

IT WAS A MISUNDERSTANDING...

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we once again begin the yearly cycle of Torah-reading with parshas Breishis. "In the beginning"... Starting again...

We've gone through intense introspection during the days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur -- sorting out who we really are and what role we must play in Hashem's master-plan. Almost immediately afterwards we spent seven days enveloped in the loving embrace of the succah -- forsaking the comforts of our permanent homes and moving into temporary ones. Focusing on what is really permanent and what is really temporary, what is truly important and where our priorities must lie. Hashem seems to be laying out the groundwork for us, preparing us with the prerequisites needed to start again...

With that we begin the Torah: "Berishis barah Elokim... [In the beginning of Hashem's creation...][1:1]." Hashem created a perfect world, day by day, until He reached the pinnacle of His creations -- "Na'aseh Adom b'tzalmenu kidmusenu [Let us make man in the form of the angels (Rashbam), similar to us that he'll make free-will decisions based on his knowledge and understanding (Sforno).][1:26]." The holiness of Adom Harishon is totally beyond our grasp. The angels wanted to sing praises to him as they do to Hashem.

The Ramban reveals to us the nature of Adom Harishon before his sin. He did all that he was supposed to do as part of his innate character, just as the heavens and its hosts do the will of Hashem without any deviation.

He was given one commandment -- not to eat from the Etz Ha'da'as Tov V'ra [the Tree of Desiring Good and Evil]. The fruit of this tree would put into a person the desire to choose tov [good] or ra [evil].

We stated above that Adom Harishon was intrinsically a free-will being. How was there free-will before the knowledge of and desire for ra?

Rav Chaim Volozhiner explains in his classic Nefesh HaChaim that Adom Harishon before the sin did have the ability of choosing tov or ra. However, he was the embodiment of unsullied purity and holiness without any internal leaning toward ra. Any desire toward ra came from an external source (the nachash [primordial snake]), as an outsider might try to convince a person to jump into a fire. By eating from the Etz Ha'da'as, man's desire to do ra entered the person himself to the point that it appears that he really wants to do it!

Rav Dessler explains this further. In our present state of 'after the sin' we hear our desires for ra in first person. "I really want to do that... I really want to go there..." The desires for tov then speak up in second person. "You know that you really shouldn't... You know it's wrong..." The "I" is the want to do ra. The mutiny has been so complete that we totally identify with the ra. That was not the case with Adom Harishon. As the Ramban wrote, his "I" only wanted to do what was tov. An internal desire to go against the will of Hashem was incomprehensible to Adom Harishon. It was like wanting to jump into a fire. How could "I" want to do ra? How could "I" want to cause myself destruction?

The Ramban writes that before the sin, Adom Harishon had no concept of tov and ra. Rather, his decision making process decided between sheker [falsehood] and emes [truth]. Meaning, when one sees with perfect clarity the goodness of good and the evil of evil, the decision is one of truth or falsehood. Only good, the will of Hashem, is true and enduring. Evil, going against the will of Hashem and thinking something could be gained by that is the most ridiculous falsehood imaginable. However, as we move further and further from that clarity, our decision begins to take the shape of good and evil, right and wrong, proper and improper. Ra becomes a possibility... I can gain plenty by choosing and doing ra but I shouldn't do it... It's wrong... We've lost sight of the intrinsic truth and falsehood of the decision. The Etz Ha'da'as Tov V'ra [the Tree of Desiring Good and Evil] confused the decision of truth and falsehood into one good and evil.

If Adom Harishon had that absolute clarity, how could he have gone ahead and eaten from the tree that Hashem had commanded him not to?

Again, Rav Dessler explains. The decision to sin could only have come from a misunderstanding. From mistakenly thinking that true tov would result from his actions. Adom Harishon felt that in his present state he could only produce a minimal kiddush Hashem [sanctification of Hashem's name]. He and the world were in such a pure state. The decision to choose truth/good was such a simple one. If, however, both he and the world were to be lowered a bit, to move a bit closer to ra, and if in that state he would still recognize ra as being the sheker that it is, then the kiddush Hashem [sanctification of Hashem's name] that he would bring about would be that much greater. The external seduction spoke to him in second person. "You are obligated to do that! Truth and love of Hashem demand it of you! To not do it and thereby not bring about your maximum kiddush Hashem, that will be your sin!"

That was the test that Adom Harishon was faced with. A harrowing decision of which course of action was true emes/tov.

Rav Dessler writes that Chaza"l, in their crypt manner, allude to this. The nachash said that by eating, "you'll become like Elokim, knowers of good and evil [3:5]." Rashi explains this in a baffling manner. You'll become like Elokim -- you'll create olamos [worlds].

We've mentioned many times before that Hashem hid Himself in this world in order to allow us free-will. The Hebrew word for world is 'olam' which means hidden. The world is defined as the place

wherein Hashem hides Himself. Our choosing of tov would 'earn' us the ultimate tov -- connecting to the Source of and epitome of Tov -- connecting to Hashem Himself. What results is that the creation of the world was a creation of seeming evil for the purpose of bringing about ultimate good.

Adom Harishon was told by the nachash that he too would create olamos. He too would be a partner in this creation. By eating from the Etz Ha'da'as he too would create seeming evil for the purpose of bringing about ultimate good.

It was his lofty madregah [spiritual level] which led to his mistake. With the clarity he had, he couldn't imagine the darkness and confusion of ra. He couldn't imagine just how difficult things could and would become. He thought the tests would be easy to pass and one would have to be crazy to succumb to ra. He decided to create evil to bring about good. He ate from the Etz Ha'da'as.

What was at the core of Adom Harishon's mistake? The thought that something could be gained by going against the Will of Hashem. What is at the core of every aveira [sin] that we, the descendants of Adom Harishon, commit? The thought that something can be gained by going against the will of Hashem. That clear decision of emes [truth] and sheker [falsehood] that has become clouded into one of tov [good] and ra [evil].

This week we once again begin the yearly cycle of Torah-reading. "In the beginning"... Starting again... A new year... Perhaps that is the most important point to gird ourselves with as we begin again. That absolute truth and absolute falsehood. The realization that absolutely nothing can be gained by going against the Will of Hashem.

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha-insights is dedicated in mazel tov to Howie Hershkovich and Martha Vays in honor of their upcoming wedding. May they be zocheh to much happiness together and to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisroel.

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