

From the Rabbi's Desk
Rabbi Manes Kogan
Hillcrest Jewish Center
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366
rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org

Stories with a Twist [29]

Peleimu and the Unexpected Visitor

(Insights into Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 81a – 81b)



Background to Our Story

Peleimu



[Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Kiddushin. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 459](#)

Peleimu – פֶּלִימוֹ: The Sage Peleimu was one of the great disciples of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. The Gemara records that he would ask his teacher incisive questions in matters of *halakha*, and his legal rulings appear in *baraitot*. He also had disputes with Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Shimon, the colleague of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. Many stories attest to Peleimu's great righteousness.

Yom Kippur



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur

Yom Kippur, also known in English as the *Day of Atonement*, is the most solemn and important of the Jewish holidays. Its central themes are atonement and repentance. Jews traditionally observe this holy day with a 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services.

Satan



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satan>

Satan is a term that originates from the Abrahamic faiths, being traditionally applied to an angel in Judeo-Christian belief, and to a jinn in Islamic belief.

Where Satan does appear in the Bible, he plays the role of the Accuser.

According to the article on 'Satan' in the Jewish Encyclopedia, Satan's role as the accuser is found in the prologue to the Book of Job, where Satan appears, together with other celestial beings before the Deity, replying to the inquiry of God as to whence he had come, with the words: 'From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.' (Job 1:7) Both question and answer, as well as the dialogue which follows, characterize Satan as having the evil purpose of searching out men's sins and appearing as their accuser. He is, therefore, the celestial prosecutor, who sees only iniquity; for he persists in his evil opinion of Job even after the man of Uz has passed successfully through his first trial by surrendering to the will of God, whereupon Satan demands another test through physical suffering. (ib. ii. 3-5.)

Yet it is also evident from the prologue that Satan has no power of independent action, but requires the permission of God, which he may not transgress. He cannot be regarded, therefore, as an opponent of the Deity; and the doctrine of monotheism is disturbed by his existence no more than by the presence of other beings before the face of God. This view is also retained in Zech. 3:1-2, where Satan is described as the adversary of the high priest Joshua, and of the people of God whose representative the hierarch is; and he there opposes the 'angel of the Lord' who bids him be silent in the name of God.

Satan and the Evil Inclination

Being Jewish

<http://www.beingjewish.com/>

The Hebrew word "Satan" means "Hinderer." To hinder someone means to hold him back, to try to prevent him from doing something. G-d created the Hinderer to give us work to do in this world. Satan is here to make things difficult for us, so we can overcome our evil temptations, and pass the test. That is the purpose of Satan. Satan is an angel whose purpose has been determined by G-d.

Temptation is there to try and deter us. It gives us the ability to do the wrong thing. More importantly, it gives us the ability to look at evil and refuse to do it. By presenting us with the opportunity to do evil, it gives us the ability to choose between good and evil.

The ability to choose between good and evil is what gives us free will.

The truth is that Satan has a job to do, just like every other angel. And angels have no free will. They do as Hashem commands them.

A man once came to a great Rabbi, very troubled. He said to the Rabbi, "Please pray to Hashem to take away my Evil Inclination. I do so many sins, and I want to stop sinning!"

The Rabbi answered, "Then what would be your purpose in this world, if you had no Evil Inclination? Your purpose in life is to overcome your personal Evil Inclination. That is what you were created for! Hashem has enough angels in heaven. He doesn't need one more. He created you human, so that you could improve yourself."

And how do we do it? By constant battle with the Evil Inclination.

So now we have to revise our understanding of Satan. Satan is not a fallen angel. Satan is merely an angel with a dirty job. Satan does not have a rival kingdom. Satan is not in competition with G-d, and Satan does not want followers or worshipers. He's not even happy when people obey him and sin.

Satan is the angel who tempts us, and the angel who prosecutes us in Heaven. He is also the Angel of Death. The angel who tries to make us sin is the same angel who

accuses us in the Heavenly Court, and the same angel who carries out the death sentence.

So, no, Satan does not wear a red suit, or carry a trident. Nor does he wear a business suit. Satan is a force of evil in the world that we must resist. Satan most often appears as a desire within *you*. Of course, there is no shortage of things in the world to tempt us to sin.

And Satan has many "helpers," many of whom don't even know they are helping him. A shady-looking character in the street walks over to you and offers to sell you some stolen property, for example.

None of us are capable of destroying Satan. What we are expected and commanded to do is to gain the upper hand over our personal Satans. And Hashem helps us do this, constantly. The Talmud says that the Evil Inclination constantly attempts to destroy us spiritually, and Hashem constantly helps us and gives us the means with which to overcome our Evil Inclinations.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 81a – 81b

פְּלִימוֹ הָיָה רָגִיל לְמִימַר כָּל יוֹמָא: גִּירָא בְּעֵינֵיהּ דְּשִׁטָּן. יוֹמָא חַד מֵעָלֵי יוֹמָא דְּכִיפּוּרֵי הָהּ, אִידְמֵי לִיהּ כְּעֵנָא. אֲתָא קָרָא אַבְבָּא, אֲפִיקוּ לִיהּ רִיפְתָּא. אָמַר לִיהּ: יוֹמָא פִּי הָאִידָנָא כּוּלֵי עֲלָמָא גּוֹאֵי וְאַנָּא אַבְרָאֵי? עֵינֵי לִיהּ, וְקָרִיבוּ לִיהּ רִיפְתָּא. אָמַר לִיהּ: יוֹמָא פִּי הָאִידָנָא, כּוּלֵי עֲלָמָא אֲתָכָא וְאַנָּא לְחוּדָאֵי? אֲתִיּוּהוּ אוֹתְבוּהוּ אֲתָכָא. הָהּ יִתִּיב מְלָא נְפִשְׁיָה שִׁיחָנָא וְכִיבֵי עֲלֵיהּ, וְהָהּ קַעְבִּיד בֵּיהּ מִלֵּי דְמָאִיס. אָמַר לִיהּ: תִּיב שְׂפִי. ר. אָמַר לִיהּ: הָבוּ לִי כֶּסֶא. יִהְבּוּ לִיהּ כֶּסֶא. אַכְמַר שָׂדָא בֵּיהּ פִּיחוּ, נְחָרוּ בֵּיהּ. שָׁקָא וּמִית. שָׁמְעוּ דְּהוּוּ קְאָמְרֵי: פְּלִימוֹ קָטַל גְּבָרָא! פְּלִימוֹ קָטַל גְּבָרָא! עָרַק וְטָשָׂא נְפִשְׁיָה בְּבֵית הַכֶּסֶא. אָזִיל בְּתַרִּיהּ, נְפַל קְמִיָּה. פִּי דְחַזְיָה דְּהָהּ מְצֻטְעָר – גְּלִי לִיהּ נְפִשְׁיָה. אָמַר לִיהּ: מָאֵי טַעְמָא אֲמַרְתָּ הֵכִי? וְאַלָּא הֵיכִי אִימָא? אָמַר לִיהּ: לִימָא מָר "רְחֻמָּנָא נִגְעָר בֵּיהּ בְּשִׁטָּן".

Peleimu had the habit to say every day: An arrow in the eye of Satan, mocking the temptations of the evil inclination.

One day, it was the eve of Yom Kippur, and Satan appeared to him as a pauper who came and called him to the door, requesting alms. Peleimu brought out bread to him. Satan said to him: On a day like today, everyone is inside eating, and shall I stand outside? Peleimu brought him inside and gave him bread.

He [Satan] said to him: On a day like today, everyone is sitting at the table, and shall I sit by myself? They brought him and sat him at the table. He was sitting and had covered himself with boils and pus, and he was doing repulsive things at the table.

Peleimu said to the pauper: Sit properly.

Satan then said to him: Give me a cup. They gave him a cup. He coughed up his phlegm and spat it into the cup. They berated him, at which point Satan pretended to sink down and die.

They heard people around them saying: Peleimu killed a man! Peleimu killed a man!

Peleimu fled and hid himself in the bathroom. Satan followed him and fell before him. Upon seeing that Peleimu was suffering, he revealed himself to him. Satan said to him: What is the reason that you spoke this way, provoking me by saying: An arrow in the eye of Satan?

He [Peleimu] replied: But what then should I say?

Satan said to him: Let the Master, i.e., Peleimu, say: Let the Merciful One rebuke Satan.



Explaining the Story - What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? What did Peleimu mean by the words: "An arrow in the eye of Satan!"?

? Why did Satan appear to Peleimu? Why did he choose Yom Kippur to appear to him?

? *What is the subtle difference between "An arrow in the eye of Satan!" and "Let the Merciful One rebuke Satan"?*

"G-d created Satan to give us work to do in this world. Satan is here to make things difficult for us, so we can overcome our evil inclination, and pass the test. That is the purpose of Satan." (from www.beinhjewish.com)

? What is the test Peleimu didn't pass?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

! And the father of all sins is.....

epilogue

Peleimu had the habit to say every day: *An arrow in the eye of Satan*, bragging of his ability to overcome the evil inclination. Our story comes to teach us that every time we brag, we invite trouble. Peleimu's trouble came in the guise of a repulsive pauper who showed up to disturb his preparation for the holiest day of the year. Peleimu learned the *hard way* that the process of being cleansed from our transgressions begins by working on getting rid of arrogance, the father of all sins.

An Alternative Analysis of our Story by Rabbi Guido Cohen

This story, with which we begin our review of stories about the eve, opens a door that is more than interesting to reflect on. The story shows us Plimo piously carrying out the preparations for Yom Kippur. We can imagine the entire family, all dressed in white, freshly bathed, ready to sit down to dine before going to the synagogue to hear the Kol Nidre. Most likely, on the morning of this day Plimo did not go out to work and his wife bought delicious foods to prepare the table for the seudah of 9 Tishri. As he was accustomed to do every day, on this Erev Yom Kippur, too, Plimo reinforced his confidence that he could vanquish Satan by flinging an arrow into his eyes. However, something shattered the solemnity of that evening. The presence of this unexpected beggar transformed that immaculate, white evening into a dark, inappropriate nightmare. The stress Plimo was under must have been unbearable. On the one hand, there was the commandment to feed the hungry, which could not be ignored, much less only a few hours before facing the King of Kings to be judged. On the other hand, there was a presence that would destroy the purity and beauty of his household on the eve of this day on which everything seemed angelic. What was to be done in the face of such a dilemma? Plimo chooses an intermediate option which "frees" him of his debt but does not get him too involved. He helps the poor man but leaves him outside; he obeys the commandment but does not open his heart. And Satan's reply is not slow in coming: Plimo must not only open the doors of his house but also make a place at his table and pour wine into one of his beautiful cups to make Satan feel at home. For a moment the reader imagines that Plimo is going to pass the test with flying colors, but the harsh reality of a body covered in sores and the lack of good manners on the part of this poor beggar are the limit of the well-to-do sage's tolerance. And when Plimo shows himself incapable of receiving a foul-smelling beggar at his table, precisely on the eve of the day of almost ascetic purity, there's nothing worse than a corpse and a murder accusation of someone who was preparing to face the Day of Judgment with countless virtues and only a few minor transgressions. Therefore he flees and runs toward the place most conceptually distant from the white peace of his household: the bathhouse. In those days, the bathhouse was a communal place, where all the inhabitants of the village used the public latrines, and it generally was located in areas that were far from where people lived. Plimo, the man who did not want a ragged beggar in his house, ended up outside it, quite far from the way in which he imagined welcoming the holiest of days. Face to face with the figure now revealed as Satan, Plimo was about to be taught a lesson. His pride and feeling of unlimited power, reflected in the belief that he could, all on his own, annihilate the harshest member of the celestial court was about to be reduced to a literary anecdote in a matter of minutes. Satan teaches Plimo that even though someone believes that he is constructing an impeccable reality within his own walls, no one is exempt from the visit of evil, just when it is least expected. It is only in a dimension removed from earthly existence that one can be immune to this threat. In other words, no one is exempt from a visit like the one Plimo received. Even when everything seems to be bright and sparkling and you trust that this is the preparation necessary to face the Day of Judgment, the true preparation seems to be somewhere else. You're not prepared by shutting the doors of your house to get your soul ready if you can't leave them open to face reality, which is perhaps less pretty but at the same time is more urgent. Plimo thought that one could be ready for Yom Kippur and did not remember that in the meantime there were others whose daily and everyday reality was a fast, so his own was not going to be sufficient.

