**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT BEREISHIT**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei

 The Torah in Parashat Bereishit tells that when Adam and Chava were first created, before they partook of the forbidden fruit, they were unclothed, yet “*lo yitboshashu*” – they would not feel ashamed (2:25).

 Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, commenting to this verse, discusses the etymology of the root *b.o.sh*., which is used in reference to shame and embarrassment. He suggests that a connection exists between this root and the verb *b.sh.sh*., which means “tarry,” or, more specifically, not arriving when expected, as in Moshe’s delayed return from atop Mount Sinai – “*ki* ***bosheish*** *Moshe la-redet min ha-har*” (Shemot 32:1). Rav Hirsch explains that the root *b.o.sh*., which denotes shame, refers to feeling disappointed in oneself, the awareness of having failed to meet one’s own expectations. Shame, Rav Hirsch writes, “is the feeling of one who has fallen short, has not come up to his expectations of himself. When someone has not attained that which he should be, finds that he is not what he ought to be, then he feels ashamed of himself.” The words for “shame” and “unexpected delay” are etymologically linked, Rav Hirsch suggests, because shame is precisely the recognition of one’s failure to meet his expectations of himself.

Rav Hirsch proceeds to reflect upon the significance of this emotion:

This feeling that God has implanted in Man, which at once comes over him when he becomes conscious of his shortcoming, is the greatest gift which the Grace of God has given mankind of whom He probably knew quite well that he would often not come up to what he was meant to be. Through it, Man becomes his own monitor and guardian… Thus God has entrusted every man to himself, has implanted in every man the ideal by which to judge himself. The consciousness of this ideal is what we call conscience, and the condemning verdict of one’s conscience is *b.o.sh.*: shame.

 The experience of shame, in Rav Hirsch’s view, reflects our having been created with an intuitive sense of self-expectation. God implanted within a person a natural desire to achieve and to meet certain standards, and so we feel shame and embarrassment when we fail. These feelings should not dishearten or discourage us, but should rather be celebrated as a precious gift, a priceless asset which constantly spurs us to grow, improve and achieve, and to work towards maximizing our potential and accomplishing all that we have been brought into the world to accomplish.

Sunday

 The Gemara in Masekhet Avoda Zara (8a) tells that Adam and Chava partook of the forbidden fruit on the day they were created, on Friday. When night fell, Adam – who had not yet experienced darkness – mistakenly assumed that this meant the world was coming to an end. As a result of his failure, he figured, God was reversing the process of creation and returning all of existence to “*tohu va-vohu*” – chaos and nothingness. Adam and Chava fasted and wept, anguished over having, in their mind, brought the end of the universe. Once the sun rose, they realized that “*minhago shel olam hu*” – this was the natural cycle of day and night.

 This Talmudic account of Adam’s reaction to nightfall powerfully captures the feelings that people often experience in response to crisis and adversity. When the world “darkens,” they instinctively assume that “the world is ending,” that the “darkness” is a permanent condition, and they despair. The Gemara here conveys the critically important lesson that when life becomes “dark,” in any sense, this is “*minhago shel olam*” – the normal pattern of life. Sometimes we find ourselves in “darkness,” but we must trust and believe that situations can change and the “light” can return.

 The Gemara’s depiction also perhaps captures the exaggerated response that people sometimes have towards their own failure. Just as Adam assumed that the world was, quite literally, coming to an end due to his wrongdoing, people might sometimes be misled into thinking that the damage caused by their wrongful actions are irreversibly devastating. Of course, we are to recognize that every misdeed causes harm, both to ourselves and to the world, and we must commit to repent to the best of our ability in order to rectify the damage we cause through our misconduct. But just as it is wrong to downplay the harmful effects of sin, so is it wrong to exaggerate them. Adam’s mistake in assuming that he caused the world to end is one which we must avoid when we reflect upon our own mistakes. We must certainly acknowledge the seriousness of our wrongdoing, but at the same time, we must remember that the “*minhago shel olam*” is that people make mistakes and are then given the opportunity to correct them and to grow. We cause harm through our sinful conduct – but we are granted the power to reverse the damage and restore the “light” through our sincere repentance and sustained efforts to improve.

Monday

 The Torah in Parashat Bereishit tells of the creation of Adam: “God said: Let us make a person in our image and in our form…” (1:26). The Gemara (Sanhedrin 38b), as cited by Rashi, notes that God here speaks in the plural form – “*na’aseh*” (“let us make”) – as though He was speaking with others in reaching the decision to create a human being. This verse, the Gemara writes, could lead to heresy, as it could be misinterpreted to mean that God is not the sole divine being, and He needed the involvement of other gods to create the human being. The Gemara cites this verse as one of several examples where a heretical argument anchored in a verse in the Torah is refuted by a different verse in that same context. Here, although the Torah speaks of God making His announcement in the plural form, the Torah later states, “The Lord created Adam in His image…” (1:27) – clearly indicating that God created Adam alone, without anybody else’s assistance.

 When we examine the human being, we might be led to assume that he is the product of multiple “creators.” After all, we have within ourselves so many directly opposing and conflicting elements and tendencies. We are both kind and cruel; generous and selfish; patient and impulsive; intelligent and foolish; controlled and undisciplined; ambitious and lazy; refined and coarse. Our conduct, too, is so often contradictory. We act one way today and much differently tomorrow. We constantly change our opinions and our preferences. A pagan would examine the human being and conclude that it must have been created by a variety of different forces, as only diverse origins could explain such diverse tendencies and properties.

 The Gemara therefore draws our attention to the fact that although “*na’aseh adam*” – we were created with many different and conflicting components, nevertheless, “*va-yivra Hashem*” – these were all given to us by the one, true God, and each person is, in fact, a single being. We were created as complex beings, and this complexity is integral to the human experience. Whereas regarding angels it is said, “One angel does not fulfill two missions” (*Bereishit Rabba* 50:2) – they are simple, one-dimensional entities, capable of following just a single, narrow direction – the human being is complex and multifaceted, and this is precisely the way God created us.

 When we find ourselves struggling with our own tendencies, we must recognize that this struggle is inherent to the human experience. We should not aspire to become people who automatically, robotically and instinctively always do the right thing, like angels. We should expect ourselves to struggle, and to occasionally make mistakes, precisely because we are complex and self-contradictory creatures.

Tuesday

 We read in Parashat Bereishit (1:11-12) of God’s bringing forth vegetation on the third day of the world’s creation. The Ramban (1:11) notes that in describing the creation of trees, the Torah mentions only trees which produce fruit (“*eitz oseh peri*”), and says nothing about “*ilanei serak*” – trees which do not produce fruit. Although not all trees produce fruit, the Torah mentions only those that are fruit-bearing. The Ramban suggests that this might be the textual basis for the view in the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabba* 5:9) that initially, at the time of creation, all trees produced fruit. It was only later, when God cursed the earth in response to Adam’s sin, that “*ilanei serak*” began to grow from the ground. (The Ramban then proceeds to offer a different possibility, according to the *peshat*.)

 Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his *Oznayim La-Torah*, suggests drawing further proof to this opinion from the text of the curse which God pronounced in response to Adam’s sin. After informing Adam that the earth would be cursed, God declared that the earth would produce “*kotz ve-dardar*.” The word “*kotz*” is generally translated as “thorns,” and Onkelos translates “*dardar*” as “*atedin*.” The word “*atad*,” Rav Sorotzkin writes, refers to a prickly tree, as we know from the fable of Yotam in Sefer Shoftim (9:14), where the trees are said to have asked the “*atad*” to serve as their king. The Ralbag, in his commentary to Sefer Shoftim, notes that the “*atad*” tree mentioned by Yotam is the “*dardar*” which God mentions in Parashat Bereishit. And, the Gemara in Masekhet Sota (13a) raises a question concerning the location “*Goren Ha-atad*” (“the granary of the *atad*”) spoken of in Parashat Vayechi (Bereishit 50:10), asking, “*Ve-khi yeish goren la-atad*” – “is there a granary for an *atad*?” It was clear to the Gemara that the *atad* produces no fruit, such that no agricultural work can be associated with this tree. Accordingly, Rav Sorotzkin writes, the curse pronounced after Adam’s sin that the earth would produce “*dardar*” meant that henceforth, not all trees would bear fruit, indicating that initially, no “*ilanei serak*” existed in the world.

 If so, then this teaches us that the ideal state of the world is when we produce no “*ilanei serak*,” when everything we do yields “fruit” which brings benefit to the world. It is only in an “accursed” world when we work and produce without benefitting mankind, when we create large, impressive “trees” that do not meaningfully contribute to the world. The ideal to which we should strive is the point where all our “trees,” all our time, work and effort, are directed towards the production of flavorful, nutritious “fruit,” providing benefit to other people and to the world at large.

Wednesday

 The Torah in Parashat Bereishit tells of God’s creation of the first woman, Chava, who was formed from a rib which God took from Adam. We read that God had Adam fall into a deep sleep, and as he slept, God removed a rib and formed it into a woman, whom he then brought to Adam (2:21).

 The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabba* 17:7) tells of a number of questions posed by a certain Roman noblewoman to Rabbi Yossi concerning this account. One question is why God decided to perform this procedure while Adam was sleeping, and thus unaware of what was happening. Assuredly, God could have come up with some sort of anesthetic to ensure Adam would not experience pain as a result of the removal of a rib. Why did He choose instead to have this occur while Adam slept?

 Rabbi Yossi replied that God in fact did initially create Adam’s mate in this fashion. But when Adam first saw her, before the process of her development was complete, she was covered with “*ririn ve-dam*” – “fluid and blood,” and he distanced himself from her, finding her unattractive. God therefore created Chava a second time – while Adam slept, so that he would first lay his eyes on her when she was fully formed, such that he would find her attractive.

 This exchange perhaps teaches that in order to forge successful relationships, we sometimes need to “sleep,” to close our eyes and divert our attention from people’s faults. All of us have, to varying degrees, have “*ririn ve-dam*,” unflattering qualities and characteristics that make us less than entirely likable, and that can thus repel other people. In order for two people to bond, they need to overlook each other’s “*ririn ve-dam*” so they could appreciate each other’s beauty and greatness. We can never expect a spouse, family member or peer to be perfect, without “*ririn ve-dam*,” but we can, and must, occasionally “sleep” and turn our attention away from their faults so we can focus on their impressive qualities and achievements. Then, just as Adam woke up and found Chava attractive, we will be able to respect, admire and cherish one another, so that we can forge meaningful, enduring relationships and bringer greater peace and harmony to the world.

Thursday

 The Torah in Parashat Bereishit tells of how God created the first woman, Chava, from a rib taken from Adam as he slept (2:21-22). Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his *Oznyaim La-Torah*, offers an insightful explanation for the significance of man’s helpmate being formed from a part of his own body. He writes that as long as the rib remained part of Adam, it was bound by Adam’s own limitations. It could go only where he went. When he slept, the rib was inactive. It was capable of taking part only in those activities which Adam was capable of performing.

 The “surgical procedure” by which Chava was formed released the rib from the constraining confines of Adam’s being. It meant that he would have a helpmate capable of doing that which he was incapable of doing. It meant he would have a helpmate who could work and accomplish when he couldn’t. It meant his limited skills and abilities would be complemented by a separate entity with different skills and abilities.

 Rav Sorotzkin suggests that this is the meaning of the phrase “*eizer ke-negdo*” – literally, “a helper opposite him” – which the Torah uses in reference to Adam’s helpmate (2:20). The purpose of a person’s partner is to stand ‘opposite him,” to be different from him and to complement him.

 This is true not only of marriage, but of all our friendships and relationships. Sometimes we feel naturally drawn towards people who think like us, who act like us, and whose lives generally resemble ours. But if we want to be truly “helped,” if we want to grow and improve, we should seek friendships also with those who stand “*ke-negdo*,” who are different from us, who have different strengths and skills than we do, and who see things from different angles and perspectives than we do. We should not befriend only “ribs” – people who are bound by the same limitations are we are. Instead, we should seek friends who will serve the purpose of “*ke-negdo*,” of standing “opposite” us so they could do that which we are unable to do ourselves.

Sometimes we shy away from friendships with people with strengths we lack because they make us feel insecure, uneasy or intimidated. The creation of Chava perhaps teaches us to overcome these hesitations. Rather than feel threatened by those who stand “opposite” us, who are capable of things we aren’t, we should instead eagerly embrace such relationships as opportunities to expand beyond our current limitations and accomplish more than we ever could on our own.

Friday

 We read in Parashat Bereishit the tragic story of the murder of Adam’s second son, Hevel, at the hands of Adam’s eldest son – Kayin. After Kayin’s murderous act, God spoke to him and informed him of his punishment: “You shall work the land, [but] it will no longer grant you its strength; you shall wander about in the land” (4:12). Kayin received two punishments: 1) he would have to work especially hard when tilling the land, because the land would not cooperate and would not yield produce easily; 2) he would be forced to constantly wander, and would never enjoy stability.

 At first glance, these appear as two separate, distinct curses which God pronounced upon Kayin in response to his criminal act. Some commentators, however, including the Radak, explain that these are actually very much related. The Radak writes that God announced He would make Kayin anxious about the agricultural potential of his current location, so he would then move elsewhere in the hope of achieving greater success in his new location. This would continue his entire life, such that he would never experience a sense of stability or satisfaction.

 Unfortunately, this curse suffered by Kayin in one which many of us impose voluntarily upon ourselves. Rather than feel content with the blessings we enjoy under our current circumstances, we feel anxious and restless, wondering if perhaps we would achieve greater success and happiness somewhere else, in a different location, in a different profession, in a different home, or after some other lifestyle change. When we live with this kind of constant anxiety, we will find ourselves in an ongoing state of “*na va-nad*” – “wandering,” without ever experiencing stability and contentment. The punishment brought upon Kayin should remind us to avoid this curse by trying to find satisfaction and happiness in our current location. Certainly, we are entitled and encouraged to make changes to our lives that will truly bring us greater happiness. But at the same time, we must learn to accept and find contentment with what we have without constantly feeling that it is inadequate. Before we decide that the “land” is no longer granting us its “strength,” that our current conditions are unsatisfactory, we must carefully consider if perhaps this feeling of dissatisfaction is self-imposed, and if perhaps it would be preferable to make the most of what we have for the sake of enjoying stability rather than constantly seeking something better.

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