

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT BEREISHIS

DVAR TORAH: TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

After Adam sins, a seemingly odd conversation takes place between Adam Harishon and Hakadosh Baruch Hu (Bereishit 3:9-12). Hashem asks Adam, "אַיִן אַתָּה?" – "Where are you?" – and Adam responds, "I was afraid because I was naked and I hid." How does that answer the question?

Then Hashem asks him, "Who told you that you were naked? Maybe you ate from the tree I told you not to eat from?" This question seems strange: we usually don't need to be told whether we are wearing clothes or not. Adam's answer, "The woman you gave to accompany me – she gave me and I ate," also seems strange: Why did Adam need a whole sentence to answer a yes-or-no question?

Harav Shlomo Twerski, זצ"ל, of Denver (in Malchut Shlomo on Parshat Bereishit) offers an explanation of this conversation. He prefaces it with the following observation.

People who do something wrong often have two unhealthy responses.

1. Either they demonize themselves – 'I'm horrible;' 'I'm an idiot;' 'I have no redeeming characteristics;' 'I'm just plain evil';
2. Or they look for someone else to blame – 'it's my parents' fault;' 'I'm a product of my culture;' 'it was my worker's fault;' 'it was my boss's fault;' 'it's your fault;' 'it's his fault;' 'it's her fault.'

Adam made both of these incorrect responses.

When Hashem asked Adam, "Where are you?" He meant, 'Where are you spiritually?' Adam's answer was "Naked – totally empty – so I hid." I am spiritually naked; he demonizes himself. Then when Hashem answers him, 'Who says you're so terrible? Maybe you ate from the tree?' Adam responds: 'My wife made me do it – it's her fault.' Both of Adam's responses shifted the responsibility away from himself. 'It is either Chavah's fault or Your fault, G-d, because you made me so evil.'

But, says Rav Shlomo, all Hashem really wants us to do when we act improperly is to take responsibility for our actions, to admit we did wrong and to take it upon ourselves not to do it again. Look at how King David responded when the prophet showed him where he went wrong in the episode of Batsheva and Uriah Hachiti. David said two words, "חטאתי לה" – "I sinned against G-d." David took responsibility for his actions – 'I'm a good person but I did a bad act. I sinned. I shouldn't have. There's no one else to blame. I did it but I won't do it again.'

Bereishit teaches us the basics. If, G-d forbid, we err, sin, or stumble, we should neither demonize ourselves nor pin the blame on another. Hashem just wants us to take responsibility for our actions, take charge of our lives, pick up and keep on going.

SOURCE GUIDE: DIVINE HUMILITY

Two rabbinic sources speak of a surprising topic: Divine humility. One is quoted by Rashi in his comments on the striking expression “Let us make man ...” (Bereishit 1:26) in the Creation story and the second is a quote from the Amora Rabbi Yochanan (Megillah 31b). This source guide, that draws on an article by the Talner Rebbe, Harav Yitzchak Menachem Weinberg, שליט"א (המה ינחמוני בראשית) (pp. 21-28), and an essay by the Maharal, וצ"ל, discusses what we can learn from Divine humility.

A. “Let Us Make Man”

<p>1. Bereishit 1:26-27 (26) G-d said, “Let us make man in our image and form, and he will rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the animals and the entire world, and over all creeping things that creep on the earth. (27) And G-d created the man in His image; in G-d’s image He created him; male and female He created them.</p>	<p>בראשית א:כו-כז (כו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל הָאָרֶץ. (כז) וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם.</p>
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Commentators were bothered by the plural expression in Hashem’s words before creation – “Let **us** make man.” Here is the Rashi’s solution (based on midrashic comments):

<p>2. Rashi on Bereishit 1:26 Let us make man – We learn from here the humility of the Holy One, blessed be He. For since man was similar to the angels and they would envy him He therefore consulted with them ... Even though they did not aid in forming him and there is room for apostates to take control (grasp this verse as proof for their heretical beliefs), [Hashem in this] verse did not withhold from teaching proper conduct and the trait of humility, that a great one should take counsel with and ask permission from a lesser one ... And the response (to the heretics) is written immediately afterwards: “G-d created (in the singular) man,” and it is not written ‘They created.’</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית א:כו נעשה אדם - ענותנותו של הקב"ה למדנו מכאן. לפי שהאדם הוא בדמות המלאכים ויתקנאו בו לפיכך נמלך בהן ... אע"פ שלא סייעוהו ביצירתו ויש מקום למינים לרדות, לא נמנע הכתוב מללמד דרך ארץ ומדת ענוה שיהא הגדול נמלך ונוטל רשות מן הקטן ... ותשובתו כתובה בצדו – ויברא את האדם" ולא כתיב ויבראו.</p>
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The Talner Rebbe quotes a serious difficulty Rishonim raised with Rashi’s answer: Is it worth opening up the door to apostasy through speaking of G-d in the plural just to teach a lesson about humility?

His answer is linked to the end of the verse: “and he will rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens ...” Man will be in a position of control and authority. Control and authority can easily lead to corruption and self-destruction when combined with arrogance. History has shown us how arrogant people in positions of authority have wreaked destruction on their countries and on the world, often destroying themselves in the process. So arrogance can be as dangerous as apostasy (and it is not far from it – for how can one who believes in G-d and appreciates His greatness be arrogant?). During man’s creation Hashem modeled humility to create the antidote to the negative side-effects of man’s greatness.

B. Divine Humility and Divine Greatness

Another discussion of Divine humility appears in the Talmud (and also in the Siddur at the end of “Veyiten Lecha,” the collection of blessings customarily said on Motzai Shabbat):

<p>3. Megillah 31a</p> <p>Rabbi Yochanan said: Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, you find His humility. This is written in the Torah, seconded in the Prophets, and appears a third time in the Writings. In the Torah it is written: “For Hashem your G-d is the G-d of gods and the Master of masters,” and it is written afterwards, “He does justice for the orphan and widow” (Devarim 10:17-18). Seconded in the Prophets: “Thus said [the One who is] lofty and high and dwells above and is holy ...” and it is written afterwards “He is with the depressed and lowly of spirit” (Yeshayahu 57:15). It appears a third time in the Writings, as it is written, “Pave a way for He who rides on the Heavens, whose name is Yud-Hei,” and it is written afterwards “The father of orphans and the judge of widows” (Tehillim 68:5-6).</p>	<p>מגילה לא.</p> <p>אמר רבי יוחנן: כל מקום שאתה מוצא גדולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא אתה מוצא ענוותנותו. דבר זה כתוב בתורה ושני בנביאים ומשולש בכתובים. כתוב בתורה: "כי ה' אלקיכם הוא אלקי האלקים ואדוני האדונים", וכתוב בתריה "עושה משפט יתום ואלמנה" (דברים י:יז-יח). שני בנביאים: "כה אמר רם ונשא שוכן עד וקדוש וגו'" וכתוב בתריה "ואת דכא ושפל רוח" (ישעיהו נז:טו). משולש בכתובים: דכתיב "סולו לרוכב בערבות בקה שמו" וכתוב בתריה "אבי יתומים ודיין אלמנות" (תהילים סח:ה-ו).</p>
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The Maharal (Netiv Haanavah Chapter 1) asks a simple question: If all Rabbi Yochanan wants to prove is that despite G-d’s greatness He doesn’t distance Himself from the lowly and unfortunate, isn’t one source sufficient? Why is Rabbi Yochanan’s statement so extreme and all-encompassing – **wherever** you find His greatness you find His humility? The Maharal answers that Rabbi Yochanan is not just saying that G-d is humble **despite** His greatness, but that His humility **is** His greatness. Humility has a quality the Maharal calls פשיטות, translated here as pure simplicity:

<p>4. Netivot Olam Netiv Haanavah Chapter 1</p> <p>This is because one who is humble is not defined and not limited at all. This indicates complete simplicity, for He is simple and that which is totally simple is unlimited. Therefore after mentioning Hashem’s greatness, may He be blessed, it said that the greatest of His great qualities is His total simplicity. For He does justice for the orphan and widow out of His simplicity – that He is not defined, doing justice only for the great and not for the small. Rather, He does justice equally for all. This is total simplicity and this is the highest level.</p>	<p>נתיבות עולם נתיב הענוה פרק א'</p> <p>וזה כי בעל הענוה לא יוגדר ולא יוגבל כלל, ודבר זה מורה על הפשיטות הגמור שהוא פשוט והפשוט הגמור לא מוגבל. לפיכך אחר שזכר הכתוב גדולת השם יתברך, אמר כי הגדולה על כל הגדולות הוא ענוותנותו שהוא הפשיטות הגמור שהרי הוא עושה משפט יתום ואלמנה, וזהו מצד הפשיטות שבו שלא יוגדר להיות עושה משפט לגדול ולא לקטן אבל עושה משפט אל הכל בשוה וזהו הפשיטות הגמור, ודבר זה היא המעלה העליונה על הכל.</p>
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G-d is not only connected with the highest, with the elite, but also with the lowest. Because of His total simplicity nothing is disconnected from Him. He is limitless and undefined. The Maharal helps us deal with a difficulty we might have had with these two sources – G-d consulting with the angels (Rashi on “Let us make man”) and the connection between G-d’s greatness and His humility (Rabbi Yochanan’s teaching). How can we speak of G-d as humble? Isn’t G-d great and lofty and doesn’t being humble mean being lowly? If we define humility as being lowly before G-d through recognizing our flaws and limitations, how can G-d, who is flawless and unlimited, be humble? But the Maharal’s definition of humility as total simplicity not only applies to G-d, it is most applicable to Him.

C. Learning from Divine Humility

The guiding principle in middot, in character development, is to model the Divine attributes, as the Tanna Abba Shaul says, “נרדמה לו מה הוא רחום וחנון אף אתה רחום וחנון”, “We should emulate Him; just as He is merciful and gracious so you should be merciful and gracious” (Mechilta Parshat Hashirah Parshah 3). We can also strive to emulate Divine humility. When in a position of control we can model our conduct after Hashem’s, who in His position of total control and omniscience, still consulted with His angels before creating man. We can even strive to emulate His utter simplicity, relating to great and small, rich and poor, the successful and the unfortunate, just as He is both lofty and holy yet with the depressed and lowly.

SOUL BY RABBI GIDON SHOSHAN

Bereishis begins with the familiar account of the six days of creation. At the close of the six days, the Torah tells us of the seventh day, the day that G-d blessed, the eternal gift of Shabbos. In one of the well-known verses, the Torah tells us:

"ויכל אלקים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה וישבת ביום השביעי מכל מלאכתו אשר עשה."

"G-d completed on the seventh day the creative work that He made. He abstained on the seventh day from all of the creative work that He made."

Many commentaries deal with the subtle contradiction embedded in the verse. Did G-d complete the creation on the seventh day or did He abstain from creation on the seventh day?

The Or Hachaim Hakadosh explains that both are true. G-d did indeed complete the creation, but He also abstained from all creative work. The completion of the world is found in one additional creative contribution – Shabbos. While all physical elements of the world had been created during the first six days, it was on the seventh day that Shabbos, the soul of the entire world, was created. Until the soul of the world was added, the body of the world was not yet fully complete. The Torah, in the book of Shemos, describes again G-d's having rested on the seventh day, and there it uses a mysterious word – וינפש. Says the Or Hachaim Hakadosh: On the seventh day, וינפש – G-d introduced to the world its נפש, its soul.

The soul, we know, is the driving force behind all that man does. While our bodies seem to act, it is our soul that provides us with any measure of existence. It is our conduit for inspiration and blessing. So it is for the world with Shabbos. While the world continues to act, it is the hidden contribution of Shabbos, which endows all of existence with its essence and with blessing. It is Shabbos that is the מקור הברכה, the source for all of G-d's munificence. For a Jew, it is Shabbos that keeps him going. Chazal describe Shabbos as being equivalent to the entire Torah. Torah also has the replenishing and refocusing effect of Shabbos. When a Jew leaves his usual pre-occupations and focuses on G-d's gift of Torah, he provides his day with a spiritual contribution that enriches all of his endeavors and his entire existence. Learning in general and time in yeshiva in specific are like the Shabbos of our lives. Just as Shabbos lends perspective to what came before it, and inspires all that follows it, so too the time spent learning in yeshiva or seminary brings everything into focus and informs and inspires our entire lives to follow. As we begin the Torah again, and as we read about Shabbos, rededicate yourself to these two soulful gifts. Good Shabbos!!

Along with all of Israel we mourn the kedoshim who were brutally murdered during Sukkot:

Harav Eitam and Naama Henkin, הי"ד

Harav Nechemia Lavi, הי"ד, &

Harav Aharon Benita-Bennett, הי"ד.

This week's Daf Keshet is dedicated to their memory.

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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