**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Bereishis – Vol. 12, Issue 1**

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**ויקרא אלקים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד (1:5)**

On the first day of Creation, Hashem made light and darkness. A number of commentators discuss whether darkness was created as a state unto itself, or if it is merely a lack of light. The Vilna Gaon brings a proof that darkness is itself a creation from a verse in Yeshaya (45:7) which states יוצר אור ובורא חושך עושה שלום ובורא רע – (Hashem) forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates evil. In this verse, the prophet Yeshaya says clearly that darkness is not simply a lack of light, but rather a state that was created by Hashem.

Rav Yisroel Reisman cites the sefer Davar Tov, who extends the Vilna Gaon’s logic to the second half of the verse, which refers to Hashem as עושה שלום – He Who makes peace. Just as we could have incorrectly viewed darkness as the absence of light until Yeshaya taught us that it is an independent entity created by Hashem, so too we might have mistakenly assumed that shalom (peace) is simply a lack of machlokes (strife). Therefore, the verse continues and teaches us that Hashem actively makes peace as an entity unto itself.

Rav Reisman suggests that this insight can help us understand the Gemora in Yevamos (62b), which discusses the advantages of marriage by delineating a number of benefits that a person is lacking before he gets married. One of the attributes mentioned as only existing after marriage is shalom, which seems quite counterintuitive. While it is an unfortunate reality that married people often disagree, it seems quite obvious that somebody who is still single certainly possesses shalom, as there is nobody for him to argue with. However, when there is no threat of discord, there is no possibility of peace, as shalom is not simply the absence of fighting, but rather the bridging of two dissonant opinions and perspectives, which is only possible in the framework of marriage.

Along these lines, Rav Reisman cites a Medrash which teaches that shalom came into existence on the second day of Creation. He explains that on the first day of Creation, there was such a strong sense of unity that although there was no disagreement, there was also no peace. Only on the second day of Creation, when the oneness was split and there was the possibility of machlokes, was it possible to create shalom. This is alluded to by the fact that the chapter of Tehillim that the Levites sang in the Temple is chapter 48, which begins שיר מזמור לבני קרח – a song, a psalm by the sons of Korach, who were able to extricate themselves from the divisiveness of their father’s rebellion in the pursuit of peace.

**ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים ברא אתו זכר ונקבה ברא אתם (1:27)**

Parshas Bereishis begins by detailing how the universe came into existence. On each day of Creation, after relating what Hashem made on that day, the Torah records that He saw what he had created and כי טוב – it was good. Paradoxically, although man is considered the ultimate purpose of the entire Creation, the Torah does not say that Hashem saw that Adam was כי טוב. Although the Torah uses this expression regarding the creation of the animals earlier on the sixth day of Creation, and it does describe the overall creation as very good after the formation of Adam, nevertheless there is no explicit use of the phrase כי טוב regarding the creation of man.

Rav Meir Wahrsager of Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim cites the Sefer HaIkkarim (3:2) by Rav Yosef Albo, who explains that the expression טוב is used to describe something that has reached fulfilled its potential and reached its shleimus (perfection). For this reason, Rashi writes (1:7) that the Torah does not use the expression כי טוב in conjunction with the second day of Creation, as the formation of the waters that began on that day was not completed until the third day of Creation.

The Sefer HaIkkarim explains that all creations other than man were formed having already maximized their potential, and therefore it is appropriate to describe them as כי טוב. Man, on the other hand, is unique in being fashioned intentionally imperfect, and therefore it would be inappropriate to use the term כי טוב in reference to his creation. What was man lacking at the time of his creation? Rav Albo explains that although other animals grow larger and older, they fundamentally remain the same from the time of their birth until the time of their death. Man, on the other hand, was created with latent potential and unrealized greatness that must be developed. Unlike animals, we are expected to make significant and fundamental changes throughout our lifetimes.

The Sefer HaIkkarim illustrates this distinction based on a verse in Koheles (3:19), in which Shlomo Hamelech discusses the apparent futility of life. He writes ומותר האדם מן הבהמה אין כי הכל הבל, which means that humans and animals appear to follow the same life trajectory, being born, living, and eventually dying, in which case there seems to be אין – no advantage to being a person instead of an animal. However, Rav Albo suggests that the verse can also be read as saying that there is in fact a difference between them, namely the word אין, which can be interpreted as referring to the dormant and undeveloped potential of man. In other words, the advantage of being a human is that in contrast to animals, we possess אין, the ability to grow and improve.

Rav Wahrsager notes that many people convince themselves that because they were born with certain negative traits, such as struggling not to speak lashon hara or get angry, they are justified in deciding that they will always remain that way. However, according to the Sefer HaIkkarim, such people are in essence electing to live their lives as animals. The Maharal (Tiferes Yisroel 3) explains that the Hebrew word for animal – בהמה – can be read as a combination of two words: בה מה, what is already in him is what he is.

A person who considers himself a finished product limited and constrained by the character traits and values that he acquired during his formative years is denying his advantage over the animal kingdom by rejecting his אין. Instead, we must change our self-images and view ourselves as incomplete people who are constantly striving to actualize our potentials in pursuit of true shleimus. In order to do so, we must internalize that the very definition of a human being is somebody who is a work in progress. In contrast to a stagnant בהמה, we not only possess the ability to change, but that is what makes us uniquely human, and it is only through constant growth and improvement that we will merit כי טוב.

**וייצר ד' אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה (2:7)**

A man who was stricken with cancer was presented by his doctor with a painful and heart-wrenching decision to make. In order to treat his illness, the doctor would need to perform surgery, and in order to access the affected region, he would need to cut through either the man’s esophagus or his vocal cords. As a result, the man would permanently lose either the ability to eat, requiring the insertion of a feeding tube, or the ability to speak. From a medical perspective, the two options were equal, so the doctor gave the man the choice of how the surgery should be performed.

Although most people would approach this tragic decision by weighing which of the two faculties is more important to them, this patient was an observant Jew who understood that his decision would have important ramifications for his ability to perform mitzvos. If he gave up his ability to eat naturally, he would no longer be able to perform the Biblical mitzvos of eating matzah, eating on the day before Yom Kippur, and eating in the sukkah. On the other hand, if he lost his faculty of speech, he would be unable to say Shema and Birkas HaTorah.

Unsure of the proper course of action, he approached a well-known Rav for halachic guidance. However, rather than focus on weighing the mitzvos to be preserved and lost, the Rav surprised the man by citing the translation of Onkelos on our verse. The Torah records that Hashem formed man from the dust of the ground and blew into him the soul of life, at which point man became a living being. Onkelos renders the phrase “and man became a living being” as a reference to the fact that he acquired the ability to speak.

In other words, as advanced as man may be, virtually everything that he can do can also be duplicated by other living creatures. Onkelos is teaching us that what makes man uniquely human and elevated above all other species of animals is the ability to speak. In light of this insight into the special status of the power of speech, the Rav advised the man to preserve his vocal cords and forego the ability to eat naturally. Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein adds that even according to the man’s initial approach of weighing the mitzvos involved, it is clear that the mitzvos which required the power of speech are performed much more regularly than those which are associated with the ability to eat and would therefore take precedence.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. Prior to eating from the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge which could cause him to die, why didn’t Adam first eat from the tree of life, which was permitted to him and which would allow him to live eternally? (Tosefos Rid)
2. For her role in eating from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Hashem punished Chava (Rashi 3:16) with the difficulty of raising children and with the pain of pregnancy. Wouldn’t it have been more chronologically precise to reverse the curses, as the suffering of pregnancy precedes that of child-raising? (Divrei Dovid, Maharsha Eiruvin 100b, Kehillas Yitzchok, Nesivos Rabboseinu, Ayeles HaShachar, Meged Yosef, Peninei Kedem, M’rafsin Igri)
3. Which two mechutanim (fathers of the bride and groom) in the Torah had the same name?

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) The **Tosefos Rid** suggests that the fruit of the tree of life only acted as an antidote for somebody who had eaten from the tree of knowledge and brought a decree of death upon himself, but eating from it proactively in order to protect oneself would not be effective. Alternatively, a footnote there suggests that Adam ate from the forbidden fruit so quickly that he simply didn’t have an opportunity to eat from the tree of life beforehand, as there were many trees in the Garden.

2) The **Taz**, **Maharil Diskin**, and **Brisker Rov** answer that this curse was directed to Chava, who gave birth to Cain and Hevel prior to eating the forbidden fruit (Sanhedrin 38b). For her, the difficulty of raising children preceded the pain of any future pregnancies, so it was said first. **Rav Chaim Volozhiner** explains that the curse is that a woman will get pregnant with additional children before she finishes the difficulty of raising those who have already been born. The pain of pregnancy is written second to hint that it exacerbates the pain of raising already-born children. The **Steipler** suggests that the order of this curse is fulfilled in our generation, when mothers are forced by financial considerations to work outside of the house and young children are babysat by their older sisters. These girls experience the difficulty of raising children (their younger siblings) long before they know the pain of bearing their own children. **Rav Yosef Sorotzkin** posits that as difficult as a situation may be, the knowledge that it is temporary makes it more bearable. A woman could cope with the difficult nine months of pregnancy if this were the only suffering associated with children. However, the knowledge that the pain will continue without any limit through child-raising exacerbates the pain of the pregnancy, so this curse is written first.

3) Rashi writes (4:22) that Noach married Na'amah, the daughter of Lemech, which was also the name of Noach's father (5:28-29).

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