

## Biblical Perspectives on What Makes us Human Part V

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

The moral approach such as the Ramchal and Rav Hirsh believe that man does not rise by virtue of his rational capacity but by his free will. His choices are not necessarily based on reason but on his desires. His intelligence has no autonomy and is enslaved to his physical needs and wants. But at the same time, he has free will which enhances the value of the good he does. Free choice gives him ownership of his behavior and the capability of rising to the level of *ha'adam*, a level attained only by the angels. As long as he is alive, man is in perpetual conflict between the body and its desires, and the soul, the source of reason.

But among the later *Baalei Mussar* such as the Saba of Slabodoka and Rav Chaim Volozhiner and some of the masters of *Chassidut* such as the Sefas Emes, there was the concept of *tiferet ha'adam*- the beauty of the human being. There were Roshei Yeshiva in Volozhin who insisted that Torah scholars must have stature and dignity and walk and dress that way. They quoted the Chazal that says that a *talmid chacham* with a stain on his garment is worthy of the worst punishment. Man must respect both his body and soul and believe that they can work in unison and that is his greatness.

Kohelet asks the question- What is the difference between man and beast? King Shlomo answers, "Ayin-nothing." As this one dies, that one dies and decomposes. The Sefas Emes reads it differently. What differentiates them is the ability to say, "*Ayin-no*." If someone holds a gun to your head and says, "Kill that man," you have the option of saying no even at the cost of your life.

Kohelet underscores this when it ends with the words, "*Elokim yireh v'et mitzvotav shamar ki zeh kol ha'adam* -Stand in awe of Hashem, keep his *mitzvot*, for that is all man is." The body's sanctity, that which makes it holy, is dependent on the choices man makes.

*Chassidut* teaches that even eating can be made into a service to Hashem. It's not just fasting and denial it's how one eats.

We say in the prayer of *Unesane Tokef*- "*Adam yesodo me'afar v'sofe l'afar mashal k'cheres hanishbar*-Man's beginning was earth and his end is earth...." His brief time here is nothing but shattered earthenware, a fading cloud, a puff of air. And yet he was created by the Almighty and dares to address Him and He addresses him and asks him to do something here on earth. Man has value. He was fashioned by the Creator Himself.

Rav Soloveichik depicts the human being as swinging like a pendulum between two poles. Man is a dialectical being. A human schism runs through his personality. But it is not due to his rebellion against his maker. The Judaic view posits that the schism is willed by Hashem as the source of man's greatness. It's His answer to the angels who ask-Why would you make man *kulo sheker*-completely false. Although Man has a *yetzer hara*, he has a capacity to override it. He has the ability to say no to evil and yes to good. He can be starving and give his last piece of bread to another.

This capacity makes him a *tzelem Elokim*-fashioned in the image of Hashem. Man is a great and creative being, torn by conflict and always in a state of ontological tenseness and perplexity.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner said, "Man can shake not only the foundations of this earth, but he can bring down the heavens to earth. Maybe that is why after Hashem created Adam he did not say it was good, because whether man will be good or evil is entirely dependent on him. He is free to choose one way or the other. And perhaps when Hashem said, "*Naaseh adam*-Let us make man," He was talking to man himself.

## Introduction to the Book of Mishlei Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah (Heller) Gottlieb

*Chochmah* asks the question- What is it? What does it mean? It's analogous to vision. As soon as you see something, you interpret it. For example, your mind will interpret the shape and color of a person into a person, not a shapeless blob. *Binah* is analyzing something in comparison to other things and thinking what it might say to you.

*Binah* has several dimensions. There's height which is questioning what you've seen and absorbed and asking where it's going. For example, if you see a person, you'll automatically ask yourself- Where's her presence in this room going? What is she here for? There's width which is asking-Who is she? What are all of the segments of her life that one might know about her? And there's depth. Thus, it says in *Gemara* that *binah* is, "*L'havin*

*daver m'toch davar*-To understand one thing from another." It's the something in the midst of something else. You can see the something that helps you really understand. When you say, "She can't hear anything from anybody," what you are saying is, "She is unwilling to understand." A person has to want *chochma* and *mussar* and through that they will be able to understand *binah*.

King Shlomo tells us that the result of having *binah* is a mind that's willing to hear and a heart that's willing to accept *mussar*. It's the ability to take a *mussar* haskel. Taking doesn't mean physically, but knowing it and making it yours. When you take something in, it becomes you. If you eat a cheese sandwich, you will never be able to extract it again. It becomes a part of you. If you really learn, observe, and understand, then it will become

part of you. Every so often, you might encounter people who have done this. The Chofetz Chaim said about himself that he didn't start off as he ended off. He heard and integrated and it became him.

Think about your best trait. Good traits can be used in many different ways. If you wanted to use the trait in the way that's most perfect, you would have to ask yourself, "What is the most perfect way to use this trait?" That's *chochma*. Noticing that you're not always using it perfectly because there's a lot of space, depth, and direction is *binah*. Being willing to say, "I have to make a turn on this road, this is not taking me where I need to go," is *mussar*. If you actually do this and act on it, you can become a different person.

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If you were to look at a newborn cow, you could probably predict its basic life story. It could eat this much and have this many number of cows, but it's basically going to stay a cow with limited possibilities. If you look at a new born baby, nobody can predict what he will become. To use the Maharal's words, "We birth ourselves." In the request for understanding knowledge in *shemone esrei*, we ask for *haskel*-the ability to take the mental process that's you and bring it to fruition concretely. You have to take the *mussar* of *haskel*, otherwise it remains

external. And it will give you direction towards *tzedek*, *mishpat*, and *meisharim*.

Rashi says *tzedek* is *tzedaka b'mamono*-giving charity. If you really understand life, you'll want justice. And justice is achieved through money. Hashem purposely made a world in which goods are maldistributed so we could be His partner in fulfilling His vision through *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* in Hebrew is never called benevolence or *chesed*. It's called justice. Hashem lets you even the scales. Your *chochma* will ask -What is being maldistributed? Your *binah*

will tell you what maldistribution does. It creates anger and bitterness or generosity, empathy, and unity. The depth is you become more like Hashem and from there you make it you, which becomes *mussar haskil*, the way you live. If you live with *tzedakah*, you instinctively look at need and seek ways to help.

Why is financial *tzedaka* so important? You've worked for it and earned it. Therefore, when you give, you are in effect giving a part of you.

## Shir Shel Yom: Yom Shishi Part V

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Rav Tzadok Hakohen teaches that in a way every Jew is like a king, created with unique capabilities that only he possesses. When a person feels he has something that others don't, it can give him the illusion that he's above them. Everything in creation is an expression of Hashem's sovereignty. Whatever a person does comes from the Almighty. It is He who gives him the ability to accomplish great things. When a person recognizes this, he becomes filled with feelings of gratitude to Hashem for all His kindness.

The Vilna Gaon gives us a different understanding of the song of the day. Each of the six days correspond to the 6000 years that the world will exist before Mashiach comes. The seventh day represents the World To Come and the era of redemption. The process that mankind traverses through history is also the individual's journey. In the first thousand years, Hashem in his kindness

bestowed unimaginable goodness upon creation. Although there were changes after the sin of Adam, the Midrashim depict an era much like Gan Eden. There was no sickness, the weather was constantly spring like... During the second stage, "*Nivchar Har Hamoriah V'Yerushalaim*-Mt. Moriah and Jerusalem were chosen." The people enjoyed much blessing from Hashem but many of them did not utilize it properly. Therefore, Hashem gave over the mission of achieving the purpose of creation to His chosen nation, *Klal Yisrael*. During the third thousand years, the Torah was given to the Jewish people and Hashem rested his Divine Presence in the *Mishkan* and the *Beit Hamikdash*. The fourth thousand years corresponds to *Kel nekamot Hashem*. It was during this period that the *Beit Hamikdash* was destroyed and in the times of Mashiach, Hashem will take revenge upon the nations. On the fifth day, we say, "*Harninu L'Elokim*-Make music to Hashem." Although

the *Beit Hamikdash* is no longer standing, we still have prayer during the fifth thousand years to substitute for sacrifices. "*B'shishi Hashem malach*-on the sixth day Hashem will rule." At the end of the sixth millennium, *Mashiach* will come. The seventh day begins with "*Mizmor shir*-A song with musical accompaniment." We will thank Hashem for all the gifts He gave us.

This is also a process every human being must go through. "*Mi yimalel gevuros Hashem*- Who will extol Hashem's strength..." How can we repay Him for all that He has given us? We have to choose the path that leads to righteousness. *Am Yisrael* made the right choices. We have to reinforce it, we have to hold on to the commitment to be the nation who will bring Hashem's Presence into this world. We must continuously sing to Hashem no matter what happens in life. When we will achieve our purpose, then we will merit to reach the level of - *Mizmor shir l'yom ha'Shabbat*.