

Breishis

The Sparks After the Fall

A. Hashem is Involved in our Personal Lives and World History

The most dramatic event for humankind occurs in this week's parsha, the sin of the *eitz hadaas*. After they sin, Adam and Chava are driven from Gan Eden. This is a defining event in human history. The Torah wrote it to teach us an important lesson in our sojourn in this world. We are all children of Adam and Chava. Their rise and fall is a model for us as we go through our ups and downs in life.

The first Rashi in *chumash* notes that the stories of Breishis and the rest of the Torah are as important as the *mitzvos* of the Torah. Hashem commanded us through His mitzvos to do various actions and to withhold from other actions. The commandments are the mainstay of the Torah. If the Torah is about laws why are so many stories included in the Torah? We read the stories about Adam, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe and more. There are many stories in the Torah, sometimes more detailed than the *mitzvos*. Rashi explains that the stories teach us that Hashem is involved in human events. He is more than just the creator and lawgiver, he is actively involved in human life. He is part of our everyday life, on the individual level and on the national level.

I remember as a child in New York *davening* in a *chassidische shteeble* filled with Hungarian and Polish refugees. I remember wondering, "Who is Hashem? He is also a member of the shul," I answered. "He is absolutely here in the lives of these people in shul." Over the centuries, the Jewish people have been able to absorb this reality and to live it totally.

When we read the Torah stories, we see Hashem Elokim as a real character, indeed the prime character of the stories. He has conversations with Adam, Noach, the *avos*, Yosef, Moshe and Aharon. He plays a major role. The Torah wants us to make this a living part of ourselves. God is not something abstract. He is not just a lawgiver who gave us a book of do's and don'ts and a Shulchan Aruch. There is a greater important concept of Hashem as a real, living being, involved in our lives and in the history of the world. He is as important as presidents and kings. We have to feel that. This is what Rashi teaches here: Hashem is an important actor in the story.

This is the basis of Sefer Breishis. Rashi illustrates this with his famous first comment. He writes that Hashem created Eretz Yisrael for Bnei Yisrael. The other nations will say, "This land is not yours." But Hashem determines what is right and wrong and who deserves something. Sometimes Hashem plays the role of coach, or judge, or reward giver, or punisher. He is involved in whatever we do. This is why the Jewish people get the land of Israel. Hashem gave it to us through His involvement in human history. He is a participant in the human story.

B. What Could be Wrong With the Eitz Hachaim?

The story of Adam and Chava is the model story. It is the sketch of every *aveira* or good deed that people do. Shem Mishmuel approaches the story with several questions. Adam and Chava were commanded not to eat from *eitz hadaas tov v'ra*. Then they succumbed to the temptation. Hashem said, "I must drive them out of the garden of Eden, for Adam might stretch out his hand and eat from the tree of life. Then he would live forever." Hashem apparently didn't want that to happen. So Hashem then

sent Adam from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. The Torah mentions Adam's banishment from Gan Eden twice. The first time the verse says, “*Va'yishlacheihu migan eden*. He sent him from Gan Eden.” Then at the end of the passage the verse says “*va'yegareshehu*, Hashem drove him out.” What is the difference between these two expressions?

Additionally, why is Hashem so concerned that Adam will eat from the *eitz hachaim*, whereas before he was not? In fact, Hashem never prohibited Adam from eating from the *eitz hachaim*. Simply, we understand that Hashem wanted the punishment of death to work on Adam. If he would eat from the tree of life, it would counteract the punishment. But upon further reflection, if God decreed that Adam should die, how would the Eitz Hachaim be capable of countering the Divine decree?

This story has a lot of symbolism in it. Rambam actually writes in the *Moreh nevuchim* that the story should be interpreted in symbolic ways. What is the deeper meaning of the *eitz hachaim*?

C. Difference between *Gerush* and *Shalach*

Shem Mishmuel explains the difference between sending away, *yishlachehu*, and *va'yegaresh*, driving out of gan Eden. In Chumash, the word *shalach* means simply to send away, a matter of physical movement. Hashem physically moved Adam out of gan Eden

What does *va'yegaresh* mean? In rabbinic literature *geirushin* means divorce. A divorce is not related to any physical distance between husband and wife. Husband and wife can be separated by thousands of miles and they are still married, they do not have a *geirushin*. Alternatively, they could be in the same place, even staying in the same house, and be divorced. The word *geirushin* in rabbinic literature does not refer to physical distance like the word *shalach*. *Garesh* denotes a change in the nature of the relationship. The word *garesh* means to sever the relationship between two people.

The *pasuk* thus says that Hashem did two things to Adam subsequent to his eating from the *eitz hadaas* – *shiluach* and *va'yagresh*. First Hashem physically sent Adam out to the world. Then in a second action, Hashem severed His relationship with Adam. He banished Adam from the formerly close relationship that he had with God. As a husband divorcing his wife, God broke the relationship with Adam.

Shem Mishmuel draws a parallel to this in the story of the *akeida*. Hashem commanded Avraham Avinu to sacrifice his son Yitzchak in a place that He would show him. After three days of traveling, Avraham “saw the *makom*, the place [of the *akeida*] from afar.” The midrash the word *makom* as referring to Hashem. The midrash says that Avraham experienced distance from the *makom*, from Hashem. In this sense he experienced a *geirushin*. Hashem had distanced himself from Avraham. The close relationship with Hashem that Avraham formerly enjoyed wasn't there anymore. God turned away His face and did not answer Avraham. Avraham felt this distance. He had grown used to closeness with God. He was a prophet who was able to engage God in discussion and God responded, as happened during his prayers for the city of Sdom. But during the three days prior to the *akeida* Hashem did not respond to him. In this test Avraham would have to proceed even while experiencing feelings of distance, in a situation of *geirushin*.

Thus, Adam experienced two stages in the downgrading of his relationship with Hashem. First he was

physically driven out from Gan Eden, *shiluach*. More traumatic and more fundamental, Hashem severed Adam's relationship to Him, *geirushin*. Sadly, tragically, Adam's awareness of Hashem's presence greatly diminished.

D. The Purpose of Life – Finding the Holy Sparks

The story of Adam's loss of Gan Eden is fundamental to understanding the purpose of our existence as human beings. Chassidus addresses the fundamental problem of human existence. What is the purpose of life? What does God want of us? What does He want us to do with our lives? We all go through life and we have our challenges. Is there a common fundamental issue that each one of us addresses? Do we all have a common mission of living as a human being? This is the most fundamental question of life, of Chassidus and kabbala, and of the Torah.

Chassidus proposes a fundamental mission, and formulates it with a unique phrase. Our mission as people is to gather and elevate the *nitzotzos hakedusha*, the hidden “sparks of holiness.” Let us explain the nature of these sparks, how they arrived in our world and subsequently were hidden.

According to the story of Parshas Breishis, the world we know today was not created in one instant. Instead creation was a process, comprised of six days of creation. There were stages in the development of the world. According to *kaballa* though, the creation story of the Torah is really only the later part of the story. Rashi too says that the Torah does not start at the beginning of creation. He demonstrates this point linguistically, and he points to details of the story itself. For example, the second verse of the Torah tells us that land already existed in some way, even before the light. On day three when Hashem made the water draw back, the land appeared. It was already there. But we never read about the creation of the land. Rashi thus proves that the creation story does not start at the very beginning.

Also according to *kaballa* there were creative steps that preceded the creation story of Breishis. Hashem created worlds, but they collapsed and ceased to exist. The Torah opens with the creation of the world that we know. Hashem looked at it and said “*tov*, it is good.” That divine approval granted permanence to our universe. It didn't just collapse. In atomic accelerators, some sub-atomic particles appear and then disappear. They are momentary flashes, they are not *tov*. The Ramban in his commentary also explains that *tov* means the world will last and not collapse.

In these earlier stages of creation, sparks of goodness and holiness came into existence. They survived the collapse of their respective worlds, and were subsequently embedded and hidden in the later stages of creation. Our world is the final steady state of creation in which we exist forever. The surviving hidden sparks from the previous universes have made it through into this world. According to the *kaballa* the purpose of man is to find these otherworldly sparks of holiness and raise them up by bringing them into himself. By rejoining the sparks with his holiness, man completes and complements his own holiness. Man's holiness is incomplete. However, as he brings these holy sparks from around the world into himself, he completes his holiness. Man thus finishes the process of Creation that Hashem initiated.

E. La'asos – Creation to be Continued

Let's try to understand this mystical idea in our own language. The Torah says (Breishis 2:1-3) that God created the world in six days. “On the seventh day, God finished creating everything in the world that

he created to make – *la'asos*.” Something in the phrasing of that verse doesn't make sense. Why does the Torah finish the sentence with the word “*la'asos*, to make?” God already created the world in six days. The whole point of Shabbos is that He finished the job. Why does the Torah add on that last word, *la'asos*?

F. Man, the Shaper of the Holy Sparks

God created this world in a number of stages. He placed man in the world on day six of this process. Then God finished what He was doing. But then comes *la'asos*, to do. Apparently, there is still more to do. God said to man, “I am giving you the *tzelem elokim*, the image of God. I am giving you the ability to continue My work as creator. I haven't finished the creation and now you have the opportunity to participate with Me in the act of creation.” Let's understand this.

When God created, He first made things that did not exist before, *ex nihilo*. This is the direct meaning of the word *bara*. But as the creation story unfolds, the Torah switches from using the word *bara* to the word *yatzar*, to shape. God then gave His creation shape, *tzura*.

Man too is a shaper. He takes the materials of the world and forms and shapes them. He is charged “*l'avda ul'shamra*,” to improve the world and to preserve the good in it. After Hashem finished His acts of creation and development, He transferred the responsibility to man to finish the job. This is why we always have improvements in the areas of science, medicine and economics. We are actively developing the world to make it a better place. This is the God-given mission of humankind.

Furthermore, our responsibility to improve the world includes exploring and searching for what is holy in this world. We must search for the holy things of our world, especially for the secret pockets of holiness. Angels, although also creatures of Hashem, are programmed to see holiness only where it is apparent. But they cannot see it where it is not easily seen. Man, though, is different. He is able to see holiness even when it is hidden.

For example, Dovid Hamelech and Shmuel Hanavi surveyed a plain mountain, and there was probably a forest there. Dovid and Shmuel saw beyond its surface. They saw more than a mountain. There they saw a beautiful holy Temple. They brought out the beautiful *kedusha* from a place that seemed like nothing more than an average hill. They built the Beis Hamikdash there as a house for Hashem. Since then, the entire world for thousands of years recognizes this *kedusha*. We can't see it with our physical eyes, but we sense it very strongly. People have the ability to sense *kedusha* even when it is not visible to the naked eye. Our mission is to find the holy sparks in everything in this world, even and especially in places where it is not visible. *Kedusha* is pervasive. It is everywhere, waiting for people to discover it and develop it.

The fundamental challenge of life is to discover the holy in everything, in every person and in every nation. We must always search for the eternal, the God-like, the holy. Whatever we do, physically, socially and economically, should be a part of the holy experience. This is the meaning of *la'asos*. Hashem placed Adam in Gan Eden *l'avda ul'shamra*, to improve it and to protect it. Rashi explains that improving the world means to perform *mitzvos aseï* and protecting the world means refraining from the *mitzvos lo sa'ase*. If man lives a moral life, with positive and negative *mitzvos*, he fulfills his God-given purpose in being a partner to develop the spiritual side of this world. He uncovers the hidden holy sparks in the world.

Hashem gave this mission to Adam and Chava in Gan Eden. They were supposed to nurture the spiritual side of reality and bring it out through their observance of positive and negative commandments. Although Adam was driven out of Gan Eden, he was nonetheless obligated to continue this mission in the world outside of the Garden of Eden

G. Magnetic Holiness

The Ari Hakadosh posed an interesting question. Adam was sent out of Gan Eden and traveled around the world. Wherever man is found, he encounters spiritual and moral challenges. His mission is to develop the spirituality of that place. But if he would have stayed in Gan Eden, how would he have fixed the spirituality of far away places? The Ari answered that if Adam would have remained in Gan Eden, he would have strengthened the *kedusha* there so much that it would have attracted the sparks of holiness from around the world. But because he failed in his mission in Gan Eden he had to travel around the world, searching for and finding *kedusha* in the specific places around the world.

The mission of the Jewish people and of humanity as a whole is to fix the sin of Adam. By keeping Torah we are promised that the Gan Eden level of existence will return. If we keep Torah properly, Mashiach will come and then the stage of Olam Haba will arrive and the Gan Eden style existence will return.

In its national history the Jewish people have in a sense reenacted the whole Gan Eden story. After leaving Egypt we entered Eretz Yisrael and stayed in one place, as Adam originally did in Gan Eden. From the Beis Hamikdash the people could fix the holy parts of the whole world. Non-Jews learned from the model of the Jewish people, even at a long distance, as was done in Shlomo Hamelech's time. You can model the *tzadik* from a distance. Then the *tzadik* is fixing the holy spark from far away.

Today this kabalistic mystical concept is still very real. If we Jewish people would be sitting in Yerushalayim with the Beis Hamikdash, keeping the Torah properly, it would be so simple for the nations of the world to see how we live and to learn and be inspired from our example. We would hook up an internet connection, and stream *shiurim* to the whole world. Mashiach would get on the channel and inspire everyone each day. Every person would then work to discover the holiness in their own life. Hopefully we will see this very soon.

However, the Jewish people sinned. We lost the Beis Hamikdash and left Eretz Yisrael and we traveled the world looking for holy sparks. Wherever we went, we were challenged. In Russia, for example, Jews suffered from hatred, pogroms, and discrimination. The Jews in the United States face a different set of challenges: opulence, wealth and success. They are challenged by being able to do everything that the non Jews do, and fight the associated draw of assimilation.

In every situation we find, we are able to overcome the pressures of the evil side and focus and develop the moral and good side. This is why we are here in this world. Jews in each place have their own challenge and mission. Wherever we are, we must live lives of holiness, with Torah and *mitzvos*. In Israel too this is our job. To come to Israel and then to say, "Now that I'm here, I don't need to keep Torah and *mitzvos*," doesn't make any sense. Israel needs Jewish *mitzvos* just as much as any other place in the world, if not more. Wherever you are, in South Africa, Russia, USA, Israel, or Yerushalayim, there is a pull to the negative and an opportunity to find the positive side. This is called

tikun hanitzotzos, finding and fixing the holy sparks.

H. The Tree of Life – Closeness to God

Now let us return to the Eitz Hachaim. What is the Eitz Hachaim in the story of Gan Eden? Shem Mishmuel suggests it is an awareness of God. The more one is closer to God and aware of Him, the more one has life – because Hashem is life. Here's an intriguing point. Hashem said, "Once man would eat from the Eitz Hadaas, I don't want him to eat from the Eitz Hachaim." What could be wrong with eating from the Eitz Hachaim? It was never prohibited to Adam! However, once man has sinned, he needs to fix the damage caused by his sin. He needs to go find the *nitzotzos hakedusha*, and find the goodness in every situation. Man in his distant *gerushin* state must do the *tikun*, fixing. If God would not drive man away after his sin, man would have no motivation to do *teshuva*. He would still feel connected to Hashem. If that would be the case, why should he fix the sin?

Think about this. It's a very profound idea. Sin is comfortable. The tree whose fruit Adam ate was beautiful, the fruit was luscious and delicious. What drives us to do *teshuva*, and abandon the comfort of sin? The answer is because we miss our closeness with Him, we want to come back to Hashem, we need Him in our life. Without Him we are lost in the jungle of this world. If people are left to their own wits in a world filled with beasts and vicious forces, we are lost. In 1929 when the stock market crashed and many people lost all their money, many people committed suicide. They did not feel that connection to God to keep them strong. We need faith, we need to be close to Hashem and feel our closeness. After sin, we can only find Him through *teshuva*. We must do the *la'asos*, the persistence to do what's right and find the good elements within ourselves and the world.

This is a paradoxical concept. Hashem drives man away, *gerush*, in response to man's sin. He does this as a fundamental motivator in order to arouse in man the desire to do *teshuva*. People desire to be close to Hashem, but they also have a desire to sin. So Hashem drives us away. This moves us to return, and we know that we have to remove the sin in order to reconnect with Hashem. The *gerushin* that drove Adam out of Gan Eden is in fact the source of his future repentance. It is a very long road with ups and downs, climbing and falling. Human history has yet to fully resolve the problem of the first sin. The *gerushin* keeps us motivated to do *teshuva*. This way we raise the holy sparks, we are *ma'aleh nitzotzos*.

This process of *tikun*, of *avoda* and *shmira*, doing what's right and staying away from wrong, is the purpose of existence. Angels don't have this challenge. They are *omdim*, they stand, they do not fall. They can't develop more *kedusha* than what they are created with. By falling, people learn that they can climb again and that they can climb even higher than they were before. This is why the Eitz Hachaim had to be placed off limits. After sinning, man has to search and find God. If man can find God easily, then he will never climb the ladder of spirituality.

I. Failures as Opportunities for Growth

If parents would never punish their child, the child would never learn that doing something wrong upsets his parents. He won't develop properly. Only when the parent gives the child a punishment, takes away a privilege, or says a harsh word, then the child realizes there is relationship that he must care for and preserve. When the relationship is broken or damaged, we have to work to fix it. This a fundamental aspect of growth.

Shem Mishmuel say being driven away from Gan Eden was not a punishment. It was an opportunity for Adam to grow and learn and become greater than he was before.

We have to learn from disasters. We are our responsible to fix them and grow from them. After our trying experiences, we grow. *Sheva yipol tzadik v'kam*. We learn from our mistakes. Shem Mishmuel says we shouldn't look at the challenges that come our way as difficulties and punishments, but rather as opportunities.

According to all rabbinic literature the future Gan Eden will be greater than the original Gan Eden Adam was in. Adam fell, but he did not endure all of the tests that his descendants would experience after him. Shem Mishmuel even says we should have joy through our *nisyonos*, because we are finding more holy *nitzotzos*. The greater the test is, the greater the accomplishment, the greater the reward, the greater the *tikun*, the more we are partners with God in developing this world.

Shem Mishmuel adds an important point for life. There are difficult situations, but they are what makes life interesting. These difficulties are opportunities to rise and show our godliness. We shouldn't give up and complain. And we must never feel that it is helpless and hopeless. Hashem puts us into situations that we can handle. If you are in a tough situation, it means Hashem knows you are capable of pulling out the holy sparks from the situation. This is the purpose of being a child of Adam and Chava. All of us are supposed to climb higher than even before. *Galus* too gives us Jews more energy to accomplish. This explains how the third temple will be even greater than the first two. The great *galus*, with all of its trying troubles and suffering, ironically gives the Jewish people more energy to create the greatest holiness.

We are living now soon after the Holocaust. Our present state is an amazing compliment to the determination of Am Yisrael. We maintain our commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*. We are resettling Israel, even with the opposition of our enemies and their attacks.

Through our determination to do good and to find the good, the right and the holy in every single situation, the whole world will one day learn from us. We will be partners with Hashem in *maaseh breishis*. May we succeed in our holy mission that Hashem has given us!

Question:

1. What is the purpose of the Torah's stories?
2. What are the different meaning of the words *shalach* and *geirush*? What is the difference between them?
3. What is the purpose of life?
4. Explain the concept of the holy sparks.
5. How does sin produce ultimate *tshuva*?

Exercises:

1. For a week, keep a chart of situations you faced, in which you acted in a holy way.
2. For a week, keep a log of things that you did to make the world a better place.