



Parshat Bereishet

For the week ending 29 Tishrei 5760
8 & 9 October 1999

Overview

In the beginning, Hashem creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, Hashem rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbos, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava — the Human pair — are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing “sin,” Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain in childbirth. Now begins the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the main subject of world history. Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to Hashem. Hevel gives the finest of his flock, and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain until the birth of Noach. After the death of Sheis, Mankind descends into evil, and Hashem decides that He will blot out Man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noach, finds favor with Hashem.

Insights

A MAN’S WORK

“Hashem G-d took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it” (2:15)

What was Adam’s work? Ostensibly it would appear that Adam was placed in Eden to work and guard the Garden. However, the gender-endings of the two verbs “to work *it*” and “to guard *it*” are both feminine. Garden — *gan* — is a masculine noun. The “it” cannot be referring to the garden.

The work and the guarding that Adam had to do was to work and guard his soul. (Soul, *neshama*, is a feminine noun). How was Adam supposed to work and guard his soul? By fulfilling one simple command. Not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Seems like a simple enough job. G-d places Adam in more than a veritable “garden of Eden.” He puts him in the real Macoy. Adam has just one mitzvah and he can’t even keep that one. What possessed Adam to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil?

Before Adam ate from the fruit, evil existed in the world only in a state of potential. Evil existed outside of Adam. By eating the fruit, Adam ingested evil into himself, thus bringing evil into actuality. But why should Adam have wanted to bring evil into his body? Why take poison?

Adam wanted to serve G-d in the greatest possible way. He reasoned that if his service of G-d consisted of refraining from eating of the fruit when evil was no more than a potential, so to bring the enemy onto his “home ground” and then defeat him would be a much greater way of serving G-d!

Adam’s motivation was selfless. His mistake was fatal. Literally. He and Chava (Eve) brought death into the world. Adam tried to second guess G-d. If G-d

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tells us to do something, He wants us to do *exactly* that, no less and no more.

We can see Adam's mistake from another point of view. The fruit that he was forbidden to eat was not from the "tree of knowledge" as is sometimes misquoted. It was from the "tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil." "Knowledge" in the Torah always connotes connection, conjunction, amalgamation. The union of man and wife is spoken of in terms of "knowledge."

Eating from the tree caused a knowledge, a mixing of Good and Evil. It created a world where Good and Evil became very hard to separate.

Sources:

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Rabbi Mordechai Perlmán

Haftarah: Isaiah 42:5 - 43:10

The Haftarah takes up the Parsha's theme of Creation. It stresses that the Creation was not just a primordial event, but that Hashem creates the world anew at every second. Without this constant re-creation, the world would cease to exist.

Similarly, Hashem did not just create the world and then leave it to its own devices, like winding up a clock. Rather, He involves Himself with the smallest event in creation. The Haftarah also mirrors the creation of Adam (the key player in Hashem's purpose in creating the world) with the role of the Jewish People who are to be the key role-model for the world — *a light unto the nations*.

Just as in the Parsha, Adam sins but is given the opportunity to redeem himself, so the Haftarah describes how the Jewish People falter and sin, and yet, through Hashem's mercy, Israel is never abandoned, for they are the agents of Hashem's original purpose.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU DO

"Hashem desires for the sake of His righteousness that the Torah be made great and glorious." (42:21)

Why are there so many *mitzvos* in the Torah? You've got to do this. You can't do that. Can't a person just think holy thoughts? Why do we have to *do* so many things?

You are what you do. What a person does dictates who he is. G-d gave the Jewish People a multitude of *mitzvos* so that we would be constantly involved in actions of holiness. Through these actions, inevitably we would become holy and deserving of an eternal existence.

It's not enough to think holy thoughts. Holy thoughts are banished by unholy actions. However if a person does *mitzvos* and studies Torah — even if his motivation is self-serving, the mere process of studying the Torah and performing the *mitzvos* will impact on his personality and he will immediately start to change for the better. You become what you do — not what you think.

Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 16