

# THE UNIQUENESS OF MAN

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Bereishis

### The Uniqueness of Man

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Today's Learning:  
Shabbat 20:5-21:1  
O.C. 450:7-451:2  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Eruvin 24  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Berachot 26

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Parashat Bereishit relates the story of man's creation, his placement in Gan Eden, his sin, and his expulsion from the Garden. R' Yehuda ben Yakar z"l (Spain; 12th-13th centuries) observes that Adam's story and Hashem's attitude toward him is alluded to in the verse in the Ne'ilah prayer: "You set man apart from the beginning and You recognized him as being worthy of standing before You . . ." He writes:

You set man apart because he sinned, as it is written (Bereishit 3:23), "So Hashem Elokim banished him from the Garden of Eden." This separation was to man's detriment. However, because man repented, his expulsion was not total and he was allowed to settle just east of Gan Eden. [R' Yehuda ben Yakar apparently infers this from the fact that Hashem placed guards at the east side of the Garden. If there was a need for guards there to keep Adam out, that must have been where he lived.]

Furthermore, because Adam repented, "You recognized him as being worthy of standing before You." You recognized him and did not become a stranger to him [a play on the similarity of the

Hebrew words "le'hakir" / "to recognize" and "le'hitnaker" / "to act as a stranger"].

He continues: Some say that the separation referred to in the prayer is man's being separated from other creatures by being given intelligence, as it is written (Tehilim 8:6), "You made him slightly less than the angels." (Quoted in Machzor Mikraei Kodesh p.504)

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*"Hashem Elokim planted a garden in Eden, to the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed." (2:8)*

Our parashah describes Gan Eden as the original home of Adam. Gan Eden also is mentioned by our Sages as the place where the souls of the deceased go to receive their ultimate rewards. How, if at all, do these two concepts of Gan Eden relate to each other?

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) explains: There are two "places" called Gan Eden. First, everything mentioned in our parashah in connection with Adam's stay in, and expulsion from Gan Eden is true in its most literal sense. This includes the existence of the Garden itself, the Four Rivers, the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge, the spinning sword, the Keruvim, the fig leaves, the belts, and the leather garments that Hashem made. But besides being literally true, the places and items just mentioned are hints to the nature of the second Gan Eden, a spiritual realm that we cannot comprehend unless we understand the allusions contained in our parashah.

Ramban continues: In the same way, we speak of a lower Bet Hamikdash, i.e., the one that stood in Yerushalayim, and an upper Bet Hamikdash, i.e., in the spiritual realms. The purpose of the design and layout of the lower Bet Hamikdash and its implements is to inform us about the upper realms. Likewise, all creations were designed to teach us about parallel beings in the spiritual realms.

Adam, the first man, the handiwork of G-d's Hand, possessed great understanding and wisdom. Hashem placed him in the finest of all locations -- Gan Eden -- where he would benefit physically and where he also could learn the design of the upper world from studying his surroundings.

(Sha'ar Ha'gemul)

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*"But of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad -- you must not eat of it; for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die." (2:17)*

"The man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me -- she gave me of the tree, and I ate!'" (3:12)

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 5b) says that Adam was ungrateful. Instead of thanking Hashem for giving him a companion, he blamed Hashem: "It's Your fault I ate from the tree, because you gave me Chava to entice me."

R' Moshe Zuriel shlita (former mashgiach ruchani of Yeshivat Sha'alvim) points out, as do other Ba'alei Mussar, that Adam was never punished for eating from the Tree per se. He did not die immediately as G-d had warned. But he was punished for denying his sin. That is G-d's way -- He waits before he punishes the sinner to see if the sinner will regret his actions and repent. And, if the sinner does not repent, he will be punished more for that failure than for the original sinful act.

Why? Maharal of Prague z"l explains that man's physical nature makes him predisposed to sin. Thus, he is not completely accountable. However, man is in control of whether he regrets his sins and repents.

The Gemara teaches that King Shaul sinned only once, but he forfeited his kingdom as a result. In contrast, King David sinned twice but did not lose his kingdom. Midrash Tehilim explains (interpreting Mishlei 28:13), "One who conceals his sins will not succeed" -- this refers to Shaul. "But he who confesses and forsakes them will be granted mercy" -- this is David." When King Shaul failed to eradicate Amalek, he initially denied that he had disobeyed G-d's command. When the prophet confronted King David with his wrongdoing, David immediately confessed.

R' Zuriel adds: We find this same lesson taught in other places in Tanach. In particular, the prophet Yirmiyah tells us (Yirmiyah 2:35), "Behold I am entering into judgment with you because of your saying, 'I have not sinned'." When a person sins, it may be inadvertent or even unavoidable. However, one who fails to repent is an intentional sinner, and for that Hashem punishes.

(Otzrot Ha'Torah: Ma'amar Modeh V'ozev Yerucham)

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*"And he called his name Noach saying, 'This one will bring us rest from our work . . .'" (5:29)*

"But Noach found grace in the eyes of Hashem." (6:8)

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) is quoted as observing: Only a person who finds favor in his own eyes, who feels he has worth, can eventually earn G-d's favor. Even Noach did not find grace in the eyes of Hashem until he first earned the approbation of his fellow man.

This is why Yom Kippur is considered by our Sages to be such a joyous day. Repeatedly in the Yom Kippur prayers, we refer to ourselves as being "Lifnei Hashem" / "standing in the presence of G-d." It is this sense that we are close to Hashem, this self-confidence that we can stand before Him, that allows us to achieve what we are meant to achieve on that Holy Day.

(Noraot Ha'Rav Vol. XV, p.72)

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R' Alexander Ziskind z"l

("Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah")

R' Alexander Ziskind of Horodna (Grodno, Belarus), was the author of the unique and influential work, *Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah* / "The Foundation and Root of [Divine] Service." He was a student of R' Aryeh Leib Epstein of Konigsberg, reportedly one of only two individuals whose written works were graced by a *haskamah* / letter of recommendation from R' Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon. R' Alexander Ziskind never held a rabbinic post, and he encouraged his children as well not to enter the rabbinate. However, he was known for his tremendous piety, which is reflected in his two published works. He died on 18 Adar 5554 / 1794.

The book *Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah* is a manual for increasing one's *kavanah* / concentration and devotion when serving Hashem, with chapters covering the daily prayers and other daily activities, Shabbat, the holidays and other major life events. Many great sages, for example, the Chafetz Chaim, reportedly scheduled regular times to study this work. In the introduction, the author writes:

In this work, it will be explained how a person should concentrate his thoughts in all the prayers and blessings and in all the *avodot* / services of our Maker and Creator, may His name be blessed and elevated, which we perform as we were commanded throughout the year from beginning to end, and how to act with awe and love to our Creator, may His name be blessed and elevated, so as to bring pleasure to the One Whose Name is Blessed, for this is the reason for man's existence.

Elsewhere in the introduction he writes:

Certainly, anyone who has a brain in his head will admit to the truth, i.e., that one who does not have in mind the meaning of the words of all the prayers, blessings, praises and intentions which will be quoted in this work can have applied to him the verse (Tehilim 101:7), "One who tells lies shall not be established before My eyes."

He explains:

Take for example the verse [in the morning prayers], "I will praise Hashem while I live . . ." If a person says these words and does not have in mind that he accepts upon himself in his heart and his thoughts to praise and sing to his G-d all the days of his life, then he is telling a lie, for he is saying that he accepts to do this [i.e., praise Hashem] and his heart is in fact distant from such an intention.

Similarly, if one says the verse [also in the morning prayers], "Let Israel exult in its Maker, let Bnei Yisrael rejoice in their King" and he does not feel a great powerful joy that his Maker and Creator, may His name be blessed and elevated, has given him the opportunity to be associated with Him, then he is telling a lie.

Throughout the remainder of the work, the author gives practical advice drawn from the Gemara, Midrashim and Zohar to enhance the concentration and attention of one who is praying or performing other acts of Divine service. [G-d willing, we will publish excerpts from this work during the coming year for the benefit of all.]

R' Alexander Ziskind's ethical will to his children is been printed in many editions of *Yesod*

Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah and also contains important guidance.

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