

BEREISHIS

A NEW BEGINNING

At this very moment the world is being created. Each morning we declare in our prayers: “He Who renews, in His goodness, every day, the work of creation.” The trees, the grass, the sky are all being created before our very eyes. God is constantly engaged in the details of our world. Existence is constant only because at every instant He continues to renew it.

If this concept of continual renewal is true for the entire world, it must certainly be true for man – the purpose and crown of the world’s creation. God is involved in a daily, ongoing process of creating us as well. But what does this mean? What implications does our constant creation have on our lives? The verse in *Bereishis* that describes the creation of the first man is the best place to look for an answer.

“And God said, ‘*Na’aseh adam betzalmeinu kidmuseinu*’ (let us make man in our image, as our likeness).”¹ The key to answering our question is in the phrase “*Na’aseh adam* (let us make man)”. To whom is God speaking? We know God is one, singular. How then do we explain the plural language in this phrase? Who is the “us”?

¹ *Bereishis* 1:26.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski writes² that God was speaking to man himself. Every bird, animal and plant are perfect and complete just the way God created them, but man must be involved in completing the process of his own creation. God gave man potential, but man must actualize his own humanity, or he will remain an animal – and an imperfect animal at that. The Divine plan can be realized only with man’s participation.

“*Na’aseh adam*” implies God and man are together in partnership. God is addressing us and saying: *Let us make man together. Only then will we have the ability to create an entity of character. I will not make you perfect from the start. Instead, you will have to work at it; you will have to strive and develop.* This constant development of the self is the essence of the daily re-creation of man.

How can we succeed in this tremendous undertaking of *na’aseh adam* and work together with God to become the best person we can be, perfect in our own unique way?

God in Partnership with Man

The first and most basic level of *na’aseh adam* is a call to each of us to appreciate the privilege of life itself. When we wake up in the morning and feel the breath of life inside us, this is God’s way of reminding us that there is a reason we are being re-created today. The *Talmud* states³ that everyone must feel that “*bishvili nivra ha’olam* (the world was created for me).” Knowing that God, all-knowing and deliberate in action, created and continues to create us, it becomes clear that every individual has been placed in this world with a unique mission. God is clearly investing in man. We

² *Let Us Make Man*, p. 72-75.

³ *Sanhedrin* 37a.

must go through our day with belief in our own purpose and use our abilities to make that day's investment worthwhile; each day we must work to discover or to further our mission.

As we wake up and greet each new day, we would do well to consider the Chafetz Chaim's approach.⁴ On a cold winter morning, we may resist getting up and beginning the day. We would rather stay comfortably under the covers. Yet if one had an appointment to meet the Mayor or the President, no one would consider sleeping in and missing the meeting. Who would delay getting out of bed, even on a frigid, wintry day, and risk missing such a golden opportunity? Every day we are partnered with God to develop ourselves to the maximum. Do we want to be late to our board meeting of creators with President God?

Redirection

Due to the fact that we are human, there are times when we get off course or go in the wrong direction. This is when we need to apply the second level of *na'aseh adam*. When Adam is expelled from the Garden of Eden, he is sent "*mikedem leGan Eden*."⁵ When Kayin is punished for killing Hevel, he is sent to wander, eventually settling in "*kidmas Eden*."⁶ The literal meaning of *kedem* is east, or eastward. East is where the sun rises, with its promise of a new day. The *Kli Yakar* there explains that on a symbolic level, the sun resembles the life of a human being. It rises in the east, continues to rise toward its fullness in the sky and slowly fades again into the west. Life begins in darkness, rises,

⁴ Based on *Mishnah Berurah (Shulchan Aruch 1:1, se'if katan 1)*.

⁵ *Bereishis 3:24*.

⁶ *Bereishis 4:16*.

reaches an apex and sets at its end. When one person murders another, it is as if the killer has perpetrated a premature sunset. Because the perpetrator caused this death, forcing a sun to set in the west before its time, he must go to the other extreme – to the east – to repair his transgression. He must be involved in a process of creation, symbolized by the east.

Both Adam and Kayin were responsible for bringing death into the world. Adam, because of his sin, forced God to make men mortal. Kayin brought his brother's life to a premature end. They both "went east," in the opposite direction of their sin, indicating their correction of their course.

God has built into life the possibility of *teshuvah* (reparation of sins). Without it, we would have no way to take on the new day if we ever erred. Because *teshuvah* exists, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to correct our course. When we have been involved in some wrongdoing, we learn from Adam and Kayin that it is not enough to show regret and ask forgiveness. In order to be a partner in *na'aseh adam*, we must take active corrective measures. If we have sinned by speaking *lashon hara* (harmful speech), for example, we must then use speech in a way that has the opposite effect of *lashon hara* – perhaps by using words to give encouragement, or to wish someone well. Regaining proper orientation on our life's path requires not only remorse, but active correction. We can then re-partner with God in the process of creating ourselves.

Opposing Forces

Along with the proper appreciation for every new day and the tools to correct our missteps, we must know what it is that we are striving to become, what the goal of our personal creation is.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik explores⁷ the nature of man by comparing the two descriptions of man's creation in the beginning of *sefer Bereishis* (book of *Bereishis*). In the first chapter, "God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land and conquer it and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over all the animals that creep upon the land.'"⁸

The second chapter of *Bereishis* gives us a very different description of the same event. The Torah tells us, "Hashem, God, formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. Hashem, God, planted a garden in Eden to the east and there He placed the man He had formed... to cultivate it and to watch it."⁹ The many obvious differences between these two versions of man's creation beg for elucidation. The second chapter provides many more details about man's creation: man being created from the dust of the ground; God breathing into him the "breath of life." We also find that man was created alone, rather than "male and female He created them." Only after God perceives man's loneliness, God says, "*Lo tov heyos ha'adam levado* (it is not good for man to be alone)."¹⁰ Only at that point does God create Chavah from Adam. The charge God gives man is also different: in the first chapter it is to fill and conquer the land, and in the second – to cultivate and watch the garden.

Rabbi Soloveitchik refers to these two accounts of man's creation as "Adam I" and "Adam II." These two accounts, he argues, are meant to establish two prototypes of man. Adam I is

⁷ *Man of Faith in the Modern World*, p. 36.

⁸ *Bereishis* 1:27-28.

⁹ *Bereishis* 2:7-15.

¹⁰ *Bereishis* 2:18.

interested in the practical matters of the world. His question is “how.” **How** does the universe work? **How** do I survive in this physical world? Adam I is told to be master over the world, to “conquer” and “rule” it and its inhabitants. Adam II, on the other hand, is not interested in “how,” but in “why.” **Why** was the world created? Who is it that guides the world, and to whom do I feel such a powerful connection?

Adam I is therefore defined as having been created *betzelem Elokim* (in the image of God), referring to his intellectual attributes, while Adam II is created with the “breath of life,” which suggests a spiritual closeness to God. While Adam I seeks dignity, Adam II seeks holiness. Imagine a scientist and an artist gazing at the same tree. The scientist would examine the tree to know its age, species and other information. The artist would find the colors and texture inspiring and admire its fragrance and the sounds of birds perched in its branches.

Rabbi Soloveitchik explains the creation of woman as a helpmate to man in the same vein. In chapter 1 of *Bereishis*, woman and man are created together: “...male and female He created them.”¹¹ Man and woman are united in facing a sometimes hostile environment. They are partners working together to face life’s challenges. They satisfy each other’s physical needs but do not necessarily develop an emotional bond. In chapter 2, Adam II experiences loneliness and therefore gives a piece of himself in order to create his soul mate. For him, a partner in the realm of the practical is clearly not enough. He desires an emotional and spiritual companion.

Adam I and Adam II, though they seem to have competing worldviews, are not to be understood as separate people. In reality there is only one Adam who contends with the physical aspect of

¹¹ *Bereishis* 1:27.

his nature and his need to work and survive, along with the spiritual aspect of himself and his need to grapple with issues of faith and a relationship with his Creator. There must be a continuous, productive dialogue between man's opposing inclinations, as both realms, the physical and the spiritual, are sanctioned by God and are to be used by man for a positive purpose.

According to these deeper insights into *na'aseh adam*, our mission to create ourselves, our job on this earth, is twofold. *Tzelem Elokim*, our intellectual endowment, pushes us to be productive and creative, to give substantially to the development of the world. At the same time, we should never lose sight of our breath of life: our personal, intimate relationship with God.

Our mission of *na'aseh adam* is to combine Adam I and Adam II in order to make ourselves into complete people. Whether we instinctively tend toward the more rational, or are more spiritually inclined, these dual aspects of man, the practical and spiritual, should be kept in careful balance. Those who are driven to build and produce must never forget their closeness to God. Those who choose to devote their lives to become closer to God must contribute to the world as well. We are all a combination of Adam I and Adam II, striving toward a synthesis between practical productivity and spiritual strivings.

Stable Change

The Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches¹² us yet another dimension of *na'aseh adam*. In addition to the dual forces of intellect and spirit, the human being must contend with another pair of inclinations:

¹² *The Inside Story*, p. 3-12, Rabbi Yanki Tauber.

the drive for commitment versus the drive for exploration. In the Torah, we learn about Adam's three children: Kayin, Hevel and Shes. Kayin kills Hevel out of jealousy and so only Kayin and Shes survive to marry and have children. Generations later, Noach, a descendent of Shes, marries Na'amah, a descendent of Kayin. Noach, Na'ama and their children were the only human beings to survive the flood. Thus, Kayin and Shes, through Noach and Na'amah, are the paternal and maternal ancestors of everyone alive today.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that Kayin and Shes represent two types of people. Kayin's punishment for committing murder is "*na vanad tibeyeh ba'aretz* (you shall wander in the land)."¹³ The Torah provides very little information about Shes, but his name means "to be set" or "to be placed," implying stability and permanence, in contrast to Kayin's volatility.

The Rebbe understood Kayin's wanderlust nature as a symbol of transcendence. Kayin's essence is about desire for change; he is not satisfied staying in one place. Shes, on the other hand, represents stability. Both drives – the impulse to wander, to desire freedom from restraints – and its opposite, the need to be settled – are found in every person. Everyone wants to be productive and to have a place in society. At the same time, we all want to break free of an orderly structure from time to time and let our spirits soar.

Opposite drives, and either one if taken to an extreme can be destructive, yet in their descendants both Kayin and Shes were able to achieve balance. Each had descendants named Chanoch, the root of which means education. Kayin's Chanoch was his son, and Kayin then built a city in his name. Kayin, who began life as a

¹³ *Bereishis* 4:12.

nomad, bore a child, created a settlement, and named them both Chanoch. Chanoch, the son and the city, represent stability, qualities which are opposite to Kayin's nature and that ultimately helped him achieve the balance he needed to repair himself.

Shes's descendant, also named Chanoch, lived a comparatively short life of 365 years. The Torah states: "*Vayishalech Chanoch es haElokim ve'einenu ki lakach oso Elokim* (Chanoch walked along with God and then was no longer, for God had taken him)."¹⁴ Our Sages tell us that Chanoch was indeed righteous. He secluded himself from the world because he felt that the society around him was corrupt and a constant threat to his purity. Chanoch was everything that Shes was not. While Shes represented a life of stability and integration with civilization, Chanoch fled from the material world and sought freedom from the influences of society.

Kayin ultimately found a way to balance his instinctual drive toward rootlessness and instability through his own son, showing that one cannot purely wander and still expect to create a stable relationship with the Creator. Shes's story is similar. His life, established and committed, teaches us the benefits of being settled. The life of his descendant, however, balances the lesson by teaching us that to forever cling to stability leads to a stagnant existence. One cannot be passive if one hopes to move toward God and transcend the ordinary. In partnering with God to re-create ourselves everyday, we are striving for some sublime combination of commitment and exploration, conformity and originality, stability and transcendence.

The Many Facets of Man's Creation

¹⁴ Bereishis 5:24.

The phrase *na'aseh adam* speaks to us on several levels. The very structure of the word *na'aseh*, being plural (*we* will make), implies that God is speaking to us, telling us that He and man are partners and that the job of making the world a better place cannot be done without this collaboration. Each of us receive a renewed mandate every day to complete our own individual purpose, and if we veer off course we can rectify it by going in the other direction (*kedem*), and once again partner up with God. *Na'aseh* also speaks to us of the union of Adam I and Adam II, the unification of intellect and passion. These qualities should not be set in opposition to each other, but integrated in order to achieve an elevated life course. And finally, *na'aseh adam* teaches us about combining the inclination to settle into a productive material routine with the desire to rise above the mundane and live in a spiritual domain. Both forces reside within us and, if synthesized properly, lead to a life of transcendence with focus and grounding.

Our work is to appreciate the God-given opportunity we receive every day. Understanding that we have the power to steer and correct our course, we are called to develop ourselves by unifying the two fundamental aspects inside every human being – something of Heaven and something of Earth.