

## BEREISHIS

# THE SPARKS AFTER THE FALL

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### A

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## Hashem Is Involved in Our Personal Lives and World History

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The first Rashi in Chumash notes that the stories of Bereishis and the rest of the Torah are as important as the *mitzvos haTorah*. Hashem commanded us through His *mitzvos* to do various actions and to abstain from others. These commandments, it would seem, are the mainstay of the Torah. If indeed the Torah is about laws, why does it include so many stories? We read the stories about Adam, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe, and more. Some of these stories are more lengthy and detailed than descriptions of *mitzvos*. Why is this?

Rashi explains that the stories teach us that Hashem, our God, blessed be He, is involved in human events. He is more than just the Creator and Lawgiver; He is actively involved in everyday human life on both the individual and national levels.

I remember *davening* as a child in New York in a Chassidische *shtible* filled with Hungarian and Polish refugees and wondering, "Who is Hashem?"

"He also is a member of the *shul*," I told myself. "He is absolutely here, in the lives of these people standing here with me."

Over the centuries, the Jewish people have been able to both absorb and live this reality.

When we read the stories in the Torah, we see Hashem as a real character, indeed as the primary character. He has conversations with Adam, Noach, the *avos*, 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 dos and don'ts. There is a far more 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, and we have to feel that. This is what Rashi is teaching us. Hashem is an important actor in the human story.

This concept is the basis of Sefer Bereishis, as Rashi illustrates with his famous first comment:

For what reason does [the Torah] open with Bereishis (when the first *mitzva* to the Jewish people only comes much later)?... For if the nations of the world will tell Israel, "You are thieves, for you captured the land of the seven nations [who previously lived there]," they will reply, "All land belongs to God. He created it and gave it to whomever He saw fit. When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it from them and gave it to us."

At different times, Hashem plays the roles of coach, judge, rewarder, and punisher. He is involved in whatever we do. This is why the Jewish people receive the Land of Israel. Hashem gave it to us through His involvement in human history.

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## B

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### **What Could Be Wrong with the Eitz Hachaim?**

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The most dramatic event at the beginning of human history, the sin of the Eitz Hada'as, occurs in Parshas Bereishis. After they sin,

Adam and Chava are driven from Gan Eden (Bereishis 3:23), a defining event in human history. The Torah wrote this to teach us an important lesson in our sojourn in this world. We are all children of Adam and Chava, so their rise and fall is a model for us as we go through our ups and downs in life.

The Shem Mishmuel approaches the story with several questions. Adam and Chava were commanded not to eat from the Eitz Hada'as Tov Vara, but 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, and then he would live forever." Hashem apparently didn't want that to happen, so He banished Adam from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. The Torah mentions Adam's banishment from Eden twice. The first time, the verse says, "*Vayeshalcheihu Hashem Elokim miGan Eden*, So Hashem God banished [Adam] from the Garden of Eden" (Bereishis 3:23). Then, the very next verse says, "*Vayegaresh es ha'adam*, Hashem drove him out" (ibid. 3:24). What is the difference between these two expressions?

Furthermore, why is Hashem so concerned that Adam might eat from the Eitz Hachaim now, whereas before He seemingly was not? Hashem never prohibited Adam from eating from the Eitz Hachaim! We could simply understand that Hashem wanted to punish Adam with death, and if Adam would eat from the Tree of Life, it would counteract this punishment. But upon further reflection, this answer is insufficient. If God decreed that Adam should die, how could the Eitz Hachaim counteract the Divine decree?

This story contains much symbolism, as noted already by the Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim Chapter 1). What is the deeper meaning of the Eitz Hachaim?

## Difference between *Geirush* and *Shiluach*

Earlier, we asked why the Torah describes the banishment of Adam as both *vayeshalcheihu* and *vayegaresh*. The Shem Mishmuel explains that, in Chumash, the verb *shiluach* simply means to send away, a matter of physical movement. Hashem physically moved Adam out of Gan Eden. What does *vayegaresh* mean? In rabbinic literature, *geirushin* means divorce. A divorce is not related to any physical distance between a husband and wife. The husband and wife can be separated by thousands of miles while they are still married; that is not *geirushin*. Alternatively, they could be in the same place, even staying in the same house, and be divorced. Rather than referencing physical distance, *gareish* denotes the severing of the relationship between two people.

Hence, the *pasuk* describes that Hashem did two things to Adam: *shiluach* and *geirush*. First, Hashem physically sent Adam out to the world. Then, Hashem banished Adam from their formerly close relationship. Like a husband divorcing his wife, God broke His relationship with Adam.

The Shem Mishmuel finds a parallel to this in the story of the Akeidah. Hashem commanded Avraham Avinu to sacrifice his son Yitzchak in a place that He would show him. After three days of traveling, Avraham “perceived the *makom* [of the Akeidah] from afar” (Bereishis 22:4). The Shem Mishmuel interprets the word “*makom*” as a reference to Hashem. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 56:11) compares the ten trials of Avraham to a *geirushin*, a divorce. Avraham experienced distance from the *Makom*, from Hashem. Hashem had distanced Himself from Avraham; the close relationship with Hashem that Avraham formerly enjoyed wasn’t there anymore. God turned His face away 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, with God responding to him, as happened during his prayers for

the city of Sedom. But during the three days prior to the Akeidah, 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 traumatically and more fundamentally, Hashem severed His relationship with Adam—*geirushin*. Tragically, Adam’s awareness of Hashem’s presence was greatly diminished.

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### **The Purpose of Life—Finding the Holy Sparks**

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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 have our own challenges, but is there a common fundamental issue each one of us addresses? Do we all have a common mission of living as human beings? 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 Bereishis, the world as we know it today was not created in one instant. Instead, creation was a process comprised of six days. There were stages in the development of the world. According to Kabbala, though, the creation story of the Torah is actually the latter part of the story.

Rashi, too, commenting on the first *pasuk*, 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 was created. On day three, when Hashem made the water draw back, the land appeared, implying that it already was there. But we never read about the creation of the land. Rashi thereby proves that the creation story does not start at the very beginning.

According to Kabbala, there were other creative steps that preceded the creation story of Bereishis. Kabbala relates that Hashem created many worlds, but they all collapsed and ceased to exist. The Torah opens with the creation of the world that we know of. Hashem looked at it and said “*tov*, it is good.” That Divine approval granted permanence to our universe. In atomic accelerators, some sub-atomic particles appear and then disappear. They are momentary flashes; they are not *tov*. The Ramban (Bereishis 1:4) also explains that *tov* means that our 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 subsequently were 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. Man’s job is to find these otherworldly sparks of holiness and raise them up by bringing them into himself. Man’s holiness initially is incomplete. But as he rejoins these holy sparks from around the world with his own holiness, he completes his holiness. Man thus finishes the process of creation that Hashem initiated.

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### ***La'asos*—Creation to Be Continued**

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Let's try to understand this mystical idea in our own language. The Torah states (Bereishis 2:1-3) that God created the world in six days. "On the seventh day, God completed His work that he had done....He abstained from all His work that God created *to make—la'asos*." This phraseology seems unnecessary. God already created the world in six days. The whole point of Shabbos is that He finished His work. Why does the Torah add on that last word, *la'asos*, to make, implying that creation is ongoing?

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### **Man, the Shaper of the Holy Sparks**

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God created this world in a number of stages. He placed man in the world on the sixth day of this process. After that, God finished what He was doing. But then comes *la'asos*, to do. Apparently, there still is 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; now you have the opportunity to participate with Me in the act of creation."

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 (Bereishis 2:7) 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 "*le'avda u'l'shamra*" (2:15), 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 creation. 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 humanity.

Furthermore, our responsibility to improve the world includes exploring and searching for what is holy in this world, especially for the secret pockets of holiness. Angels, though they also are creatures of Hashem, are programmed to see holiness only where it is apparent. Man alone is able to see holiness even when it is hidden.

For example, Dovid Hamelech and Shmuel Hanavi surveyed a plain mountain, probably with a forest covering it. But they saw beyond its surface; they saw not merely a mountain, but a beautiful, exalted Beis Hamikdash. They realized the *kedusha* hidden in a place that seemed like nothing more than an average hill. And they built the Beis Hamikdash there as a house for Hashem (Zevachim 54b). Since then, the entire world for thousands of years has recognized this *kedusha*. We can't see it with our 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, then, 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 and develop it.

The fundamental challenge of life is to discover the holiness in everything, in every person and in every nation. We must search for the eternal, the Godly, 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 *le'avda u'l'shamra*, to improve it and protect it. Improving the world means performing *mitzvos asei* and protecting the world means refraining from *mitzvos lo sa'asei*. If man lives a moral life, abiding by the positive and negative *mitzvos*, he fulfills his God-given purpose in being a partner in developing 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 nonetheless was obligated to continue this mission outside the Garden.

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### Magnetic Holiness

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The Ari Hakadosh, the great expositor of Kabbala, poses an interesting question. Adam was sent out of Gan Eden and traveled around the world. Wherever man finds himself, he encounters spiritual and moral challenges. His mission is to develop the spirituality of that place. But if Adam would have stayed in Gan Eden, as God originally planned, how would he have fixed the spirituality of faraway places? The Ari answers 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 each particular place.

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, *olam haba* will arrive, and we will return to the Gan Eden style of existence.

In our own 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 Jewish people could fix all the holy parts of the whole world. Non-Jews learned from the model of the Jewish people even from a long distance, as we

find in the times of Shlomo Hamelech. You can model the *tzaddik* from a distance. Then the *tzaddik* is fixing the holy sparks from far away.

We can sense how true this Kabbalistic concept really is. If the Jewish people were living in Yerushalayim with the Beis Hamikdash and keeping the Torah properly, it would be so simple for the nations of the world to be inspired by how we live. We would hook up an internet connection and stream Torah to the whole world. Mashiach would get on the air and inspire everyone each day. Every person would work to discover the holiness in his own life. Hopefully, this will become reality very soon.

Unfortunately, however, the Jewish people sinned. We then 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: those of opulence, wealth, and success. They are challenged because they can do everything that the non-Jews do and must resist the allure of assimilation.

In every situation, we are able to overcome the pressures of evil and focus and develop the moral and good. This is why we are here in this world. In every place, Jews have their own challenges and mission. Wherever we are, we must live lives of holiness, keeping Torah and *mitzvos*. In Israel, too, this is our job. To come to Israel and then 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 we are, be it South Africa, Russia, the United States, Israel, or even Yerushalayim, there is a pull to the negative and an opportunity to find the positive. This is *tikkun hanitzotzos*, finding and fixing the holy sparks.

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## The Tree of Life—Closeness to God

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Let us return to the Eitz Hachaim—what is it in the story of Gan Eden? The Shem Mishmuel suggests it is an awareness of God. The more one is close to God and aware of Him, the more he has life—because Hashem is life. Once man sinned, he had to fix the damage caused by it. He had to go find the *nitzotzos hakedusha*, the goodness in every situation. Man, in his distant *geirushin* state, must do the *tikkun*, fixing. If God had not driven man away from Him after his sin, man would have no motivation to do *teshuva*. He still would feel connected to Hashem. And in that state, he would feel no need to fix the sin.

This is a very profound idea. Sin is comfortable. The Eitz Hada'as was beautiful, the fruit was luscious and delicious. What drives us to do *teshuva* and abandon the comfort of sin? The answer is that we miss our closeness to Hashem, and we want to come back to Him; we need Him in our lives. Without Him, we are lost in the jungle of this world, left to our own wits in a world filled with beasts and vicious forces. We need faith, to be close to Hashem and feel His closeness. After sin, we can find Him only through *teshuva*. We must do the *la'asos*, persistently doing what is right and finding the good elements within ourselves and the world.

This is a paradoxical concept. Hashem drives man away, in response to man's sin. He does this as a fundamental motivator in order to arouse man's 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 *geirushin* that drove Adam out of Gan Eden in fact is 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. But the *geirushin* keeps us motivated to do *teshuva*. This way, we raise the holy sparks, we are *ma'ale nitzotzos*.

This process of *tikkun*, 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 in place and do not fall. They can't develop more *kedusha* than they are created with. By falling, people learn that they not only can climb again, but that they can climb even higher than before. This is why the Eitz Hachaim had to be placed off-limits. After sinning, man has to search and find God. If man would be able to find God easily, he would never climb the ladder of spirituality.

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### **Failures as Opportunities for Growth**

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If a parent would never punish a child, the child would never learn that doing something wrong upsets his parents. He wouldn't develop properly. Only when the parent gives the child a punishment, takes away a privilege, or says a harsh word does the child realize that there is a relationship that he must care for and preserve. When the relationship is broken or damaged, we have to work to fix it. This is a fundamental aspect of growth. The Shem Mishmuel therefore states that being driven away from Gan Eden was not a punishment; rather, it was an opportunity for Adam to grow and learn and become greater than he was before.

We have to learn from our mistakes. We are responsible to fix them and to grow from them. "*Sheva yipol tzaddik v'kam*, The righteous person falls seven times and then gets up" (Mishlei 24:16). We shouldn't look at the challenges that come our way as difficulties and punishments, but rather as opportunities.

The future Gan Eden will be greater than the original Gan Eden Adam was in. Adam fell, but he did not endure all the tests that his descendants would experience after him. The Shem

Mishmuel says we should even have joy through our challenges because we are finding more holy *nitzotzos*. The greater the test is, the greater the accomplishment, the greater the reward; the greater the *tikkun*, the more we partner with God in developing this world.

The Shem Mishmuel adds an important point for life. There are difficult situations, but they are what make life exciting. These difficulties really are opportunities for us to rise and develop our Godliness. We shouldn't give up and complain, and we never should feel that it is helpless and hopeless. Hashem places us in situations that we can handle. If a person is in a tough situation, it means Hashem knows he or she is capable of pulling out the holy sparks from that situation. This is the purpose of being a child of Adam and Chava. All of us are supposed to climb higher than ever before. Exile gives the Jews more energy to accomplish. This explains how the third Beis Hamikdash will be even greater than the first two. Exile, with all of its 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. Our commitment to Torah and *mitzvos* has been maintained. Despite the opposition of our enemies and their attacks, we are resettling the Land of Israel. 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 *ma'ase bereishis*. May we succeed in this holy mission Hashem has given us!

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## REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. What is the purpose of the Torah's stories?
2. What are the different meanings of the words *shilu'ach* and *geirushin*? What is the difference between them, in the context of the story of Adam and Chava?
3. What is the purpose of life?
4. Explain the concept of the holy sparks.
5. How does sin ultimately produce *teshuva*?

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## EXERCISES

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1. For a week, keep a log 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.



