

THE MEANING OF LIFE

by Rabbi Dovid Green

"When a woman will conceive and give birth..." (Leviticus 12:2). This week's parsha continues the detailed discussion of ritual disqualification. There are times when entering certain places of sanctity and eating certain sanctified foods are prohibited, those times being when we find ourselves in a state of ritual disqualification. The Torah notes that this is the case for a woman after giving birth to a child.

These verses lead the midrash into the discussion of the purpose of the creation of humankind. "This is what is stated: 'You have formed the front and back of me...'" (Psalms 139:5). Reish Lakish said: "The front," this is (refers to) the first day (of creation), and "the back" this is the last day (of creation). If one merits he is told "you have preceded the entire creation." If not, he is told (even) a mosquito preceded you in creation."

The Yalkut Lekach Tov quotes several questions on this midrash. Firstly, mankind was created on the 6th day of creation. Why is he told (if he merits) that he was created before everything else? Secondly, why is it so terrible to be created last? We save the best for last.

The work Bais Yitzchok quoted by the Yalkut Lekach Tov, explains as follows. Once many great philosophers joined together to contemplate the world and everything therein. Their goal was to come to understand the purpose that every creature serves, and the benefit that each one brings to the world. After long and arduous work, they indeed found a purpose for everything. Some things are for food. Other things serve as cures. Some things serve mankind, such as horses and donkeys, etc. They concluded that nothing however minute is created for nought.

After their study was concluded, they celebrated its success with a great feast. Amidst the drinking and celebrating, one of the wise philosophers turned to the others and stated: "We have indeed labored and succeeded in finding the purpose of all there is in the world. However, there is one creature which we have missed completely. We have not given any thought as to its purpose; MANKIND! What need does the world have for us?" No one could come up with the benefits which mankind brings to the world. On the contrary, the more they delved into the subject, the more they realized that he does only damage, and no real good. They chop down trees, slaughter and eat animals and fowl and fish, and they destroy and eat plant life to name just a few things. Everything mankind does is only for his own good, and selfish needs.

The conclusion that they subsequently reached is that mankind has a higher purpose than other

forms of life in the creation. This also brought them to the conclusion that there is a soul which lives beyond the lifespan of the body.

The conclusion of the team of philosophers coincides with the Torah perspective. We possess this knowledge from our Torah and our sages who taught us that everything in the world was created to aid us in doing G-d's will. That is the fulfillment of its purpose in this world, when we utilize the world with for that end.

When a person works, for example, in a field, he does all of the necessary jobs which cause the earth to yield its harvest. Afterwards, he refines the produce, and he scrupulously separates and distributes the tithes required by the Torah. That act gives a new and higher dimension to the entire process. When he eats the food he has grown, he recites a blessing to G-d, and recognizes his Benefactor. The produce becomes a vehicle through which he serves G-d. That is its intended purpose, and its life's mission. It has realized its true potential. Consequently, mankind is not destroying, but elevating the entire creation. This is the meaning of telling him that "you have preceded the entire creation." You were the original thought for which all things were created, and you have lived your life according to G-d's expectations and elevated the entire creation.

On the other hand, when a person acts irresponsibly, and does not use the world for its intended purpose, then he is indeed destroying the creation for his own selfish purposes. In that case he is told: "the mosquito preceded you." You have lowered yourself to the level of a thief and a force of destruction.

We are here for a reason. Let us take it to heart and utilize the creation in a way that elevates it. Let us not use our good fortune for our own ends, but rather in a way through which we can show our gratitude to our Creator.

Good Shabbos!

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