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**A Parsha Weekly by the Friedman Kollel  
of Metropolitan Washington**

**Parshas Chukas  
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## **What Makes an Angel?**

**By Rabbi Elyakim Milikosky, Director of Community Learning  
and Rabbi Eliezer Lachman, Rosh HaKollel**

In this week's parsha we read the story of how Moshe sinned, and of the punishment that he received that he was not able to enter the land of Israel. Moshe, the greatest of men, has shown that he too is human and, as the verse in Koheles (7:20) states, "There is no man so righteous on earth that he does only good and never sins."

It is fascinating, however, that in the very next section, the Torah teaches that Moshe was as an angel. It relates that when the Jewish people approached the land of Edom, Moshe sent the Edomites a message, in which he stated that God sent an angel to take the Jews out of Egypt (20:16). Rashi, citing the Sages (Vayikra Rabbah 1:1 and elsewhere), explains that the term "angel" refers to Moshe, for prophets are considered to be as angels. Why does the Torah choose to inform us of the exalted, angelic nature of Moshe in the very shadow of his all too human sin?

Evidently, being considered as an angel does not mean that one never sins. What, then, does it mean?

The Hebrew word for angel, "malach," literally means agent or messenger. Angels are called "malachim" because they carry out the will of God totally, without any changes or diversions. Indeed, an individual angel's name is determined by his God-given mission (Rashi, Bereishis 32:30), because the mission is his very essence. An angel has no sense of self other than as the one who performs a specific mission.

The Gemara stipulates that a teacher of Torah must be like an angel. "If the teacher resembles an angel of Hashem, Master of Legions, people may seek Torah instruction from his mouth; but if not, then they may not seek Torah from his mouth" (Chagigah 15B). Part of the lesson the Rabbis are conveying is that a teacher of Torah must be selflessly devoted to the students

and to his mission of teaching them. He must teach whatever information or skills they need, at whatever level they are on, and dedicate himself tirelessly to developing the proper methodologies to accomplish these ends most effectively. This often involves the teacher sacrificing his own personal and intellectual growth for the sake of his students. When this happens, the teacher of Torah does not regret his loss, because like an angel, he identifies his essential sense of self with his mission of teaching.

With this understanding of the angelic nature of Torah teachers, Moshe's reference to himself as an angel after he stumbled is easy to comprehend. As the Torah teacher par excellence of the Jewish people, Moshe certainly had the qualities described above. Chasam Sofer goes as far as to claim that it pained Moshe so much that God did not permit him to teach others the secret understandings of the law of the Red Cow (see Bamidbar Rabbah 19:6), that he would rather have not learned them himself, despite the spiritual ecstasy he received from them! Indeed, the sin of Moshe can be properly understood only once his angel-like character is appreciated. As the verse states, Moshe was punished so severely because he did not sanctify God in the eyes of the Jewish people (Bamidbar 20:13; Devarim 25:51); this implies that his relatively small failing reached epic proportions only because the Jewish people observed it and, fully cognizant of Moshe's identity as the quintessential teacher, derived from his failing a negative impression (see Rambam, Shemoneh Perakim 4; Ramban here and Kli Yakar, Devarim 1:37). Moshe's sin is not the sin of a regular person, but of a truly angel-like teacher of Torah.

A human "angel," according to the Torah, is not one who never sins, but one who has given his self over to the mission of teaching and helping others. He is not at all concerned with personal gain, and the only personal growth that matters to him is that which helps him fulfill his mission.

## About the Friedman Kollel

The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel, located in Olney, Maryland, offers learning opportunities for Jews of all backgrounds. These include one-on-one chavrusas, public lectures and classes for men and women, as well as after-school structured learning for public school teens. The Kollel operates under the leadership of Rabbi Eliezer Lachman and Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky. For more information or to sponsor an upcoming Capital Torah, please contact Rabbi Elyakim Milikowsky at [FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org](mailto:FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org).

### The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel of Metropolitan Washington

18318 Georgia Avenue \* Olney, Maryland 20832  
[FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org](mailto:FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org)

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Samuel & Zehava Friedman Kollel of Metropolitan Washington | 18318 Georgia Ave. | Olney | MD | 20832