



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Bereishit 5782

### The Three Faces of Adam

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered October 11, 1969)

**T**he Torah's story of Adam was never meant to be simply the biography of the first human being, a Biblical attempt to satisfy our idle curiosity about our origins. Rather, it is a source of what might be called Biblical anthropology, God's view of man.

It is therefore the stuff of profound interpretation as to the nature of man, from the earliest, brief insights of the Midrash to the latest philosophical dissertations. This morning, I apologize for attempting to introduce such an imposing topic in so brief a time, and will proceed to seek suggestions for three insights, all drawing on the name Adam. For the Torah hints, but never openly states, that the origin of the name is *adamah*, earth or ground, and therefore leaves open the question of the derivation of the name Adam and its significations.

Some distinguished Orientalists and lexicographers, assert that the Hebrew Adam is related to Assyrian *adamu*, to make or produce (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, Hebrew & English Lexicon of the Old Testament). From this derivation, we learn that man's superiority, his charismatic endowment, his spiritual dignity, lies in his technological genius. He is, like his Creator, creative. He was placed in the Garden of Eden *le'avdah u-le'shamrah*, to work it and to guard it, to develop it and improve it. A great scholar, Rabbi Leibele Eger, who became a Hasid of the Rabbi of Kotzk, once returned from a visit to his master and said that one of the three things he learned in Kotzk was: בראשית ברא אלוקים When asked what he meant thereby, he said: I learned that God created only bereshit, only the beginning— man must do all the rest. Man, Adam, must be *adamu*, a maker and producer and creator.

In a remarkable interpretation, the Sages revealed to us the same insight in yet another fashion. We read that when Abraham met the King of Shem after defeating the captors of his nephew Lot, the King, Melchizedek, said to

him: ברוך אברם לאל עליון קונה שמים וארץ, usually translated as: "Blessed be Abram to God the Most High, Possessor (or: Creator, for קונה actually means to make) of Heaven and Earth." The Rabbis, however, maintain that the last phrase, קונה שמים וארץ, refers not to God, but refers back to Abram! Melchizedek blessed Abram who was creator of heaven and earth, to God the Most High. What the Rabbis meant, of course, was that Abraham was the creator of the world in a spiritualized fashion, that is, by virtue of his merit and his righteousness he sustained the world. Today, however, we can give that Rabbinic statement a quite literal turn: man has become the master of earth and heaven as well.<sup>1</sup> With our thrusts into space, we, the successors of Abraham, have extended our hegemony over the heavenly bodies as well as our own globe. Indeed, Rabbi Menachem M. Kasher, in an article which just appeared (Hapardes, Oct. 1969), maintains that landing on the moon was a fulfillment of a prophecy of Isaiah that has to do with the "end of days." Isaiah says that in the times of Messiah וּחִפְרָה הַלְבָנָה, the moon will be embarrassed or ashamed (Is. 24:23). Mankind once worshipped the Moon, then sang about her and admired her — and now has landed men on the Moon, violating her integrity, humiliating her. We have established our mastery of our nearest neighbor.

Hence, by exercising our *adamu* function we enhance science, engineering, and medicine; we build cities, tame nature, and enjoy the benefits of modern life.

However, this is not the totality of man. Were it so, man would be nothing more than a machine with a computer on top. Unlike machines or animals, Adam has the capacity for personal relations. Man is involved not only with things, but with beings; he has not only a brain, but a heart, and this quality derives from the divine "breath of life" that God blew into the nostrils of man (Gen. 2:7).

In blatant disregard of the principles of scientific

linguistics, a famous Talmudic scholar offers a penetrating insight into the nature of man, that is no less valid because of its faulty etymology. Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, the Rabbi of Prague, and known as the author of Noda B'Yehudah, Avers (in his צ"ח) that the Hebrew אדם comes from אדמה, which means, "I shall be like unto." Adam fulfills himself when he achieves *adameh*, when he compares himself to and imitates God, Who is a *chanun, ve-rachum, ve-erekh apayim*, merciful and gracious and patient. *Adameh* therefore spells the dimension of warmth and relatedness.

So man is more than a functionary, than a producer or consumer. He is more than a grocer or mechanic or lawyer or industrialist. He is a man. His net worth may be measured in dollars, but his ultimate and real worth can only be judged in terms of friendships and loves, of influence and good deeds.

There is a common maxim: "You can't take it with you." The Psalmist, however, put it slightly differently: כִּי לֹא בְמוֹתוֹ יִקַּח הַכֹּל "for at his death a man shall not take everything with him" (Ps.49:i8). We do not say that you can't take it with you absolutely; just that you can't take it "all" with you. But there are certain things that you can take along as your portion for the world-to-come: cherished memories, a good reputation, love, good deeds, mitzvot performed. The *adamu* function of man ceases with his last breath; the *adameh* function continues beyond that.

The conflict between the generations — and it is not really between the generations as such as much as between two life styles and philosophies, one established and defensive, the other emerging and militant — can be expressed as the attitude to the balance between *adamu* and *adameh*.

The pragmatic philosophy which made America great — which ideologically funded Western civilization, spurred on science, and gave the impetus to technology — viewed Adam as *adamu*. Man's greatness lies in his creativity, his productivity, his mastery.

The new thinking, however, rejects this role as a major definition of man. It emphasizes not Adam as *adamu* but as *adameh* — man's existential plight, his freedom, his love and his self-expression, his relations with his family, his neighbors, his community — and his integrity. It desires not to build the mute world all around, but the living self within; not to produce but to experience; not to create but to relate. Hence, it views Adam not as *adamu* but as *adameh*.

The lines are being drawn in our times. The established

generation takes a hard line against the revolutionaries, condemns all critics of society and the status quo as "Hippies." And there are times that the established segment of society invites excesses of criticism -- as, for instance, when government announces with a flourish that last week we lost only 64 men in Vietnam — meaning to say, that we are pleased it was so low, but revealing meanwhile its basic orientation: for the purpose of the smooth functioning of the military machine, 64 men are indeed expendable. In the same week, the financial leaders of Government inform us that by a stroke of good fortune and great wisdom, we have achieved a 4% degree of unemployment. Here again, Government indicates that in its attempt to relieve the pressure of inflation for the total population, a certain amount of "inconvenience" is inevitable. But the younger critics do not want to accept this excuse. Perhaps in the system of economics under which we live, a certain amount of unemployment is unavoidable and even necessary. But then, if we look at the problem from the point of view of these downtrodden, miserable, humiliated individuals who are thrown out of jobs, perhaps the whole system of economics should be overthrown. Perhaps all of society is rotten and corrupt if this is all it can do. Perhaps our form of government that allows an involvement in Vietnam which can revel in a death rate of 64 per week should be disbanded.

And the rebels, on their part, are indiscriminate in their rejection of society and its values. They fail to select the enduring values while they reject those that are damaging. They disdain work and productivity, science and technology. They take its advantages for granted, and uncritically condemn the whole philosophy that made these benefits possible.

Obviously, both are right and both are wrong, for both are necessary. *Adamu* alone leads to a hard, depersonalized view, and reduces men to cogs in a wheel. But *adameh* alone results in a society where there are no wheels in which we ought not to be cogs. It means that insofar as civilization is concerned we stagnate, and we must ultimately be defeated by Nature, by illness and storm and all else against which technology is a shield.

So both definitions or faces of Adam are needed, *adamu* and *adameh*.

However, these two are still insufficient. Even with material progress and viable personal relations, man must remain dissatisfied, unhappy, possessed of an inner vacuum. With all this, he still lacks something

transcendent, something holy, something beyond nature and beyond man — something supernatural. With all his achievements, Adam today is haunted by the same question that confronted the first Adam: *ayekah*, “where art thou?” Where are you going, what is the meaning of your life, what is the purpose of it all?

*Adamu* and *adameh* do still not exhaust the meaning of Adam.

For Judaism requires a third dimension, yielding three faces of Adam. It demands yet another facet to the totality of man’s existence.

In a typical, characteristic flight of romantic, speculative philology, which usually has little bearing to the scientific facts, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch maintains that the name Adam derives from the Hebrew word *hadom*, which means the footstool. Thus, Isaiah says in the Name of God, *השמים כסאי והארץ רגלי*, “the Heavens are My throne and the Earth My footstool” (Is.66:1). Or David says, *והשתחוה ליה רגליו כי קדוש הוא*, “Bow down to His footstool, for He is holy” (Ps.99:5).

What does this mean? Man always wants to feel significant and needed, that what he does has meaning and purpose. Therefore Judaism tells us that every man must be a *shaliach*, a messenger or an ambassador. Each of us must feel that we are the *hadom raglav*, the footstool of God, that we carry out His mission, that what we do or are all lead to a higher, divine end. This is not a separate area of life, but an interpretation of the other two: Whether *adamu* or *adameh*, whether at office or at home, whether at factory or with family, I must seek to advance God’s causes by acting as His *hadom*. As technical creator or as a human in relation with others, I must see myself as a footstool of the Lord. Only then can I be sure of avoiding the extremes of becoming hard, a mere producer; or soft, one who revels in ethereal relationships that have no objective worth or enduring value.

## Dying to Know

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z”l

After God creates Adam and places him in the garden of Eden, He tells him that he may eat of all the trees in the garden but he may not eat of the ‘*etz hada’as tov vara*,’ or the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’ He also tells Adam that if he does eat from that tree, then on the day that he eats from it he will surely

Perhaps that’s what the Rabbis of Kabbalah meant when they said that the Patriarchs became *מרכבה להקב”ה*, a chariot or vehicle for the Lord. The righteous man is one who puts his life at God’s disposal, and carries out His causes. Not always do we know in advance what function has been assigned to us — but the discovery and execution of that purpose, that is all of life.

No wonder that Dr. Viktor Frankl, in a great book which I have recommended before and hope still to recommend in the future, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, maintains that psychologically and existentially man needs purpose and meaning in life as much as nourishment and sex and power. It is a fundamental dimension of his being. Man as *hadom*, as a mission-bearer, is God’s ambassador, and it makes *adamu* bearable and *adameh* enduring.

When man explores the *hadom* aspects of his nature, he aspires to be more than human. But without it, he must perforce remain less than human. Man can be commercially and scientifically, domestically and socially, successful if he only pursues the *adamu* quality of his life and enhances the *adameh* dimension; but he remains woefully inadequate if he is ultimately meaningless in all his actions.

So as a people and as individuals, we must recapitulate the story of the first Adam.

Like Adam, we must strive for *adamu*, to transform life into a Garden of Eden. Like Adam, we must attempt to be successful in *adameh*, in our personal relations, in fulfilling our humanity. But again like Adam, that little but powerful voice that unnerved him still pursues us: *ayekah*, where art thou, what meaning does your life have?

And the answer must be forthcoming without hesitation: I, an adam, am ready to become a *hadom*, a footstool of God, and place my life at His service.

Read more at [www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage](http://www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage).

die. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra and others explain that Adam and his wife Chava did not actually die on the day that they ate from the fruit of the tree. Rather, the meaning of God’s warning to Adam is that on the day he would eat from the tree, he would become subject to death, whereas he was originally meant to live forever. Many commentators also

point out that Adam had free choice before he ate from the tree, because otherwise there would have been no point in telling him not to eat from the tree of knowledge, and no grounds to punish him when he did eat from it. Thus, the tree of knowledge did not provide Adam with knowledge of the difference between right and wrong, since he already knew that before he ate from it. The Rambam, in his Guide for the Perplexed (1:2), explains that at the time Adam was warned by God, he knew the difference between truth and falsehood, but did not know the difference between good and evil. By eating from the tree, he introduced the knowledge of good and evil into his psyche. This approach is elaborated upon by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in his *Nefesh HaChaim*, and expanded upon by Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler in his *Michtav MeEliyahu*, which is available in translation under the title *Strive for Truth!* The interested reader can consult those works for a fuller explanation.

There is a basic difficulty with the approach of the Rambam and those who explain him. According to this understanding, by eating from the 'eitz hada'as,' something in man's fundamental nature changed, reflecting the sin he committed in eating from the tree. The question is, how was man able to make that step before this new element entered into him as a result of his sin? Moreover, according to this approach, what is the relationship between man's sin and his punishment of become mortal? The rabbis teach us that there is a principle in divine punishment known as 'midah keneged midah,' or measure for measure. The function of this principle is for the punishment to serve an educative role, helping to correct the wrong that was done through the sin. Following the approach of the Rambam, it is difficult to find such a relationship. Although these questions can undoubtedly be answered, I would like to mention another approach to the sin of Chava and Adam which precludes the first question, and then go on to explain how it answers the second one.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, in his Torah commentary, writes that since Adam must have had free choice at the time that God commanded him not to eat from the 'eitz ha-da'as, it cannot be that eating from that tree changed his nature at all. Rather, we must explain the term 'eitz hada'as' not as the tree that introduced knowledge of good and bad into man but, rather, as the tree which would serve as the model for what is considered good and bad for man. After the serpent urged Chava to eat from the tree, the Torah relates her thinking: " And

the woman saw that the tree was good for eating, and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, and she took of its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband with her and he ate" (Bereishis 3:6). Chava's decision was, then, based on her own personal assessment of the utility of the tree's fruit, rather than on the instructions given by God. Animals, says Rav Hirsch, follow their instincts when they act, and serve their personal needs. Man, however, has a higher calling, and his decisions on how to act must be made in accordance to God's instructions. As a punishment to Chava and Adam for following their own criteria for morality, they became liable to death. According to Rabbi Hirsch's approach, what was the educative function of this punishment? In what way did it serve to correct the basic error made in approaching morale decisions?

Although Rabbi Hirsch does not say this, perhaps we can explain that man's knowledge of his own mortality makes him turn to God. This is how Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik explained the purity process used for one who has become defiled through contact with a human corpse. Although usually purity is attained through the passage of a certain amount of time and immersion in a mikvah, defilement through a corpse requires an additional process element of haza'ah, in which water mixed with ashes of a red heifer that has been burned are sprinkled on the impure person. Haza'ah, says Rav Soloveitchik, being done by an outside source, indicates that man cannot, on his own, deal with his own mortality. He needs to attach himself to an outside source, namely, God, who is described by the prophet as, in the future, sprinkling purifying waters on the Jewish people, in order to come to terms with the fact that he will inevitably die.

Once man realizes that he is not in control of his own life and that he will eventually die, and thus turns to God, Whose eternal nature gives him something to hold onto, it is easier for him to make the next step and base his decisions regarding how to act on God's instructions. Understanding that God gives ultimate meaning to his life, then, moves man to turn to God for guidance in living that life each day. In this way, the punishment of being liable to death served as a corrective to man's sin.

## Proper Perspective on Parnassa

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur, originally entitled, “Two Minute Torah - Bereishit 5776,” and presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Oct 8, 2015)

One of the many mysteries in Parshas Bereishis is the story of Kayin and Hevel. At first, it seems like they are quite similar—both are born, both engage in some form of occupation, both bring a Korban to Hashem. And then, suddenly, Hashem accepts Hevel’s korban but not Kayin’s. And from then on, as we know, it all goes downhill. The meforshim all struggle to figure out what caused this tremendous divergence in terms of their ultimate destiny. Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch has a homiletical interpretation of the pasuk at the beginning of their story—where we start seeing the difference between them. *Vayehi Hevel ro’eh tzon, ve-Kayin haya oveid adama*. Hevel was a shepherd, and Kayin was a farmer. And he says that you can already discern the difference between them by how the Torah describes their occupations. Hevel was *ro’eh tzon*. What did he do? He did a simple job, raised sheep, and kept his eye on them, etc. But Kayin is described as an *oveid adama*. *Oveid*, is the same root as *eved*—a slave. Meaning that Kayin took his work, his business, and made himself an *eved*—like people who enslave themselves to their work. He let his work take over his life. Hevel was *ro’eh tzon*, but he wasn’t

an *eved* to anything. He put his work in perspective so that it would occupy the proper place in his life. You should make *parnassa* and earn an honest living. But he did not let it take over his life. Maybe for that reason, Hevel brought from the best of his sheep. He understood that it’s not just about making money. It’s not about having the most sheep, etc. Ultimately, Hashem is more important. But with Kayin, we can see a difference. He didn’t bring *kol cheilev la-Hashem*. Kayin brought *min ha’adama*—*min ha-garua min ha’adama*—from the worst produce of his land. Once someone becomes an *eved* to his work, even if Hashem is in the picture for him, his attitude is “just throw Him a bone,” as it were. Give Him some of the refuse from your produce that you didn’t want anyway. Kayin lost his sense of priority in terms of what was important in life. And from then on, it all went downhill. This whole story began when Hashem kicked us out of Gan Eden and told us that now we have to work *be-ze’as apecha* to earn *parnassa*. The key is defining the fine line between working honestly and seriously yet not becoming a slave to your work, being the master of your work, and not allowing your work to become the master over you. Shabbat Shalom.

## Why do People Sin?

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

It didn’t take long!! Cradled in an exquisite garden and mandated with just one command, Man wasted no time in disobeying the Divine will. Guilty, he and his wife were swiftly dismissed from the comforts of Eden. Subsequently, their jealous first-born son brutally slayed his own kin, disgracing the earth with murdered blood. Witnessing this moral degeneration and acknowledging that Man’s nature or his ‘yetzer’ was inherently evil, Hashem determined that a global flood was necessary to reboot the world’s population. After the devastating flood, Hashem once again acknowledged Man’s sinful nature, promising to never again obliterate His world.

Emphasizing Man’s innate capacity for sin, the Torah attributes the source of sin to his “yetzer harah”. This yetzer harah is described as “evil from the earliest phase of life” - *rah mine’urav*. Since the term ‘yetzer’ does not easily translate in English, the identity of this yetzer harah

remains ambiguous. One thing though is clear: the yetzer harah, as the source of human wickedness can be perceived in manifold ways. For example, the gemara (Succah 52a) lists seven different names or metaphors for the yetzer harah: some deemed it “an enemy” while others portrayed it as an “impure agent”. Some likened it to a “heavy stone” while some imagined it as “hidden and ominous force”. Each metaphor reflects a different perspective both upon the essence of the yetzer harah as well as upon the source for sin. As our sense of human identity is dynamic, it is logical that the metaphors describing the yetzer harah should also vary. It is imperative to update our metaphors and descriptions of the yetzer harah, to bring them in line with contemporary views of human identity. To better understand the pathology of sin and avoid sin, our perception of the yetzer harah must be consistent with our overall inner experience.

Classically, the yetzer harah was defined as an “evil force” within human conscience. Man’s decisions and behavior are influenced by two inner “forces” or two “drives”- one motivating him to virtue and obedience and one pressing him toward sin. Though these two forces are external to our core identity, they are so deeply embedded within human consciousness that they feel innate. Human beings, endowed with free will, must choose which force to follow or which “voice” to listen to.

This evil force or yetzer harah is both relentless and cunning. Reish lakish, an amora who himself was a repentant sinner, remarked “the yetzer harah battles us daily, seeking our religious demise and our eternal death.” Facing this irrepressible adversary, Man lives in a constant state of struggle against an indomitable foe. As the famous line in Pirkei Avot announces: “who is strong? He who conquers his yetzer”. To summarize: Man lives under siege from a powerful and antagonistic force, constantly misleading him into sin. Never-ending vigilance is necessary to keep this hostile enemy at bay and to defeat its ruthless and unrelenting efforts.

In the modern era, our self-perception of human identity has undergone drastic changes. The era of democracy and the proliferation of personal freedom prioritized the sanctity of each individual, over the authority of the collective. Man began to view himself as an individual rather than a small part of some greater whole. Man began to deconstruct his own inner identity in revolutionary new ways. This exploration of individual human identity led to the emergence of the field of psychology. This study of psychology – generally credited as having begun in the late 19th century- transformed our self-image, as well as our understanding of human identity. Our modern view of identity is radically different from the classical sense. Given these dramatic shifts, it is vital to modernize the imagery and the terminology associated with the yetzer harah. Perhaps in the past, the religious drama was viewed as a struggle between two inner voices. For many, this mapping of “two voices” is inconsistent with our current view of human identity. Many people do not go through their lives vacillating between two inner voices.

Not only is the classic image of yetzer harah inconsistent with our contemporary views of identity, but it also may be psychologically harmful. The classic view of the yetzer harah as a hostile enemy, implies a constant state of “warfare” between two opposing voices or at the least between Man and a belligerent “inner enemy”. A constant

“battle mentality” may induce extreme stress and generate unhealthy mental and emotional turmoil. Constantly living “under siege” may not be the best recipe for general emotional well-being. Even those who succeed in this battle may find their energies sapped and their victories sporadic.

Additionally, this “classic” view of the yetzer harah may cause unhealthy suppression of character. By conquering and defeating this evil foe, what parts of human identity are also compromised or suppressed? As we strive to erase the influence of this inner enemy, what other parts of our identity may also be inadvertently scrubbed and what potential may be squandered in the process?

As classical views of identity have been replaced by modernized versions, the imagery of the yetzer harah must also be reformulated. Otherwise, we may find ourselves living an outdated narrative and terribly unequipped to legitimately sculpt a better religious personality.

### **Rabbi Soloveitchik’s “Layers”**

Speaking in the modern context, Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik produced a fascinating mapping of our religious psyche. What is striking is the almost complete absence of the classic yetzer harah as an inimical or adversarial force. In his essay on prayer, Rabbi Soloveitchik asserts that human identity can be deconstructed into three different “states of being” or three different layers of identity. Our cognitive “identity” enables reason and empowers rational analysis. Through this identity we analyze the Divine word and we probe our surrounding world- each of which leads to knowledge and understanding of Hashem. A second state of human identity is the “ethical will”- the inclination of man to bend his desires and decisions toward moral law and ethical behavior. Through our ethical will we identify Hashem as the absolute moral being and we feel compelled to sculpt our being in the likeness of Hashem. Both the “cognitive identity” and the “ethical will” are easily and naturally compatible with religious experience.

A third layer of identity or the “aesthetic type” employs sensual experience to perceive beauty and art. The aesthetic type is naturally drawn to physical delight and sensuousness. If it dominates human experience Man hedonistically degenerates into sin. Ideally though, this third layer of identity can also be “channeled” toward religious experience. Aesthetic sensitivity allows us to marvel at the grandeur and majesty of Hashem and His world. Admiring this magnificence and splendor bridges us to infinity and to a recognition of exaltedness. Recognizing

exaltedness in our world is a lofty and sublime encounter with the transcendence of Hashem. Man is composed of these three layers and religious success is a product of our cognitive and ethical will steering our aesthetic self toward sublimity.

In Rabbi Soloveitchik's system each of these three identities are endowed by Hashem and each possesses religious energy and potential. It is striking that the classic yetzer harah as a malignant force bent upon seduction of Man is completely absent from this mapping. Rabbi Soloveichik provided a modern gloss or map toward understanding human identity and religious struggle.

### A Toolbox

A different and perhaps less philosophical narrative likens human identity to a toolbox. Hashem created Man with an enormous range of traits, talents and desires. Each and every trait within a human being has a purpose and a utility; each trait is a tool. Religious success rests in properly balancing and calibrating our diverse traits and our innumerable qualities. Successful calibration depends upon context: when should a trait be expressed and when suppressed. However, timing isn't everything. The

## Creation and the Middah of Truth

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

**B**ereishis 5782. The excitement of a new cycle of Torah. New beginnings for the new year. Opportunities to review insights we already know, and b'ezrat Hashem, to glean new insights we are not yet familiar with.

Bereishis. "In the beginning Elokim created the heavens and the earth" (Bereishis 1:1). In regard to Torah learning, we are never done, and so, as soon as we complete Devarim on Simchas Torah morning, we begin Bereishis all over again. "And it was evening, and it was morning, one day" (ibid, v.5).

While the account of Creation is amongst the most - if not the most - esoteric parts of Torah, there are certainly many lessons, messages and teachings we can learn and apply to our own lives.

In regard to the creation of man, the pasuk tells us:

"And Elokim said: בצלמנו כדמותנו - let us make man in our image and in our likeness" (ibid, v.26). Rashi teaches that in His great humility, keviyachol, G-d consulted with the heavenly angels before creating man.

A fascinating Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 8:5) provides

expression of a trait must also be finely tuned: even when a trait is expressed or employed it should be regulated and often combined with other- sometimes contrary- traits. Not all traits are created "equal": some traits are more mild while others are more combustible. The more explosive traits unleash great achievement but must be handled with greater care and caution. Human identity is a toolbox and we are expected to familiarize ourselves with each tool and apply them judiciously. Sin results from the failure to properly employ the tools or balance this assortment of traits. Each tool has function and value, and as we learn more about ourselves and about life we are better able to control and maximize the toolbox.

Our sense of human identity is under constant flux. For some the view of a yetzer harah as a "wicked voice" accurately reflects their self- image and their religious experience. For many others, whose identity is shaped by modern psychological conventions, an updated narrative of the yetzer harah is absolutely vital to assist us in avoiding sin and in exploiting the enormous potential which Hashem vested in us.

us with further details:

אמר רבי סימון, בשעה שבא הקדוש ברוך הוא לבראת את אדם הראשון, נעשו מלאכי השרת כתיים, וחבורות חבורות, מהם אומרים אל יברא, ומהם אומרים יברא... חסד אומר יברא, שהוא גומל חסדים. ואמת אומר אל יברא, שכלו שקרים. צדק אומר יברא, שהוא עושה צדקות. שלום אומר אל יברא, דכוליה קטטה. מה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא נטל אמת והשליכו לארץ... רב הונא רבה של צפורין אמר עד שמלאכי השרת מדינין אלו עם אלו ומתעסקין אלו עם אלו בראו הקדוש ברוך הוא. אמר להן מה אתם מדינין כבר נעשה אדם

*Rabbi Simon said: At the time when The Holy One Blessed Be He (HKB"H) created the first man, the heavenly angels formed groups with each other. Some said man should not be created, and some said he should be created. (The angel of) Chessed said that man should be created, for he will do acts of loving-kindness for others. (The angel of) Emes (Truth) said that man should not be created, for man is entirely falsehood. Tzedek (Righteousness) said he should be created, for he will do acts of righteousness. And Shalom (Peace) said he should not be created, for he will be full of quarrel. What did HKB"H do? He took Emes and threw him to the ground... Rav Huna said: While the heavenly angels were arguing with one*

*another, HKB”H created man! He said to them: what are you quarreling for? Man has already been created!*

What was so wrong with what Emes said that it had to be cast down to the ground? “The angel of Emes (Truth) said that man should not be created, for man is entirely falsehood.” What was the root reasoning of his argument that was so perverse it had to be immediately silenced?

Rav Yaakov Bender shlita, Rosh Yeshiva Yeshiva Darchei Torah, provides a beautiful and piercing answer, and he writes, “The middah of Emes simply spoke up when it was asked to, offering an opinion (as to why man should not be created). Why did it deserve a punishment for being true to its essential mission of speaking truth?”

“Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz z”l (1886-1948) shared a powerful answer.

“Emes argued that the world would not work - that it could not work - with man at its center. Man is a creature of sheker, deceit and falsehood, Emes proposed, and Creation, as envisioned by the Master of the Universe, could not endure with such a creature at its center.

“This argument - ‘it cannot work’ - is itself the biggest sheker, falsehood, possible. To view human beings through eyes shrouded in negativity and pessimism is inherently false, so the middah of Emes was not worthy of its own reason for creation!” (Rav Yaakov Bender on Chumash, Artscroll, p.39).

What a tremendous insight. To claim that man is full of sheker, that existence cannot work with the grandeur of man at its center, to say “it’s impossible,” to claim “it won’t happen,” to cry out “man will never succeed!” is in itself

## A Lesson from the Fruit

*Rabbi Jared Anstandig*

**T**he Torah begins anew with the begin-ning of our parshah. This affords us the opportunity to revisit the familiar stories of Sefer Bereshit. As comfortable as it is to reread a story many of us can retell by heart, there is actually a great risk with this. Rabbi David Fohrman, in his book *The Beast that Crouches at the Door*, notes that when we read familiar stories, we suffer from “The Lullaby Effect.” He writes, “The Lullaby Effect blocks our ability to ask, or even to see, the really important questions that the Bible begs us to ask it.” (pg. 1) It is possible for us to know a story too well. Hopefully this year, with a fresh look, we can arrive at deeper

the greatest sheker, falsehood, there is. To view our fellow human beings - and more specifically - our brethren, with negative eyes and a suspicious heart is unacceptable before the RS”O.

There is a very famous children’s book, “The Little Engine that Could”, originally published in 1930 - almost 100 years ago - whose message rings true even today. It is a book that I used to read to my children when they were young (and I am sure many of you are familiar with). It is a story about a little train that needed to get over a mountain, and despite any obstacles in her path and opinions to the contrary, her mantra was always, “I think I can, I think I can.” And when she finally got over the mountain, her mantra became, “I thought I could, I thought I could.”

L’havdil, this should be our outlook into, first and foremost, our own growth as ovdei Hashem, and the lens with which we view - not only ourselves - but those around us. From our children, who struggle mightily in today’s confusing world, to one’s students, to our friends, spouses and any Jew we encounter.

We must see, and believe, that there is always hope for improvement, room for growth, possibility for change, and reward in the end. With much effort, prayers and tears, and emunah in G-d, ourselves and our fellow Jews, we always must live by the belief that “I think I can.” And so, when it came to creation, Emes - who claimed that man was entirely sheker and would certainly fail - was cast down.

As we move forward into a new year, let us internalize this message as we forge new paths ahead.

understandings of these open-ing narratives to the Torah. For now, let’s look at Adam and Chavah’s eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the very first sin.

### A Fresh Look at the Tree

The Torah tells us that G-d planted the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (2:9) and promptly forbade Adam from eating of it. (2:17) Of course, Adam and Chavah do eat of this tree (3:6-7) and are immediately filled with embarrassment (3:7-10). A surface read of the text indicates that eating the fruit of this tree endowed Adam and Chavah with some additional knowledge. In-deed, Rashi (2:25)

suggests that before partaking of the fruit, Adam and Chavah lacked the ability to discern between right and wrong.

Rashi's explanation is the way many of us understand this narrative. Had Ad-am and Chavah never sinned, we would still be in Gan Eden, blissfully unaware of even the concept of sin. This explanation is intuitive, especially given the name "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." What would the tree supply, if not a new knowledge of good and evil?

### **Rabbi Hirsch's Challenge to Rashi**

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch high-lights the flaw with this approach, in his commentary to the Torah. He writes (2:9, Feldheim translation), "Had man been unaware of the concept of good and evil, G-d could not have assigned him a prohibition; and once man had violated the prohibition, G-d could not have held him responsible and punished him." In other words: if, at the time they were prohibited from eating from this tree, Adam and Chavah lacked the ability to discern good from evil, then how could they be held responsible for performing an evil act and disobeying G-d? Rabbi Hirsch continues (2:9), "It must be, then, that he possessed a sense of duty, and could distinguish between forbidden and permitted – and this is none other than the knowledge of good and evil." Unlike the first interpretation, Rabbi Hirsch suggests that Ad-am and

Chavah always knew right from wrong.

### **Rabbi Hirsch's Explanation**

If the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil didn't provide knowledge of good and evil, then what did it provide? Rab-bi Hirsch offers that the name "Good and Evil" stems not from the nature of the tree, but from G-d's instructions about it. In other words, there was nothing inherently "good" or "evil" here.

However, once G-d outlawed its fruit, it became bad.

The tree and its fruit demonstrate that even though something looks appealing, it may still be objectionable to G-d. As Rabbi Hirsch writes (2:9), "From this tree we learn that in judging what is good or evil, man should not rely on his own senses, his own imagination, or his own intelligence; rather he should obey the revealed Will of G-d and follow the lead of His wisdom." G-d is the ultimate arbiter of Good and Evil. Not us.

With this understanding, the story of Adam and Chavah serves as an im-portant warning. As far back as Gan Eden, we humans liked to buck external instruction, preferring instead to rely on our own rationalizations. Here, at the very outset of the Torah before any mitzvot have been given, G-d warns against that tendency. Our goal is not to determine for ourselves what mitzvot make sense for us to keep and what to ignore. Instead, we are charged to humbly accept G-d's instructions.

## **The Moral Imperative of "The Strength of His Works"**

*Rabbi Jeffrey Saks*

**R**ashi opens his monumental commentary on the Torah with the midrashic observation of Rabbi Yitzhak, that the first 61 chapters of the Torah, until the beginning of halakhic material (in Exodus 12), are potentially superfluous. The reason we open with the tale of Creation is on account of the verse, "The strength of His works He related to His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations" (Psalms 111:6).

For if the nations of the world should say to Israel, "You are robbers, for you conquered by force the lands of the seven nations [of Canaan]," they will reply, "The entire earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whomever He deemed proper. When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it away from them and gave it to us."

Most of us recall this most well-known comment of Rashi from our first encounter with Biblical commentary; many may have even learned it by heart – whether as a schoolchild or later in life. It is often marshalled as Zionism's ur-text – a candid and forceful declaration of the claims of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael.

It is instructive to consider this comment of Rashi through the prism of its prooftext in Psalm 111. If taken as a whole, the short, acrostic mizmor is a psalm of thanksgiving to God, whose actions are righteous and just, who provides for those that hold Him in awe and for His nation (including, v. 6, the land grant to Eretz Yisrael), followed by a declaration of the righteousness of His decrees, His eternal covenant with His nation, and a statement about Yirat Hashem. The psalm is delivered "be-

sod yesharim ve-edah,” in the council of the upright (v. 1). These upright, of course, are the people of Yisrael (whose name echoes the very word yashar), “who are upright in their deeds according to the instruction delivered to them by God” (Radak). Toward the psalm’s conclusion we are informed that “The works of His hands are truth and justice; all His commandments are faithful. Steadfast forever, made in truth and uprightness (yashar)” (vv. 7-8). Apparently, the “strength of His hand,” with which he removed the land from the possession of the seven nations, transferring it to us, is of course the very same “work of His hands” (of the following verse) defined by this key term, yashar, which if read back into its first appearance at the psalm’s opening, points at a reinforcing interpretive circle. God’s commands are yesharim, and if we follow them we become upright as well, enabling us to join the exalted Sod Yesharim (council of the upright), through which we merit our ongoing possession of the land.

In fact, Midrash Tehillim (111:1) suggests the Sod Yesharim is formed through the deliverance of prophecy, the conduit through which the Divine word reaches the nation. This idea spins the interpretive wheel once more around its spoke: Prophecy is merited through the moral/intellectual perfection of the Navi, who in turn can instruct the people on upright ideals, which—if achieved—become the source of merit to Divine reward and the land of Israel itself.

It is impossible to consider the word “yashar,” especially in understanding the true rationale for Genesis, without reflecting on Netziv’s introduction to that book. In considering why Genesis is nicknamed Sefer HaYashar

Netziv observed that Bilaam referred to the Jewish nation as yesharim, not tzadkim or hasidim, and prayed that he would meet an end similar to theirs – “May my soul die the death of the upright and let my end be like his” (Numbers 23:10).

This is the praise of the Avot, the protagonists of Sefer HaYashar, who, aside from their rank as righteous and holy, and as maximizers of the love of God, were first and foremost characterized as yesharim. This is principally demonstrated by their moral behavior towards other nations, even the idolatrous, with whom they also acting out of love and fellow-feeling. (Netziv specifies the example of Avraham praying for Sedom.) It is for this reason that Genesis is called Sefer HaYashar, and if read back through Rashi (and his source in Psalm 111), it may tell us something about our claim to Eretz Yisrael.

Netziv points to the verses in Haazinu, “The deeds of the Mighty Rock are perfect, for all His ways are just; a faithful God, without injustice He is righteous and upright (yashar). Destruction is not His; it is His children’s defect you crooked and twisted generation.” (Deut. 32:4-5). He is yasher; to our detriment, we have often been “crooked and twisted” (ikesh u-ftaltol) – the very opposite image of the rectitude of upright yashrut. That, says Netziv, is the cause of exile. Our claim to Eretz Yisrael is a sign and direct function of “the strength of His works.” Our right to maintain that claim is the degree to which we can continue to count ourselves among the Sod Yesharim. Rashi’s opening comment is as much a moral call to us as it is a claim to the outside world.

## Making Sense of the First Rashi

*Rabbi Avraham Gordimer*

**R**ashi famously begins his commentary to Sefer Bereshis with the words of a medrash: Rabbi Yitzchak said, “The Torah should have begun with Kiddush Ha-Chodesh (Sanctification of the New Month), which is first mitzvah commanded to B’nei Yisroel (and is found in Sefer Shemos). Why did the Torah instead begin with Bereshis (Creation)? Due to the pasuk (verse – Tehillim 111:6) that states, ‘The strength of His actions did He relate to His people’, which justifies Hashem giving Eretz Yisroel to the Jewish People. For should the nations of the world accuse the Jews of being thieves by

conquering and possessing the Canaanite lands, the Jews can reply that the entire world belongs to Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu (the Holy One, blessed is He), Who created it gave it to whom He saw fit. He gave it (Eretz Yisroel) initially to the nations of Canaan and decided to then take it and give it to us.”

The obvious question is how will B’nei Yisroel invoking Bereshis as the basis of our right to Eretz Yisroel convince the nations that we are not thieves regarding the Land?

The nations of the world do not accept the Torah and will surely reject our use of it as proof for our rights to the Eretz Yisroel. What is the medrash quoted by Rashi actually telling us?

I believe that there are two answers, which form a unified idea.

Although the nations of the world do not accept the Torah, at least not as their final authority, the Torah is the source of profound universal and eternal truths which people do accept on a subconscious level, despite their denial thereof. The unparalleled and unique primacy of man as the most advanced creature in the biosphere; people's almost uncontrollable inclination to break rules and violate their dearest values in the face of carnal temptation, as well as for personal honor and control; deep-seated characteristics of the male and female personality, and of human nature in general, especially pertaining to siblings and their rivalries; the role of the Jew in Golus (Exile) as accused and persecuted, thereby forced to scheme for his survival, as per the prototype of Yaakov Avinu in Lavan's house - as well as notions of an all-powerful Being and Force of Creation, of a Higher Morality, including the prohibitions of murder, theft, sexual deviance, and so much more, are universal concepts that the Torah presents in Sefer Bereshis. The world at large has accepted these ideas outright or at least subconsciously.

Among these universal truisms is the divine and historical connection of the Jewish People to Eretz Yisroel.

Hence, although this connection might be robustly denied by the nations of the world, in their innermost minds and souls does it resonate, and when the Jews make their claim to the Land as articulated by the medrash, it strikes an intuitive chord, as much as the nations will consciously deny and fight it.

There is another perspective to this all. When B'nei Yisroel lay forth their claim to the Land based on the Torah, it is not for the sake of the nations that they need to do so - for even if the nations deep down accept the words of B'nei Yisroel, fierce denial and refusal will usually be expressed by the nations, until the time of Moshiach. What is the function of B'nei Yisroel's assertion of their right to Eretz Yisroel based on the Torah, on the story of Bereshis? The function is to encourage and inspire B'nei Yisroel themselves. We must always know that our rights to the Land are by virtue of Hashem creating and gifting the Land to us; once we overlook this and resort solely to pragmatic arguments, as powerful and true as they often are, we strip away notions of sanctity and of our relationship with Hashem through the Land. Therefore, our instinctive and immediate claim to Eretz Yisroel must flow from the words of the Torah, which affirm Hashem's authority over the world and His unchallenged ability to apportion its lands to whom He sees fit.

This is the deeper and paramount significance of the first words of Rashi in his Torah commentary.