

CLASS 70 - BEREISHIS

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

Once again, we begin this week the story of creation. Ma'aseh Breishis is not an event that happened long ago, but rather, it is the narrative of an ongoing revelation; the origin of man and his world; his life and his death, and the role that he plays in rediscovering the Master of the universe.

Breishis is the beginning, and it outlines all of creation; the six days that parallel the six thousand years of existence, and Gan Eden man's ultimate destination. The garden of Eden was man's original world, and it reflects an ideal that will be realized only at the end of time.

But, this seems a bit contradictory. If Gan Eden is the image of man's eternal resting place, the goal and objective of his lifetime of service, why is it described at the very beginning of the Torah, rather than at its end?

In our shiur this week, we will explain this idea, demonstrating why beginnings and ends are always identical, for at the end of the line, we all return to the beginning.

1

"And this is the blessing that Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Bnei Yisrael before his death" (Devarim 33:1)

"...before his death" "close to his death" (Rashi, ad. loc.)

It is not merely a coincidence that Moshe Rabbeinu blesses the Jewish people on the day of his death, but rather, it is the approach of death that renders this time fit for blessing.

This idea, to bless the nation immediately before death, parallels one other obligation that is associated with man's imminent demise:

"Rebbe Eliezer said: return [to G-d] one day before you die. His students asked: does man know the day of his death? He responded: Certainly then! He should repent today, perhaps he will die tomorrow, and in this way he will do Teshuva all his life." (Shabbos 153a)

The responsibility to repent before death is not merely to rectify past misdeeds before it's too late. Rather, as with the blessings of Moshe Rabbeinu, the moment before death is the most opportune and appropriate time for Teshuva, a natural and expected occurrence.

Why is Teshuva referred to as return? To where is man returning? Has he been there before?

Apparently, true repentance returns man to the pristine state of purity that he enjoyed before his original misdeed. Much more than simple regret, proper Teshuva cleanses all evil, restoring the kingdom of G-d on earth.

In a very real sense, man discovers once again eternal life.

In other words: at the end, he goes back to the beginning. For this reason then, Gan Eden is described at the beginning of creation. After all is said and done "Sof Ma'aseh B'Machshava Techila the end of all deeds was in the original plan."

When man reaches the end of the line, though he may have wandered, he is sure to recognize that the path he has chosen has arrived at a dead end. Of necessity, he must return to his origins, hoping to find once again the straight and narrow path the road back to Gan Eden.

This is the Teshuva that precedes man's death, an end that inspires a new beginning.

2

Let us take this concept one step further.

"With the sweat of your brow you will eat bread, until you return to the ground from which you were created Ki Afar Attah V'El Afar Tashuv - for you are dust, and to the dust you will return." (Breishis 3:19)

In a very real sense, and in a physical context as well, at the end man returns to his source, the very earth from which he was formed.

Yet, the burial of man's physical body alludes to a different idea as well.

Let us explain.

Elsewhere, man's being is defined not as just any dust, but specifically - "Afar Min HaAdamah dust from the earth" (Breishis 2:7)

And Rashi explains: "He gathered dust from all the earth, from the four directions, so that wherever he dies, the earth will accept him for burial."

Man's burial is incorporated as an aspect of his very creation, and his essential nature - from its earliest origin - carries within itself a hint of his ultimate end.

What is the reason that we bury man's body after death?

"...this is a wondrous matter to those who understand the secret of man's burial, for the idea of burial... is hiding something away for the future. Because man has the potential to live for the future, he is buried in the ground...teaching that he has the potential for life ... when the dead are resurrected, for things that are open and revealed are actualized, while matters that are hidden exist in potential." (Maharal, Gur Aryeh, loc. cit.)

At the moment of physical death a man's body may cease to function, but it is not the end of life. True life is hidden - locked away in potential, and waiting for the righteous man who will bring it back to this world and restore a lost reality.

In this way, he returns to the garden of Eden. The apparent end is actually a new beginning.

Death and Teshuva are very much intertwined, both the inevitable conclusion of a temporal and finite existence. Yet, a deeper look reveals more: the hidden blessings of eternity that lie just beneath the surface, waiting to be discovered.

In the very same vein, on the day of his death, Moshe Rabbeinu sees the opportunity to bless the Jewish people. And as we - his descendants - complete the reading of the Torah, our journey through the cycle of life, we ready ourselves to begin again once more.

Have a good Shabbos!

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