

UNREAL

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

The Garden of Eden provided all that Adam and Eve needed to live. But with their expulsion came the curse, "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread." (Beraishis/Genesis 3:19) But the Talmud informs us that with G-d in absolute control of the entire universe, our mandated efforts are just that. G-d cursed mankind with having to expend effort; the degree of success that those efforts yield is completely out of our hands - and totally in G-d's. Indeed, the Talmud teaches, "A person's sustenance is apportioned for him in Heaven on Rosh HaShana" (Beitza 16a).

But why must we go through this effort? What is the purpose to this seemingly meaningless task, if G-d is going to provide our sustenance in the end?

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1) explains that our burden of requisite effort serves as a spiritual challenge. By its very nature, the physical world in which we live challenges our ability to connect spiritually. The Hebrew for "world", "olam", derives from "he'elam", meaning "hidden", because our physical world hides G-d's presence and spiritual realities from our consciousness. By all appearances, our will controls and dictates the success of our livelihood and chores. It is very easy to succumb to the belief "my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!" (Devarim/Deuteronomy 8:17) It is incumbent upon us to remember that, conceptually, nature does not exist; nature is no less than wondrous Divine marvels to which we are privy on a daily basis. Nothing happens without G-d willing it to be. So, too, our livelihood is one of the many natural "miracles" to which we are too accustomed, not unlike a stunning sunset or a blossoming flower. Despite our toil, we must remember that we are fulfilling our mandate, but the results are not ours to determine.

G-d's punishments are never arbitrary or vengeful; rather, they serve to undo the affects the sin. How does this punishment repair the damage done by Adam and Eve? Rabbi Dessler concludes that Adam's sin was that he wanted to understand evil. But Eden is a place of complete, pristine spirituality - a place that is exclusively good. Therefore, he was removed from this environment and placed in the realm of coarse physicality, a world subject to the "laws of nature". G-d appreciated that the way for mankind to undo what Adam did is, while toiling in the physical realm that Adam craved, developing the understanding of the fallaciousness of nature and the reality of G-d's dominion.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) in Michtav Me'Eliyahu, his collected writings and discourses; 1891- 1954; of London and B'nai Brak,

one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement

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