

*PIRQE DE R. ELIEZER §13-14*¹

‘Jealousy, sexual lust, and (the quest for) respect drive forth a person from the world.’²

The ministering angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Master of the Universe! “What is humanity that You should take note of him? Humanity is like a fleeting breath!” (Ps 144:3-4). “He cannot even rule over dirt”’ (Job 41:25). He answered them, ‘Just as you offer praise to Me in the supernal heights, he will declare My unique status among those who dwell below. But not only this—are you capable of standing and giving names to all the creatures?’ They stood up, but were unable (to pronounce any names). Immediately Adam stood up and proclaimed names for all the creatures, as scripture attests: ‘and Adam proclaimed names for all the cattle, etc.’ (Gen 2:20).

When the ministering angels saw this, they said, ‘If we do not take counsel against this Adam so that he will err before his Creator, we will never be able to prevail over him!’ Now Samael was a mighty prince in the heavens: whereas the divine beasts and seraphim had no more than six wings, Samael had twelve wings. He took his faction (of angels) and descended and examined all the creatures which the Holy One, blessed be He, created, but he did not discover among them one who was clever enough to commit mischief except for the serpent, for scripture confirms: ‘the serpent was the craftiest of all the wild beasts’ (Gen 3:1). Its appearance (at that time) was like that of a type of camel. Samael climbed up and rode upon him.

The Torah began to cry out, saying: ‘What are you doing, Samael? Now that the universe has been created, is it a time to revolt against the Deity? “A time to raise yourself on high” (Job 39:18)? O Master of the Universe, it is a time for You “to laugh at the steed and its rider!”’ (ibid.).

¹ Translated from R. David Luria, ed., *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer ha-Gadol* (Warsaw: T. Y. Bamberg, 1852), 31a-32b, 33b.

² A quotation of *m. ’Abot* 4.21, with the text’s האדם interpreted as a reference to ‘Adam.’

A parable. What was the matter like? It was like a man who is possessed by an evil spirit. All of the things he does and the words he speaks he appears to do and speak of his own accord, but he is actually only doing (and saying) what the evil spirit possessing him dictates. So too with the serpent: everything which it did and said was at the behest of Samael. About him scripture states: ‘the Evil One pushed aside his mind’ (Prov 14:32).³

(Another) parable. What was the matter like? It was like a king who married a woman and gave her control of everything belonging to him. He said, ‘Behold, everything of mine is in your control except for this one barrel which is full of scorpions.’ An old man came to her looking for vinegar. He asked her, ‘How does the king treat you?’ She replied to him, ‘Everything which he owns he has given to me and placed in my control except for this barrel which is full of scorpions.’ He said to her, ‘Are not all the king’s jewels⁴ in that barrel? He told you otherwise because he is planning on wedding another woman and giving them to her!’ The king is Adam, the woman is Eve, and the old man looking for vinegar is the serpent: about them scripture states: ‘there the evil-doers fell’ (Ps 36:13).

The serpent debated with himself. He thought, ‘If I speak to the man, I know he will not listen to me, for it is always difficult to change a man’s mind. Instead, I will speak to the woman, for (changing) her mind is easy: I know that she will listen to me because women listen to everything, as scripture attests, ‘simple-minded and clueless’ (Prov 9:13). The serpent went and said to the woman, ‘Is it true that you were commanded about the fruits of this tree?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, as scripture attests, “from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden” (Gen 3:3).’ From her response he found an opening to enter. He said to her, ‘This command is based on nothing but jealousy, for at the time you eat some of it you will become like gods. Just as the Creator has made and destroyed worlds, so you also will be able to create and destroy worlds. Just as He puts to death and revivifies, so too you will be able to put to death and revivify, as scripture states: “for God is aware that the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened” (Gen 3:5).’ The serpent then went and touched the tree. It cried out and said, ‘O Wicked One, do not touch me, for scripture states “a prideful foot shall not approach me ... there the evil-doers fell” (Ps 36:12-13).’⁵ The serpent went and said to the woman, ‘Look, I have touched the tree and have not died. You touch it, too:

³ By revocalizing *ברעתו ידחה*.

⁴ Read *קוזמין* ‘jewels.’

⁵ See *’Abot R. Natan A §1* (ed. Schechter 2b).

you won't die!' The woman then went and touched the tree, and saw the Angel of Death approaching her. She thought, 'Probably I will die now, and the Holy One, blessed be He, will make another woman and give her to Adam. Instead, I will cause him to eat with me: if we die, both of us will die, but should we live, both of us will live.' She took and ate some of the fruits of the tree, and gave some of its fruits to her husband so he could eat with her, as scripture states: 'and she took of its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband' (Gen 3:6). As soon as Adam had eaten some of the fruits of the Tree, he saw himself (to be) naked. His eyes were opened and his teeth were blunted. He said to her, 'What is this which you have fed me which has opened my eyes and blunted my teeth? I would opine that just as my teeth have been blunted, so too will be blunted the teeth of all generations!'

... [while decreeing curses against the various guilty parties] He (i.e. God) cast out Samael and his faction from their holy stations, from heaven.⁶

⁶ Note that this expulsion is a consequence, not a cause, of Adam's sin.