

Parshat Bereishit: Gathering The Sparks

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

One of the most pivotal events in mankind's history was the sin of Eitz Hadaas. We are all offspring of Adam and Chava and their rise and fall is a model for us. Rashi points out that the stories in the Book of Bereishis are as important for us as the mitzvos of the Torah. In fact the Torah sometimes devotes more space to relating these stories than to some of the mitzvos. This is to teach us, that not only did Hashem create a world and give us a blueprint to live by, but he is personally involved in every facet of our lives.

The Shem Mishmuel examines the story of Eitz Hadas and poses a few questions. After Adam and Chava sinned, Hashem drove them out of Gan Eden to specifically prevent them from eating from the Eitz Hachaim, the Tree of Life. Why was Hashem now concerned about this and how would this counteract the decree of death? In addition, there seems to be a redundancy in the verses which describe Adam's banishment- "Vayishlach Hashem"-Hashem sent him out, and "Viyagresh es ha'adam"-He drove man out. What is the difference between these two terms? Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim poses some additional deeper questions. What was Hashem's plan when he placed Adam in Gan Eden with the Eitz Hadas and tempted him with the snake? What was the role of the Eitz Hachaim? Shem Mishmuel answers that V'yashilacheiu involves physical movement-literally moving out of Gan Eden. However, V'yigarsheiu means a previously existing relationship which was now sundered. Adam was driven out physically from Gan Eden but his prime punishment was geirushen- he was banished from Hashem's presence and his close relationship with Him was severed.

What did Hashem mean for us to do with our lives at the most fundamental level? Kabbalah and Chassidus teach "l'ha'alot et hanetzot"-to gather and elevate the sparks of holiness in this world. According to Kabbalah, the world was created in stages. There were creative steps earlier where Hashem created worlds that collapsed. Our world is the final level of creation and embedded in it are sparks of holiness from previous worlds. The purpose of man is to find these sparks and elevate them. This is how man perfects himself and the world around him. Everything man has accomplished over thousands of years is an improvement of the world at the place Hashem left it. Angels are programmed to see apparent holiness. However, man can see sanctity in impurity. Man is enjoined to discover these secret pockets of holiness. This is his essential mission, to elevate the hidden holy sparks and find the spirituality in every aspect of this world.

Adam and Chava were supposed to develop the spiritual side of Gan Eden. After man was driven out, he was supposed to continue this mission in this world. The Arizal asks, if Adam was in Gan Eden, how was he expected to fix the spirituality in the lower worlds? He explains that if Adam would have remained in Gan Eden, he would have been able to attract the sparks of holiness to himself. However since he failed in his mission in Gan Eden, he had to go out into the world to find these sparks and fix them in their place of origin.

The Shem MiShmuel points out that the mission of the Jewish people is to rectify the sin of Adam. By keeping Torah, we are promised that the Gan Eden level of existence will be restored. There will be a future world which will be like the Gan Eden of Adam. In a sense, the Jewish people reenacted the sin of

Adam. The Jews were able to rectify the sparks of holiness from the Beit Hamikdash in Yerushalayim. However after they sinned, they were forced to travel around the world to find these sparks.

We are challenged by suffering, opulence, and assimilation. Yet we can overcome temptation and focus on developing the moral holy aspects of this world. This is called tikun hanitzot. The Tree of Life- the Eitz Hachaim, signified an awareness of Hashem. The more one is aware of Him, the more one is in touch with the essence of life. Therefore, Hashem forbade man to eat of the Eitz Hachaim after the sin of the Eitz Hadas. Part of man's rectification after sinning was to find the spirituality in his mundane world. The tikkun is accomplished by man who is in a state of geirushin-distant from Hashem. If he would be bound to Hashem-the source of life, he would not be motivated to fix himself. Geirushin – distance, is the source of tikun - rectification. It is a long tortuous road with many ups and downs. The fact that we don't have the Eitz Hachaim pulls us back to our Source. We must find the good in what is otherwise evil, without the help of the Eitz Hachaim.

The Shem Mishmuel writes that we should not look at our challenges as difficulties but as opportunities for growth. Being driven out of Gan Eden was not a punishment, but an opportunity for Adam to climb higher. According to Rabbinic literature, the future Gan Eden will be greater than the one before. The Gan Eden after death is greater than the Gan Eden of Adam because it is the reward that we have earned for passing our tests. In truth, we should rejoice with our challenges because they are opportunities to find the netzotot-hidden sparks.

Parshat Breishit: Yaysh V'Ayin: Being Something

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Torah begins, "In the beginning, Hashem created heaven and earth." The Kedushat Levi notes that this verse establishes a fundamental principle. Everything in the world is an extension of Hashem's will. Not only did Hashem create the world but he continues to renew it every day.

In Shachrit we say, "Yotzer ohr u'borei choshech." He creates light and darkness. Creation is an ongoing process. The world continuously exists by the active will of Hashem. This should elicit two reactions from us. The first: incredible gratitude that at every moment Hashem, out of his infinite chesed, is giving us life. The second: we have no independent existence. We cannot accomplish anything without Hashem giving us the ability to do it. In a sense, we are nothing but the expression of Hashem's will. If a person would internalize this, there would be no place for the yetzer hara and its evil urges. Doing

mitzvot and avoiding sin would become instinctual. This is the concept of ayin, nothingness. Modern society propounds the exact opposite. The yesh, the I, is everything and man has the power to be whatever he chooses to be.

Rav Levi Yitzchak explains that the blessing recited under the chupah, "Asher yatzer et hadam" refers to Hashem as the creator of man in the past tense. Hashem left us to finish the task of self-creation. On the one hand we are ayin and on the other hand we are a yesh. We all have unique qualities and abilities which are meant to be expressed and utilized to affect and change the world. Hashem put Adam into Gan Eden l'avda, to develop it and l'shamra, and to protect it. When a person uses his wisdom guided by the Torah to think creatively, to plan and to dream, then he is a yesh. But if he just follows his physical instincts and lets his desires control him then he is an ayin, he is nothing.

We can manipulate things within nature but we are limited by its laws. However, if a person makes himself into an ayin, submitting His will to Hashem, he can align himself with the Creator, who is above limitation. Then he can rise above physicality and perform miracles.

These two concepts of yesh and ayin are hidden in the letters of Hashem's name. Yud keh is the secret level of Hashem. He is concealed, distant and above nature. Vav heh parallels Hashem in this world. The vav is the connection from the outside world to this world and the heh represents this world. Performing a mitzvah affects not only this world but the hidden world too.

May we merit to become partners with Hashem and to transform this world to the next world with the power of Torah.

Chessed in the Torah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg

The Chofetz Chaim quotes the verse in Shemot, "Vayeitzei el echav vayar b'sivlosam." Moshe went out to his brothers and saw their suffering. Rashi explains, "Nasim einav v'libo li'hivot meitzar aleheim. He directed his eyes and heart to feel their pain." This is midat hachessed, thinking about one's friend's difficulties and challenges and how one can help him. Although Moshe grew up amid the wealth and opulence of Paro's palace, the Torah describes how he went out to his brothers and immediately felt a kinship to them. The first step is caring and feeling connected.

Moshe considered the situation and thought about what he could do to help. The Torah continues to describe how he saw an Egyptian attacking a Jew and how he killed him to save the Jew. Later on when he went to Midyan, he again displayed chesed by saving the daughters of Yitro from the shepherds. The Ramban uses striking language to describe Moshe's kindness and good attributes. He couldn't tolerate injustice. When he saw a Jew hurt, he immediately had to assist him.

The Torah tells us that Moshe was called Moshe – "Ki min hamayim mishisihu." Batya, the daughter of Paro, called him Moshe

because she drew him out of the water. Rav Hirsh asks, according to correct Hebrew grammar Moshe's name should have been mashui (the one who was drawn), in the passive tense. But by giving him the name Moshe, the active form of the verb, she indicated that all his life he should remember that he was drawn out of the water. He was to have a sensitive heart to other people's trouble and be conscious to be a moshe, a deliverer in times of distress. His Hebrew name gave him the constant awareness of his origins and taught him to be an active savior to others in times of need.