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Angel of Whom?

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Angel of Whom?

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here. Ever this day, be at my side to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

As a child, I barely understood these words: I only identified with them. I knew nothing of angels or guardians, and I certainly knew little of this almighty God. But every night, I would methodically take off my socks, right, then left, slowly climb up my great big red bed frame—as a toddler, it was much like scaling the mast of a great ship—crawl into the soft embrace of my comforter, clasp my uncalloused hands, stare into the vast mystery of darkness before me, and whisper to my unseen angel. I barely understood these words, but for some reason, I knew that saying them each night before I slept was a part of Garrett, that even if the meaning of the words never mattered to me, the medium did.

So, when I first grew and changed and explored and discovered and won and lost and fought and loved, I was not distraught when the meaning behind this prayer morphed and evolved. Instead, I found it fun to try and put a face to this God and a name to my guardian. Who was He? Why did He make the sky that way? Did He really control everything? The questions began innocent enough, but as I grew more mature, my questions became more volatile. Why did He let bad things happen? Did He let them happen or *make* them happen? Why did He create

hate, death, famine, war, floods, cancer, plague, genocide? As I asked these questions, I lost touch with this God, took a step away from my faith, and instead began to challenge everything prolifically. In fact, I began to believe this practice of inquiry was my new faith, and I was devout in this ideology. Every day, I struck out to turn over stones, challenge the questions themselves. I lived to inquire. Despite my questioning, however, I never stopped saying my prayer each night, odd as that seems, and to this day I am plagued with a dilemma: is it wrong that I question everything, God especially, and still say this sacred prayer?

With no clear answer before me, I seek guidance in the words of others. Perhaps their faith will restore mine and encourage me to find God, or maybe I will realize I cannot find Him. So, I turn to Job, the “innocent, upright, and God-fearing” man who is unrivaled in his commitment to the Lord, and Socrates, wisdom’s martyr who would “much prefer to die” asking questions than sacrifice his desire for knowledge (Job 1:5, Socrates 93). Each of these philosophers is an extreme living inside me, and by exploring the conflict between Job and Socrates I can find a more holistic solution to my dilemma. Job and Socrates would say hold to my faith or question everything, respectively encouraging one or the other, yet neither of these answers are fulfilling. Instead, I think that the solution to my dilemma involves both poking holes in the conventional wisdom of reality and holding on to some of my irrational practices: I should question my faith but allow myself to hold personal meaning in my prayer.

Correspondingly, the story of Job suggests that, were I to consult him, he would instruct me to never abandon my God no matter how unfair and indignant his actions may seem; he would also assure me that when others condemn my belief I must stick to it. I have grown up questioning His will. Moreover, I have questioned His existence and the nature of it. But, I have

challenged these foundations for reasons that pale in comparison to the suffering that Job endured under the wrath of Yahweh. My faith folded at the mere mention of tragedy, while Job's faith stood fast and endured calamity and catastrophe. His wealth, family, and health were all stricken down by Yahweh, yet still he refused to "curse God and die." (Job 1:1-2:10) Why is this? Job himself curses the day he was born, cries out that he should have "died inside the womb," and practically accuses Yahweh of punishing him for no reason (Job 3:59, 7:68-69), but, in action, he still is submissive to the will of God. Initially, it is confusing to me that a man would be so committed to such an unjust Lord. The story continues to be resolved happily, and God rewards Job for his piety and devotion with a new family and estate and livestock; in the end, God is good and just for testing Job. The resolution? Commitment to God brings rewards, and abandoning Him does not.

But how does this guide me in my dilemma? I have asserted that I should question my faith, and keep my prayer, but Job would say that questioning my faith is heinous. I should clarify. It is true, that even Job desires "that Shaddai answer [him]" and somehow justify the punishments that he receives despite his innocence, but he never forsakes this cruel God: Job, like me, has questions but, unlike me, accepts those questions unanswered and holds true to his belief. Thus, what provides insight on my dilemma is not Job's commitment to God per se, but his unwavering stance on what he believes is right. Essentially, Job holds onto something because he *feels* it is right, just as I hold to my angel, and would tell me that because I feel that my prayer is right, I must not let it go.

It may be a little ironic that I use Job's unyielding devotion to God to protect my lack thereof, but we indeed share commonalities. For instance, Job is accused by Eliphaz, Bildad, and

Zophar of harboring objects gained “through crime,” of being the “wicked man,” (Job 11:15, 15:20), but Job resists these assailants and holds to his faith. I too face similar challenges, and my reaction to them mirrors that of Job. People constantly criticize the fluidity of my faith and question how I can have any passion for something so amorphous. But I, like Job, inform them that “I too have a mind” and have the ability to construct my own rational perception of the cosmos, which is no less valid than theirs (Job 12:1). Therefore, Job’s predicament can perhaps etch out guidelines for defense of my own mindset, and his advice, while he probably would not be too keen on my disconnect from God, would instruct me to stick to my guns in the face of opposition: embrace my prayer as long as I *feel* it is right.

While very different from Job, Socrates, in all his secular glory, would also assure me that my questioning is justified; this practice is only acceptable, however, if I recognize that I hold no true wisdom. Alas, I am presented with the seemingly insurmountable task of corralling the vast teachings of Socrates into one conical funnel, producing from that concentrate one uniform hypothesis, and tethering that suggestion to my situation in a way that sheds some light on my crisis of religious confidence. Surely, this is too daunting of a challenge, for between Socrates and I “neither of us knows anything noble and good” and certainly cannot defend our circular cross-examinations of the world (Socrates 70). I, of course, use the characterization of this task, not only as a light jest, but as an example of Socrates’ justification of his comparative wisdom. To Socrates, it is ignorance that grants wisdom, and his recognition of the little knowledge he possesses justifies his constant “seeking” and “investigating” of the truth (Socrates 72). For this reason, I believe that if I were to be counseled by Socrates, he would refer to me as one of his true “judges” who votes him innocent because I too see no real knowledge in myself. I may read all day about history, and study all the world, but I have no better hope of guessing the

next minute than one who tills her field (Socrates 94). Ergo, I question not because I know enough to “win” an argument, but because I truly know very almost nothing and seek to learn, and Socrates would praise this practice.

However, I am yet again cornered in the justification of my vestigial prayer. Socrates would doubtlessly support my trial of God, but would he encourage me to act in a way that is potentially irrational? To be honest, probably not. This great philosopher’s entire foundation was structured on logos and the elimination of irrational thinking. But if he rejected my nonsensical prayer, I would provide the master of questions with the contemporary predicament that my situation illuminates: if it brings me comfort, and provides no harm, and I recognize the possible hypocrisy of this prayer, then is there a good reason I shouldn’t pray?

And so, I have recognized the teachings of Job and Socrates, both wise men in their own right, and they have shaped my psyche. And maybe it is strong-headed and foolhardy to use both teachings to confirm and defend my current belief, but isn’t life just our interpretation of this infinite cosmos? How else are we supposed to digest great teachings and ideas without, to some degree, compacting them as to fit who we are? In truth, I may have stretched each of these wise men’s words, but that’s why the words are there. They provoke, they challenge, and they are meant to be invoked, to be challenged. In the end it all may seem like poppycock, like there is a clear right and wrong in these teachings and that I am defiling them. But this is how I want to live my life. I want to live in a contradictory fashion because it forces me to challenge my thoughts and the thoughts of others. And so I will question, and I will pray:

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God’s love commits me here. Ever this day, be at my side to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.