

Lashes Of Fire: A Talmudic Metaphor For Power

1. Tosefta Hagigah 2:3-4

Four entered the orchard. One gazed and perished, one gazed and was smitten, one gazed and cut the shoots, and one went up whole and came down whole. Ben Azzai gazed and perished. Concerning him (Psalm 116:15) says, *The death of his faithful ones is grievous in the Lord's sight*. Ben Zoma gazed and was smitten. Concerning him (Proverbs 25:16) says: *If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, or else, having too much, you will vomit it*. Aher gazed and cut the shoots. Concerning him (Ecclesiastes 5:5) says: *Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin*. R. Akiba went up whole and came down whole. Concerning him (Song of Songs 1:4) says: *Draw me up after you, let us run....*

2. Bavli Hagigah 15a

Aher gazed and cut the shoots. About whom (Ecclesiastes 5:5) says: *Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin*. How so? He saw that permission was granted to Metatron to sit and write the merits of Israel. [Aher] said: It is taught [as a tradition] that "on high there is no sitting and no competition, and no back, and no weariness." Perhaps, G-d forbid, there are two divinities! They kicked Metatron out, and hit him with sixty *pulsei* *d'nura*. They said to him: Why did you not rise before him when you saw him? Permission was [then] given to him to strike out the merits of Aher. Bat Kol went forth [quoting Jeremiah 3:22]: *Return, you faithless children* except Aher. [Consequently Aher] said: Since that man has been driven from the world to come let him go forth and enjoy this world! So Aher went into evil culture. He went out, found a sex-worker and propositioned her. She said to him: Aren't you Elisha b. Abuyah? He tore a radish out of its bed on Shabbat and gave it to her. She said: He must be another [Aher].

3. 3 Enoch 16:1-5 (§20)

Rabbi Ishmael said to me: The angel Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, the glory of highest heaven, said to me: At first I was sitting on a great throne at the door of the seventh palace, and I judged all the denizens of the heights, the familia of the Omnipresent, on the authority of the Holy One, blessed be he.

¹ Ecclesiastes 5:5

Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin; and do not say, before the angel, that it was an error; why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands?

² Jeremiah 3:22

Return, you faithless children, and I will heal your faithlessness. Behold, we come to you; for you are the Lord our God.

I assigned greatness, royalty, rank, sovereignty, glory, praise, diadem, crown, and honour to all the Princes of Kingdoms, when I sat in the heavenly court. The Princes of Kingdoms stood beside me, to my right and to my left, by authority of the Holy One, blessed be he. But when Aher came to behold the vision of the Merkabah and set eyes on me, he was afraid and trembled before me. His soul was alarmed to the point of leaving him because of his fear, dread and terror of me, when he saw me seated upon a throne like a king, with ministering angels standing beside me like servants, and all the Princes of Kingdoms crowned with crowns surrounding me. Then he opened his mouth and said: "There are indeed two powers in heaven!" Immediately a heavenly voice came out from the presence of the Shekhinah and said: "Return, backsliding children—except for Aher!" Then 'Anafi'el YHWH, the honoured, glorified, beloved, wonderful, terrible, and dreadful Prince came at the dispatch of the Holy One, blessed be he, and struck me with sixty *Pulsaot shel Or* and made me stand upon my feet. והעמידני על רגלי.

4. Tosafot to Hagigah 15a

"and hit him with sixty *pulsei d'nura*" - To make known that Metatron has no more ability than any other [angel].

5. Shmuel Eliezer HaLevi Eidels (1555 – 1631) "Maharsha, *Chiddushei Aggadot*" to Hagigah 15a

And this is how the Talmud should be understood: What is the reason that they hit him? To dispel an incorrect assumption, and they asked [Metatron], "when you saw him..." For if he had risen before him, they would not have had to make known to [Aher] that Metatron has no more ability than any other [angel]." but now that you did not rise before him you caused him to err and think that there are two divinities. And in order to expel [this] from Aher's mind they hit Metatron "To make known to to [Aher] that Metatron has no more ability...." However, he did not stop thinking this bad thing

6. Daniel Boyarin, "*Beyond Judaism: Metatron & the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism*" JSJ 41 (2010) 348-353

These two texts are clearly closely related. Most scholars from Urbach to Alexander to Goshen-Gottstein make the 3 Enoch version dependent on the Talmudic story, while a few dissent. I will file a brief here for the dissent. The Enoch version, which is coherent and intelligible, is the source for the talmudic version which is not... One would have to assume that an incomprehensible text led to an incoherent one and out of the incoherent one, a brilliant redactor or rewriter produced the powerful coherent narrative of 3 Enoch. I propose rather that that perfectly coherent and powerful narrative that we find in 3 Enoch (without claiming necessarily that this is its original home) was the earlier form of this narrative, distorted in all of the recensions of the Talmud for a particular rabbinic ecclesiastical reason... I suggest, therefore, that it was the combination of sitting, suggesting the enthronement, and authority or sovereignty to sit and judge that is represented as both Aher's mistake, bringing the talmudic text very very—and crucially—close to the 3 Enoch version, in which it is the fact of Metatron's enthronement which leads to the idea of Two Sovereignties... the whipping of Metatron is not a punishment of the angel but a demonstration to Aher that Metatron is not an independent power but a subordinate one.

7. Bavli Bava Metzia 85b (MS Hamburg 165)

Elijah used to come to Rabbi's study session daily. One day, which happened to be *Rosh Hodesh*, he was late. When [Elijah finally] came, [Rabbi] asked him, "Why were you late today?" He said, "[Because I had to] awaken Abraham, wash his hands, and [make him] pray and protect him, so too for Isaac and Jacob." "Why not wake them all at once?"

"I thought they might be so strong in prayer and and bring the Messiah too soon." "Is there anyone in this mold in this world?" "There is Rabbi Hiyya and his sons." Rabbi proclaimed a fast, and made R. Hiyya and his sons pray in front of the ark. They exclaimed, "He causes the wind to blow" and a wind blew; they said, "He causes the rain to fall" Rain descended. When he was about to mention, "He raises the dead," they said in the vault of heaven "Who has revealed this thing!" They said "Elijah." They brought him out and hit him with sixty **Pulsei D'nura**. He went, disguised himself as a bear, entered among [the prayer group] and scattered them.

8. Bavli Yoma 77a

Hana bar Bizna said in the name of R. Simeon the Pious: Were it not for the fact that the coals of the hand of the cherub became cold [in the process of coming] into the hands of Gavriel, there would not have been anyone to remain escape from the "enemies of Israel," for it is written [in Ezekiel 9:11]: *And, behold, the man clothed with linen, who had the ink well by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as you have commanded me.* R. Johanan said: at that moment Gavriel was led out behind the curtain and received sixty **Pulsei D'nura**. They said to him: If you had not executed the command at all, well, you simply would not have executed it. But since you did execute it, why did you not do as you were commanded? Furthermore: Don't possess the Rabbinic tradition that: "One brings no report about mischief." So Dubiel, the guardian angel of the Persians, was brought in and put in his place, and he officiated for twenty-one days. This is what is written [in Daniel 10:13]: *But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days; but lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I was left over there beside the kings of Persia.*

9. Kallah Rabati 2:9

Children receive the face of the shekhinah, as it is said, "seed shall serve him" (Ps. 22:31). It was asked of them, "[Can children] atone for their parents sins, or not?" Come hear: R Akiva went down to "that place." He found a certain man who was carrying a burden on his shoulders, and he could not manage it, and was crying out and sighing. [R. Akiva] said to him, "What was your deed [that you received this punishment]?" He said to him, "I did not leave a single sin that I did not commit in that world, and now there are guards on us, and they do not let me rest. R. Akiva said to him, "Did you leave behind a son?" He said to him, "On your life, don't ask me [questions]! For I am afraid of the angels who lash me with **Pulsei D'nura**, for they say to me, "why don't you hurry up!" [R. Akiva] said to him, "Tell me what [next generation] you have passed on. He said to him, "A pregnant woman."

איתתא מעברתא

¹ Ezekiel 9:11

And, behold, the man clothed with linen, who had the ink well by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as you have commanded me.

² Daniel 10:13

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty one days; but, behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

R. Akiva entered that city. He said to [the people of the town], "Where is the son of So-and-So?" They said to him, "May his memory be obliterated; may his bones be crushed (into dust)." He said to them, "Why?" They said to him, "He was a bandit who consumed people and brings strife to humanity. And not only that, but he had sex with a woman who was betrothed to someone else, on the Day of Atonement." [R. Akiva] went to [the man's] house. He found [the man's] wife pregnant. He watched over her until she had given birth. He went and circumcised [the baby]. When [the baby] had grown up [R. Akiva] set him up in the synagogue to bless [him?] in the congregation. After a few days, R. Akiva went [back] to that place [i.e., Hell]. [The man] greeted [R. Akiva], "May your mind rest, for you have rested mine."

10. Bavli Bava Metzia 47a (MS Hamburg 165)

How is *kinyan* done? Rab said: With the object of the receiver; for the receiver wishes the bestower to take possession, so that he [the latter] in his turn may determine to give him possession. Levi said: With the object of the giver, as will be explained below.

בכליו של מקנה כדבענן למימר קמן
R. Huna of Diskarta said to Rava: Now, according to Levi, who maintained that it is with the object of the giver, one will be able to acquire land in virtue of a garment, which is tantamount to secured property being acquired along with unsecured, whereas we learned the reverse [in Mishnah Kiddushin 1:5]: *Property that does not serve as a guarantee can be acquired with property that serves as a guarantee* - Said he to him: Were Levi here, he would have smitten you with *pulsei d'nura*! Do you really think that the garment gives him possession? [No Way!] It is in consideration of the pleasure he [the giver] experiences in that the receiver accepts it from him, he wholeheartedly transfers it to him.

11. Maimonides - Laws of Idolatry 11:4

Similarly, people who set up signs for themselves [saying] "if such and such should happen I will do a certain thing, but if it should not happen, I will not do it," as Eliezer, the servant of Abraham did, and similar things- this is forbidden.

12. Abraham ben David (1125 – 1198) Hasagot to Laws of Idolatry 11:4

וכן המשים לעצמו סימנים אם יארע לו כך וכך "Similarly, people who set up signs for themselves [saying] 'if such and such should happen...' But I say this is a big mistake for this is certainly permitted, and maybe this is what tripped him up, for he assumed that divination is the kind of thing that Eliezer and Yonatan did, and he assumed [incorrectly] that this is about that which is forbidden. But this is not so. Rather, [any other kind of divination] isn't worth relying on, and one should not ascribe sins to the righteous, and if they were around they would hit [Rambam] with *Pulsei d'Nura* on his face.

¹ Mishnah Kiddushin 1:5

Property that serves as a guarantee, [i.e., land or other items that are fixed in the earth] can be acquired by money, by document, or by taking possession of it. Property that does not serve as a guarantee, [i.e. movable property], can be acquired only by pulling. Property that does not serve as a guarantee can be acquired with property that serves as a guarantee by money, by a document, or by possession And binds the property that serves as a guarantee to take an oath concerning all of them.