

AN ENLIGHTENING INSIGHT INTO THE MEANING OF GADOL AND KATAN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Bereishis

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 432, Choices in Marriage Partners. Good Shabbos!

An Enlightening Insight Into The Meaning of Gadol and Katan

The pasuk in this week's parsha says, "And the L-rd made two luminaries: The great luminary (haMaor haGadol) to rule in the day and the minor luminary (haMaor haKatan) to rule at night and the stars." [Bereishis 1:16]. Rashi quotes the teaching of our Sages that originally the sun and moon were created equal. However the moon came to G-d with the complaint that two kings cannot share one crown. G-d then commanded the moon to minimize itself, and then there was a profound difference between the sun and the moon.

The sun is not only much larger than the moon but, additionally, it generates its own light. The moon is only a reflection of the light of the sun.

In the past, we have suggested that through this pasuk [verse] we may gain insight into the blessing given at every Jewish baby's circumcision. We say at a Bris Milah, "Zeh haKatan [this young child] Gadol yiheyey [will mature into greatness]." I have noted previously that katan [child] represents one who is concerned only about himself and his own needs, whereas gadol [greatness] represents one who is concerned about his fellow man and the needs of others. We express our hope and prayer that this helpless and dependent infant who can think only of his own needs will one day grow up and mature into one who is able to be concerned with and will help provide for the needs of others.

However, I recently heard another beautiful insight into this bracha [blessing], in the name of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt"l. Rav Soloveitchik suggested that this pasuk in Bereishis provides us with

the Torah's definition of the words "Gadol" and "Katan".

The sun is called Gadol [great] because it generates its own light. The moon is called Katan [minor] because it does not generate its own light. It only reflects the light of the sun. We express the prayer at a Bris Milah that "this katan will develop into a gadol." Every child starts out - and for a large portion of a his (or her) life remains - a katan, a reflection of the parents. A child is influenced and guided by his parents. He reflects the light generated by those who brought him into the world and those who raise him. The blessing is that the child should take this light and generate therewith his own power and illumination.

Why Did Adam Need to be Convinced to Enter Gan Eden?

Later in the parsha, G-d placed Adam, the first man, into Gan Eden [the Garden of Eden] with the charge to work it and to guard it [Bereishis 2:15]. Rashi says that the language of the pasuk (VaYikach) indicates that G-d had to seduce Adam with pleasant words and convince him to enter Gan Eden.

Imagine G-d offering us a place that was rent free, obligation free, with angels at our service feeding us, fanning us, and taking care of all of our needs. Would we need to be convinced? Would we need to be 'seduced'? Rashi makes it sound like the Almighty had to do a real sales job on Adam to get him to agree to go into Gan Eden. What is the meaning of Rashi's comment?

Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi explains that it is the life goal of the yetzer haRah [evil inclination] and Satan to prevent a person from doing whatever he is supposed to do in this world. A person may have to do something that is sweet, delightful, and enjoyable. But if it is something which 'has to be done,' the yetzer haRah invariably counsels him against doing it. It is the power of our yetzer haRah to be able to convince us that anything that we MUST do is, in fact, the worst thing in the world for us to do. The yetzer haRah can blind us, selling us a bill of goods that convinces us that the greatest thing in the world for us is really not good for us at all.

There are so many things in life that are really enjoyable, but people somehow are convinced otherwise. We may sit down to study a page of Talmud, or attend a Torah class, or learn a single Mishna. Torah is sweeter than honey. It is the ultimate enjoyment. It is intellectually stimulating. It is the closest we can approach to the Divine and to Divine Insight. It is beautiful to learn Torah. It is the greatest thing in the world!

But we know how life works. It is time for the shiur [Torah class] and it is the bottom of the seventh inning and there are two runners on base... Or, "should I get up? It is cold outside. It is raining." This excuse... that excuse... The yetzer haRah can make sitting and learning a task, a pain, and a burden.

Such is its power.

This is the insight of the previously quoted Rashi. Gan Eden itself -- the most beautiful and pleasurable existence that has ever been known to man in his entire history -- can be made unattractive by the yetzer haRah. Adam did not want to go. He needed encouragement, persuasion, and even seduction before he would consent to enter.

Why didn't he want to go into Gan Eden? He did not want to go because he was SUPPOSED to go, because G-d commanded him to go. Even though the yetzer haRah was still in a very "watered-down" form at this stage in history, it had the power to plant seeds of doubt in the mind of Adam regarding whether it was in his best interest to enter Gan Eden.

Man's obligation is to try to remove the mirage that the yetzer haRah always paints for us -- that what is good is bad and what is bad is good. Our task is to do what we are supposed to do, so that we can enjoy the "Gan Eden on this earth" that is inherent in living a life filled with Torah and Mitzvos.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Bereishis are provided below:

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