels that after all of his physical labor, he still depends on G-d’s Kindness so that rain comes down from the sky.

“The Diaspora,” on the other hand, means a state in which a person thinks, “My power and might of my hand did for me all this valor” (Devarim 8:17)—that he’s the one who got it all done. He’s the reason for his own success—it all happened because he said so and he did suchand-such, etc.

Whether one is in a state of exile or redemption depends on us. A person can put himself in a state in which he remembers and feels G-d’s Hand, and he reminds himself that all of his success comes from G-d—and that if he just stops for a moment he’ll discover that that is the absolute truth: the world around him doesn’t depend on him, and even his livelihood doesn’t depend on him. He could run around an entire week and not do a single thing—but then with one phone call, he can earn a massive amount.

So it all depends with acknowledgment, my friends—and our mission is to bridge the gap from “Blessed is the Glory of G-d in His place” to “the whole world is filled with His glory.”

Good Yom Tov!