

# IT'S ALL ABOUT REDEMPTION PART II

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

## G-d Like and Self Serving

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This class is dedicated by Ephraim Sobol in loving memory of his father, Shlomo Mordechai ben Yaakov a"h.

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In last week's issue we explained that humankind was created to seek redemption. In other words, the purpose of creation is Geulah (redemption). We further explained that the meaning of redemption was the absolute acceptance of Hashem's (G-d's) word (law, commandments, etc.)

From the moment that Adam and Chava sinned and the evil inclination was released they needed to seek redemption. That redemption was a return to the pristine purity of their inception. That pristine purity was the absolute acceptance of G-d's word as to the meaning and purpose of their creation and existence. Redemption is therefore the absolute acceptance of Hashem's word. Redemption is the acceptance that the only true value is G-d's intention for creating the universe, in whole and in part.

This week I would like to continue the discussion of redemption as the focus of creation and Hashem's first and last intent.

How do we know what G-d's intent is? How do we know what Hashem really wants? The sixth of the Rambam's Ani Mamain (Maimonides's Thirteen Principles of Faith) states, "I believe with perfect faith that the words of the prophets are true." Prophecy was and is the medium of G-d's communication with humanity. In fact, the Torah is called "Moshe's Prophecy." Whether in the most direct manner of G-d actually speaking to the prophet, such as in the case of Moshe, or the more common visions and dreams that most prophets experienced, the manner of G-d communication is prophecy. There have always been prophets. In every generation starting with Adam and Chava there have been individuals who merited the direct communication of G-d.

The story of Adam, Chava, the Nachash (serpent) and Gan Eden (Garden of Eden) is the first extensive communication between G-d and a prophet recorded in the Torah. A deeper analysis of that "scene" is essential for understanding the relationship between creation and redemption.

G-d placed Adam and Chava in the Garden to experience His reality in all its intricate and majestic manifestations. The hope was that the humans He would fashion in His own image would be free of all worries for their basic needs and able to spend all their time exploring the glory that is this universe. Through personal observation and prophetic direction they would be able to ascertain the truth of His existence and the purpose He had for creating the universe.

The plan assumed two human efforts: a) natural curiosity and therefore the desire to explore and observe; b) the desire to know the truth of Who and why. Either of the two by itself could not have worked. Curiosity without a drive toward truth, purpose, and understanding is the prescription for an amoral world of perversion and self-worship. The desire to know the truth without the curiosity and ambition to know how truth manifests itself is a potential that will never be realized. In the end the person will have squandered his precious time and strength on waiting for the proverbial bird to "come-a-whispering." Curiosity and exploration is the minimal "Hishtadlus" (effort) that Hashem expects from us.

(As an aside... When Moshe turned to explore and further observe the "Burning Bush" he passed the first test of his selection for Redeemer. I believe it is the Kutzkah Rebba who said that the Burning Bush was visible to many other shepherds grazing their flocks in the area; however, only Moshe took the time to investigate the obvious. As we have all experienced, the best teachers are the ones who themselves are still curious and are still seeking knowledge and understanding.)

However, in addition to having created Adam and Chava with a natural curiosity and the drive to seek out understanding and truth, he also forbade them from eating from the two trees in the center of the garden. Of course, that guaranteed that the two trees would be the focus of their curiosity and desire; however, the world was new and they were the first to walk its heretofore-untouched beauty. There was more than enough to occupy Adam and Chava's desire to explore and experience before turning their attention to the "two trees in the center of the garden." More over, it appears from the narrative of the story that Hashem had never told them the true nature of the two trees. It was only after the Nachash revealed the true nature of the one tree that their desire awoke to experience that which was forbidden.

In last week's analysis we pointed out that being unclothed was not a contradiction to basic modesty. If value is determined by its association with purpose in the service of G-d then the human body should have no other value than its purpose in fulfilling G-d's Mitzvos. Attributing values of personal pleasure and gratification to the physical being of a person is selfish to the human creature and summarily ignores the presence of G-d in creating and ordering the physical universe.

Prior to sinning, Adam and Chava had no other system for evaluating value except the law of G-d. So long as they did not eat from the tree they served all of G-d's purpose in being created. Nothing else was forbidden or restricted. They were free to spend their lives exploring every aspect and facet of G-d's wondrous nature. As such, there was no reason to cover one's body because of modesty.

Modesty became necessary when there was the need to distinguish between G-d's intentions and their own desires. Modesty aids us in being clear about what our intentions should be. That is why in certain professional settings (e.g. medical examination or procedures) the norms of modesty are changed. The professional setting imposes the necessary clarity on why the human body is being uncovered. It should not be for the sake of personal gratification; rather, it is for the sake of health and helping. It further explains why there are Halachik prohibitions against wearing clothes in certain limited circumstances. To cover one's self when G-d's intentions are best served by being unclothed is itself a denial of G-d's intent and therefore wrong.

After the Nachash enticed Adam and Chava to eat from the forbidden fruit the Torah states that (3:7) "...their eyes were opened and they knew they were naked..." Rashi references the Medresh that answers the obvious question. It took eating from the forbidden fruit to know that they were naked? Even a blind man knows when he is naked! The Medresh answers, "They had only one Mitzvah and now they had none. Adam and Chava knew at that moment that they were naked of Mitzvos!"

Imagine a world without Mitzvos (commandments). How would you serve G-d? What would you do? What would you not do? What would you teach your children and students? Mitzvos are how we serve Hashem. Whether heard directly from G-d or taught by one of His prophets, the Mitzvos are a revelation of G-d's wishes for how we are supposed to serve Him.

Adam heard G-d's wishes directly. He was told not to eat from the two trees in the middle of the garden. Adam then told the commandment to Chava. She believed Adam and knew that not eating from the tree was G-d's wish. Besides the natural curiosity and exploration and the desire to ascertain the truth of G-d's existence, the only way Adam and Chava could willfully serve G- was to not eat from the tree of good and evil. The moment Chava and Adam ate from the tree they could no longer fulfill their one Mitzvah. Forever after they would never again be in a position of not having eaten from the forbidden fruit. As Rashi references, "Their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked of Mitzvos."

More so, their eyes were opened to the possibility of not listening to Hashem. No longer were they pristine and pure in their service to G-d. Until that moment everything they did, everything they desired to do, so long as they did not eat from the forbidden fruit was perfectly allowed. In fact, they were fulfilling G-d's intention for them by exploring their natural curiosity. The simple act of living and experiencing was the fulfillment of G-d's commandments. Not so anymore. With tasting the forbidden fruit, Adam and awoke their evil inclination; meaning, their desire to do what they felt like doing even if it was in conflict with what G-d wanted. From then on they would have to ascertain whether their purpose in fulfilling their natural curiosity was for the sake of revealing and sanctifying G-d's name or for the sake of fulfilling their prurient desires.

How foolish they must have felt! Not only didn't the forbidden fruit make them smarter, G-d like, and more capable of serving G-d; instead, it negated their only means for willfully serving G-d.

What were they to do? What does one do when they have no Mitzvos? What does one do when even Teshuvah (repentance) will not help? The sin stood. They had eaten. They could no longer, "not eat. Regret and apologies could not turn back the clock!

The answer is, they needed more Mitzvos. Through prophecy G-d would have to reveal to them further instructions to frame their existence in purposeful intent. No longer would humanity be able to serve G-d by just being. From here on in humanity would have to apply discernment and wisdom (see the 4th blessing in the daily Amidah - silent benedictions) to every action so as to know whether their performance was serving G-d or serving themselves.

It was in this context that humanity failed and had to be destroyed. The ten generations from Adam to Noach had a choice. Do they frame their lives within the values of the Seven Noahide Laws (which were actually revealed to Adam and his sons way before Noach was born) and give focus and purpose to existence by imposing G-d's intent on their lives; or, do they forge their own destinies ignoring G-d's commandments and following the dictates of their hearts and minds?

They chose the later and consigned the entire world, except the eight refugees on Noah's Ark, to irreparable harm.

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