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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV LERNER

Ascending Scales

Adam and Eve err, even rebel; they follow hungry impulses and find themselves exposed. As the guilt seeps into consciousness and the blood drains from their aware faces, a resounding whisper gathers pace; it is the sound of Divine reckoning. In haste they flee and hide in the woods—an act which carries the flavor of mortal fear, a flavor that resonates in our wooden coffins[1] Naked and ashamed, barely born and now unmasked, G-d curses man and offers the now required dignity of dress: "The Lord made coats of skin for Adam and his woman".[2]

Coats of hide, not leaves or fabric, leave mankind clad in the residue of death's touch. Forever accompanied by the texture of animate vulnerability, Adam and Eve are inescapably alerted to their own limits. So the text implies.

Rabbi Meir, though, refutes such an image and infuses the scene with sacred illumination; he, the Midrash reports,[3] would read the word for skin—עור, *Or*—as its softer twin—אור, *Or*—meaning light. Extracting the guttural undertones of the sound, Rabbi Meir simultaneously erases the moral distaste for the image. Man is no longer draped in death, but radiates light. Although expelled, warmth remains; although east of Eden, the hope of paradise lives on.

Rabbi Eliezer, however, refuses to lighten the cloth's sting, and in fact adds a vast new weight to its already heavy load. Taking the text at its word—the cloth *was* skin—but burying deeper into detail, he asks, 'Whose skin was it?' It was, Rabbi Eliezer claims, the skin of the snake.[4] A creature of cruel persuasion, it was the serpent that had triggered human error and shaped the toxic hubris which led to mankind's demise. Being enrobed and enveloped by the scaly skin of man's initial tempter, it would seem, serves as an eternal token not only of the generic limitations of the living, but of Adam's personal failure. In G-d's offer of dignity there appears to lie a ghastly torment; with expulsion and curse as punishment enough, we might ask why G-d would comfort man with such a disturbing gown.

Perhaps we misunderstand the presence of failure, and with the aid of two suggestive scenes we can alleviate the seeming cruelty of Adam's cloak.

One Midrash[5] describes a desert teaming with snakes that had the strange effect that if they touched the shadow of a bird overhead, the bird would burst into pieces. The symbol of failure cannot be concealed; to soar over past misdoings and ignore former misdeeds is to undo all possibility of success; to try and obscure blunders in the shadows is to invite an inner splintering.

When G-d washes away the world's moral degeneracy and recreates it with Noah, Rashi invokes an image in which rather unexpected passengers alight the ark: demons.[6] Emmanuel Levinas suggests that, "These are the tempters of postdiluvian civilizations, without which, no doubt, the mankind of the future could not be, despite its regeneration, a true mankind".[7] In a moving reading of a phrase in Psalms, our Sages proclaim the truth that, "If a human being uses a broken vessel it is shameful, but the vessels that G-d use are specifically broken ones, as per the verse, 'G-d is close to those of a broken heart'".[8] Any attempt to forget our failures is an ill-conceived illusion, unattainable and unhealthy. In Freud's terminology, the repressed will return.

To complete the picture we turn to another desert scene, where Israel are seen surviving on the backs of engendered serpents: "When Israel walked in the desert, in abundant love, G-d directed the snakes to form bridges, and Israel passed over them as a man on a bridge".[9] Snakes and serpents and sins are cunning creatures and will forever haunt our steps—to ignore them is fatal. But to privately carry the knowledge of our failures can offer comfort in the spirit of recognized progress. In confronting our pasts, our hissing sins dissipate into service, and in harmony we ascend their scales. In crossing the bridge toward our destinies, we merge the fibers of Rabbi Meir's and Rabbi Eliezer's imagining, as when we wear our sins and recognize them we can convert icy misdeeds into beams of

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[1] Genesis Rabbah, 19: "'Adam and his wife hid among the woods of the garden' – R' Levi said – this hints to descendants placed in wooden coffins."
[2] Genesis 3:21
[3] Genesis Rabbah, 20
[4] Pirkei D' Rebbi Eliezer, 20
[5] Mechilta D'Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai 15:22; Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach, 18.
[6] Rashi Genesis 6:19
[7] Levinas, Emmanuel. *Nine Talmudic Readings* (New York: Indiana University Press, 1994), 33
[8] Leviticus Rabbah, 7
[9] Midrash Vayosha Collection

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RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

If leadership is the solution, what is the problem? On this, the Torah could not be more specific. It is a failure of responsibility.

The early chapters of Genesis focus on two stories: Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel. Both are about a specific kind of failure.

First Adam and Eve. As we know, they sin. Embarrassed and ashamed, they hide, only to discover that you cannot hide from G-d: "The Lord G-d called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.' And he said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?' The man said, 'The woman you put here with me -- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.' Then the Lord G-d said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'" (Gen. 3: 9-12)

Both insist that it was not their fault. Adam blames the woman. The woman blames the serpent. The result is that they are both punished and exiled from Eden. Adam and Eve deny personal responsibility. They say, in effect, "It wasn't me."

The second story is more tragic. The first instance of sibling rivalry in the Torah leads to the first murder: "Cain said to his brother Abel... While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' 'I don't know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.'" (Gen. 4: 8-10)

Cain does not deny personal responsibility. He does not say, "It was not me," or "It was not my fault." He denies moral responsibility. In effect he asks why he should be concerned with the welfare of anyone but himself. Why should we not do what we want and have the power to do? In Plato's Republic, Glaucon argues that justice is whatever is in the interest of the stronger party. Might makes right. If life is a Darwinian struggle to survive, why should we restrain ourselves for the sake of others if we are more powerful than they are? If there is no morality in nature then I am responsible only to myself. That is the voice of Cain throughout the ages.

These two stories are not just stories. They are an account, at the beginning of the Torah's narrative history of humankind, of a failure, first personal then moral, to take responsibility -- and it is this to which leadership is the answer.

There is a fascinating phrase in the story of Moses' early years. He grows up, goes out to his people, the Israelites, and sees them labouring as slaves. He witnesses an Egyptian officer beating one of them. The text then says: "He looked this way and that and saw no one (Ex. 2: 12, vayar ki ein ish, literally, 'he saw that there was no man')."

It is difficult to read this literally. A building site is not a closed location. There must have been many people present. A mere two verses later we discover that there were Israelites who knew exactly what he had done. The phrase almost certainly means, "He looked this way and that and saw that there was no one else willing to intervene."

If this is so then we have here the first instance of what came to be known as the Genovese syndrome, or "the bystander effect," (For a discussion, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder of Kitty Genovese) so-called after a case in which a woman was attacked in New York in the presence of a large number of people who knew that she was being assaulted but failed to come to her rescue.

Social scientists have undertaken many experiments to try to determine what happens in situations like this. Some argue that the presence of other bystanders affects an individual's interpretation of what is happening. Since no one else is coming to the rescue, they conclude that what is happening is not an emergency.

Others, though, argue that the key factor is diffusion of responsibility. People assume that since there are many people present someone else will step forward and act. That seems to be the correct interpretation of what was happening in the case of Moses. No one else was prepared to come to the rescue. Who, in any case, was likely to do so? The Egyptians were slave-masters. Why should they bother to take a risk to save an Israelite? The Israelites were slaves. Why should they come to the aid of one of their fellows if, by doing so, they were putting their own life at risk?

It took a Moses to act. But that is what makes a leader. A leader is one who takes responsibility. Leadership is born when we become active not passive, when we don't wait for someone else to act because perhaps there is no one else, at least not here, not now. When bad things happen, some avert their eyes. Some wait for others to act. Some blame others for failing to act. Some simply complain. But there are some who say, "If something is wrong let me be among the first to

put it right." They are the leaders. They are the ones who make a difference in their lifetimes. They are the ones who make ours a better world.

Many of the great religions and civilizations are based on acceptance. If there is violence, suffering, poverty and pain in the world, that is the way the world is. Or, that is the will of G-d. Or, that is the nature of nature itself. All will be well in the world to come.

Judaism was and remains the world's great religion of protest. The heroes of faith did not accept; they protested. They were willing to confront G-d himself. Abraham said, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18: 25). Moses said, "Why have you done evil to this people?" (Ex. 5: 22). Jeremiah said, "Why are the wicked at ease?" (Jer. 12: 1). That is how G-d wants us to respond. Judaism is G-d's call to human responsibility. The highest achievement is to become G-d's partner in the work of creation.

When Adam and Eve sinned, G-d called out "Where are you?" As Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, pointed out, this call was not directed only to the first humans. It echoes in every generation. G-d gave us freedom, but with freedom comes responsibility. G-d teaches us what we ought to do but he does not do it for us. With rare exceptions, G-d does not intervene in history. He acts through us, not to us. His is the voice that tells us, as He told Cain before he committed his crime, that we can resist the evil within us as well as the evil that surrounds us.

The responsible life is a life that responds. The Hebrew for responsibility, achrayut, comes from the word acher, meaning an "other." Our great Other is G-d himself, calling us to use the freedom He gave us, to make the world that is more like the world that ought to be. The great question, to which the life we lead is the answer, is, which voice will we listen to? The voice of desire, as in the case of Adam and Eve? The voice of anger as in the case of Cain? Or the voice of G-d calling on us to make this a more just and gracious world?

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"In the Beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth... Let us make the human being in our image and after our likeness."

Why did G-d create the world? If G-d is the All-in-All and perfectly sufficient within Himself, why the necessity for a world? And why a world such as the one in which we live, in many respects a vale of tears and tragedy? From many perspectives, this is the question of all questions. It has special poignancy - and is therefore closely related - to the Days of Awe which we have just experienced and even for the festival of Succot, in which the Divine decree regarding rain is handed down from Above and is the conclusion of the period which marks individual human destiny.

Rav Haim Vital, the disciple-scribe of the legendary Rav Yitzhak Luria (known as the holy Ari), gives an amazing response to our query based upon G-d's second revelation to Moses at Sinai when He forgives Israel and allows for the Second Tablets. The basis of our Yom Kippur liturgy is G-d's own self-definition (as it were): "The Lord, the Lord, G-d, merciful and gracious..." (Exodus 34:6). G-d here defines Himself as a G-d of unconditional love, i.e., the G-d of love before one sins and the G-d of love after one sins (Rashi ad loc.), and the G-d of compassion who loves His children just as a mother loves those who came from her womb.

Love, however, cannot exist in a vacuum; love requires an object to be loved. And that object must also be a subject in and of itself; after all, love for something which one can control is loving an extension of one's self and is only another form of self-love.

G-d, therefore, had to create "other," someone who may be a part of Himself but who must also be separate from Himself, someone who would be granted freedom of choice. That freedom of choice must allow the beloved to do even that which the Lover would not want him to do (see Seforno to Genesis 1:26, "in our image").

This idea formulated by Rav Haim Vital has ramifications that impinge upon almost every human relationship, which poignantly expresses what love is and what love is not. If a husband loves only a wife whom he can control, if a parent loves only an adult child whom he can control, then one is loving not the other, but rather oneself, loving only an extension of oneself.

Clearly, this is not true love. Undoubtedly, love which leaves room for the other to do even that which one would not want him to do leaves the door open to conflict and - in the case of G-d - human sin. In the most extreme case, it enables the possibility of Auschwitz and Treblinka. And, from a theological perspective, does not such uncontrolled freedom of choice place an inordinate limitation on G-d's power? At this point we must enter into our discussion the very profound and bold image of tzimtzum; this kabbalistic notion suggests that, in creating the world, G-d constricted or limited Himself in order to leave room for the other in a very real and palpable way. To be sure, G-d does make two promises: He will always step in to make certain that Israel, the people of the Covenant, will never be destroyed and that we will ultimately return to Israel (Leviticus 26). G-d also guarantees that we will eventually return to His teachings and therefore will be worthy of being redeemed.

And the prophets maintain that Israel will eventually fulfill the Abrahamic charge of bringing redemption to the entire world.

However, a G-d of love had to create independent individuals who would be worthy of His

love, who would serve as His partners and not merely as His pawns or puppets.

This theological underpinning magnificently explains the significance of Rosh Hashana. On the day of the creation of the first human being, we are commanded to blow the ram's horn, the musical instrument by which kings of Israel were crowned. We learn on Rosh Hashana that it is the task of Israel to bring the message of a G-d of love, peace and morality to the entire world. It is the task of Israel to eventually enthrone G-d in the world because, after all, there is no king without subjects.

G-d has been accepted as King by us, but not yet by the world at large. Our task is a daunting one, but G-d promises that we will succeed. The drama of history is fraught with human failure, Divine forgiveness and ultimate reconstruction and repair. This process began in the Garden of Eden, continued through the Sin of the Golden Calf in the desert and encompasses the destructions of both Temples followed by exile and persecution. However, our G-d is a G-d of love - and love means to give, love means to forgive. Love also empowers the beloved, and we have certainly been empowered by G-d's promise of our eventual redemption. Our return to and development of the State of Israel is a powerful affirmation of G-d's empowerment. G-d willing, this time we will truly succeed.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Because of the intricacies of the Jewish calendar, the end of the Torah - Zot Habracha - and the beginning of the Torah - Bereshith - follow each other in rapid succession this week. This is a timely reminder to us of the seamlessness of Torah - an understanding that will help us appreciate all of the Torah portions that we will hear and study in this new and blessed year.

The rabbis of the Talmud have taught us that words of Torah which seem poor and unimportant in one Torah text contain rich and meaningful information and insight when viewed in the perspective of another text. Thus the Torah has to be viewed in its totality and not only in analysis of individual and particular words and phrases.

The immortal greatness of Rashi's commentary to Torah lies in its ability to present both the trees and the forest at one and the same time to its readers and students. Without knowing Bereshith, Zot Habracha descends into poetry and narrative devoid of its ultimate spiritual content and purpose. And without knowing Zot Habracha, Bereshith itself remains an unfathomable mystery of creation and primordial life without apparent purpose and relevance to later human generations.

That is what Rashi is driving at in his initial comment to the Torah. Creation had a purpose; G-d is not a random force in human existence, and Torah - the Torah of Moshe - and the continued existence of the people of Israel are integral parts of the purpose of creation and human life. Thus, these two parshiyot of the Torah, the last one and the first one, are intimately joined in the great seamless Torah that is our inheritance. Each one accurately describes the other.

The rabbis teach us that each individual person must always believe and say to one's self that this entire wondrous universe was created only for me. By this they meant to reinforce the idea of the purposefulness of creation itself and of the role that each and every human being can play in determining the destiny of that process of creation. By fulfilling our role as devoted Jews, with a moral understanding of life and good behavior patterns, we inherit the blessings of our teacher and leader Moshe as well as becoming partners, so to speak in G-d's handiwork of creation.

Nothing in life is wasted and even acts that we may deem to be somehow insignificant are important in G-d's cosmic scheme of human existence. The blessings of Moshe are individual and particular. No two of them are alike. So too are human beings - no two of them alike. It is one of the many wonders of creation. Since the blessings are individual and human beings are unique, it is obvious that each of us has a role in the human story - each one of us individually. Thus our own individual lives take on greater purpose, influence and meaning. And that is the true blessing of creation itself.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

While some maintain that the human being is only physical form, the Torah, in one of its most important sentences, insists that every person is also created in the image of G-d-tzelem Elokim (Genesis 1:26,27). On the surface we see each others' outward appearance, but if we look deeply, we ought be able to perceive a little bit of G-d in our fellow human being. In fact, it is the tzelem Elokim which makes the human being unique. In the words of Pirke Avot, "beloved is the human being who is created in the image of G-d." (Avot 3:18) Several fundamental ideas emerge from the tzelem Elokim principle. Bearing in mind that each and every human being is created with tzelem Elokim, it follows that all people-regardless of race, religion, nationality, age, mental faculties, handicap, etc.-are of equal value.

Human beings can relate to G-d "vertically" and "horizontally." In the sense that we have the capacity to reach upwards to the all powerful G-d through prayer and ritual, we relate vertically. Additionally, when we relate to our fellow person, we connect to that part of

G-d in them. If one hurts another human being, G-d is hurt. Similarly, if one brings joy to another, G-d is more joyous. Hence, a horizontal relationship exists as well.

No matter how far one strays, one has the potential to return to the inner G-dliness we all possess-which is, of course, good.

Even if a person holds him/herself in low esteem, he/she ought have self confidence. After all, G-d is in each of us. G-d, as the ultimate creator has given us the capacity to be endlessly creative - adding an important ingredient to our self-esteem.

As G-d is omnipresent, so too do people created in the image of G-d have the inner desire to reach beyond themselves. We accomplish this by developing lasting relationships with another. In that sense, one's presence is expanded. Similarly, as G-d is eternal, we, created in the image of G-d have the instinctual need to transcend ourselves. This need is met by raising children. Unlike animals, human beings are uniquely aware of historic continuity.

The image of G-d points to life after death. As G-d lives forever, so too does the part of G-d in us, our soul, live beyond our physical years. Of course, it must be remembered that tzelem Elokim does not mean that every human being is automatically good. Image of G-d is potential. If properly nurtured, it takes us to sublime heights. If abused, it can sink us to the lowest depths. Hence the words ki tov, found after every stage of creation, are not recorded after the human being is formed. Whether we are tov depends on the way we live our lives; it is not endowed at birth.

And, the mystics add, that when we live our lives properly, the image of G-d in each of us merges with the omnipresent G-d to become One-Ehad. The tzelem Elokim is an eternal spark. Whether it is lit is up to us. *Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"Rabbi Yitzchok said, 'there was no need to write the Torah (whose primary purpose is to teach us the laws that G-d wants us to follow, see Mizrachi, Gur Aryeh, etc.) from anywhere but "this month is for you" (Sh'mos 12:2, the first mitzvah given to the nation). And what was the reason [the creation story] was written [in the Torah]? To inform [us] of His might, as it says (T'hillim 111:6), "the strength of His actions He told to His people to give them the inheritance of nations.'" This Midrash (Tanchuma Yoshon, B'reishis 11) is quoted by Yalkut Shimoni (Bo, #187) by Midrash Lekach Tov (B'reishis 1:1) and, most famously, by Rashi as his very first comments on the Torah. [Rashi adds to the original Midrash, combining it with R' Levi's opening remarks (B'reishis Rabbah 1:2) in order to explain why the last part of the verse in T'hillim is quoted.] Rabbi Yitzchok's question and answer (or statement made in the form of a question/answer) is quite puzzling, as evidenced by the amount that has been written throughout the centuries to try to explain it. Can we imagine the Torah as just a book of laws, with no historical background, without any perspective on how we got to the point of being chosen (or being given the opportunity to choose) to fulfill G-d's mission? How could we pray to "the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov" without really knowing who they were? And, as some commentators point out, if the Torah doesn't need to include these narratives except to share the information with us (rather than being an integral part of the Torah), why not just include them in a separate book? In short, if the non-law sections should be considered "Torah" (which they obviously should, since they are in the Torah), then there is no room for Rabbi Yitzchok's question (or his opening "assumption" which led to his question), and if these sections should not be considered "Torah" why are they included in the Torah?

Rabbi Moshe Shamah ("Recalling the Covenant") discusses the similarities between the covenant enactment that took place at Sinai, as well as the covenant renewal that took place at the Plains of Moav, and the covenant enactments and renewals that took place in the Ancient Near East--specifically covenants between the king of a powerful empire and the king of a smaller country. Rabbi Shamah references the work of Rabbi Joshua Berman in this area (tinyurl.com/kw4yy2s; see also tinyurl.com/kwdhnye), and quotes (pg. 1054) the description of the Harper's Bible Dictionary regarding Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties of the 14th and 13th centuries B.C.E. -- "The main elements of the Hittite treaty...are: the identification of the treaty-maker (i.e. the great king); a historical introduction (prior beneficial acts done by the great power on behalf of the smaller one); the stipulations (the primary demand is for loyalty); a list of divine witnesses; and blessings and curses. The treaty was recited, a ceremonial meal eaten, and the treaty deposited at the feet of the idol."

The similarities are striking and undeniable. Whether G-d chose to use a similar format because He thought, in His divine wisdom, that it was the most effective way of enacting a covenant with us, or because He thought it would be the most effective way to do so during that time period, the bottom line is that this seems to be the basic format He used. (Keep in mind that since a covenant is, by definition, an agreement between two parties, the perspective and perception of both parties is vital.) Either way, once we recognize that this was the context within which the covenant at Sinai was made and then renewed at the Plains of Moav, certain elements take on a new perspective. This is especially true for things that are part of the historical introduction, which is designed to explain how the two parties reached the point of wanting to enact the covenant (or to continue it, such as when a

new king takes over, thereby necessitating a restatement of intent to maintain the covenant).

In the case of the covenant renewal at the Plains of Moav, Moshe recounted the nation's history after the original covenant was already in place and it was time to start preparing for the trip to the Promised Land (see D'varim 1:6). The "prologue" to this covenant renewal was meant to explain why a renewal was necessary: Moshe was about to die, and it was important to demonstrate that the covenant would still be in effect under the new leader (Y'hoshua), as well as under all future leaders (the commandment to gather the nation every seven years served as a regularly-scheduled covenant renewal, see D'varim 31:10-13); the nation was about to enter a new phase of its existence when it entered the Promised Land, and it had to be made clear that the covenant still applied there (having the "blessings and curses" phase occur after entering the land, see 11:29-32, was quite helpful in this regard); and the nation hadn't always acted (or reacted) properly, so had to be made aware that the covenant would still be upheld by G-d even if they didn't always keep their end of the bargain (informing them of this allowed for a return to G-d, see 30:1-10).

In this context, some of the anomalies contained in Moshe's historical overview can be better understood. For example, in recounting the instituting of the system of judges (D'varim 1:9-17) there is no need to mention that Yisro had originally suggested it, as Moshe's point was that they needed, and would continue to need, a structured judicial system; who came up with the idea was beside the point. (In any case, G-d obviously had a plan for how His system of law should be administered. The Torah may give Yisro credit for thinking of a plan similar to the one G-d had intended, but unless Yisro thought of a better plan than G-d's--which is obviously not possible--the plan that was put into action was what G-d had always intended; there is no need to pretend it was Yisro's idea once he had gone back home.) Similarly, whereas it is important to know that G-d gave His permission for the scouts to go on their mission (Bamidbar 13:1-3), when explaining as part of the historical prologue to the covenant renewal why it took 40 years to get to the Promised Land, the part that is most relevant is that the original request came from the people (D'varim 1:22). Along the same lines, that the people didn't want to go despite all the scouts agreeing that the land was good (Bamidbar 13:27, D'varim 1:25) is highlighted more than the fact that 10 of the 12 scouts were afraid to try to conquer it (Bamidbar 13:28-29 and 31-33, D'varim 1:28). Although historically accurate (if incomplete), the focus of this historical overview is its relevance to the renewal of the covenant, not giving a complete history. [The above perspective regarding the historical overview Moshe presented would be similar even without positing that such a prologue was necessary for covenant protocol, since one of Moshe's primary focuses was to rebuke the nation before he passed away (see Rashi on D'varim 1:1).]

Until now I've discussed the historical overview prior to the covenant renewal that took place at the Plains of Moav. What about the historical overview of the covenant enactment that took place at Sinai? "And he (Moshe) took the Book of the Covenant and he read it to the nation" (Sh'mos 24:7). What was this "Book of the Covenant"? "From the creation story until the giving of the Torah, and the mitzvos that were commanded at Marah" (Rashi, based on Mechilta, Yisro, BaChodesh 3). In other words, all of Sefer B'raishis, the entire exodus story as told in Sefer Sh'mos, as well as the narrative of the nation's travels in the desert until they reached Mt. Sinai was all written down and read to them before they heard the Ten Commandments from G-d (and before Moshe's first 40-day stay atop Mt. Sinai). It would therefore seem that the historical prologue for the covenant enacted at Sinai encompassed all of Sefer B'raishis (which is primarily narratives) and a good portion of the narratives (and laws) at the beginning of Sefer Sh'mos. (The mitzvos commanded at Marah are mentioned separately since they do not appear in the text of the Torah, and would otherwise not be understood to be included.)

[Interestingly, the other opinion in the Mechilta (see also Chizkuni on Sh'mos 24:7) is that "the Book of the Covenant" refers to the blessings and curses at the end of Sefer Vayikra (which the Torah says explicitly were given at Mt. Sinai, see 26:46, despite its placement after Moshe started receiving laws in the Mishkan), which is another prominent feature of Ancient Near East covenants. It would seem that both were part of the process of covenant enactment, and theoretically both could have been included in "the Book of the Covenant" Moshe wrote down and read to the nation. It is also theoretically possible that the narratives had already been committed to writing prior to the nation's arrival at Sinai (bear in mind that there wasn't that much time once they got there before Moshe went up the mountain for 40 days and nights). G-d had already told Moshe at the burning bush that He would give the nation the Torah on that very same mountain (see Sh'mos 3:12), so instructions to start preparing what was necessary for the covenant protocol could have already been given. It is even possible that the early narratives were earlier texts studied in the Yeshivos of Shem and Ever (and then in the Yeshivos set up by our forefathers, including the one set up by Yehudah at the behest of our forefather Yaakov before he moved his family to Egypt), which G-d then told Moshe to include in "the Book of the Covenant" as the historical overview. Obviously, since it was for the covenant being established between G-d and the Children of Israel, and presented to the latter on behalf of the former, nothing could be included that wasn't directly approved by G-d; as Midrash Lekach Tov (at the beginning of Sefer B'raishis) puts it, Moshe wrote the creation story

"through "Ruach haKodesh, by the mouth of (read: based on the instructions of) the Mighty One (G-d)." Just as the bulk of Sefer D'varim is Moshe's words which attained the status of "Torah" when G-d subsequently told Moshe to include them in the Torah (see Abrabanel's introduction to Sefer D'varim), even if the historical overview of the Sinai covenant included texts that were written earlier, they attained the status of "Torah" when G-d told Moshe to include them in "the Book of the Covenant" and to include it the Torah.]

When Rabbi Yitzchok discusses the theoretical possibility of the Torah containing only the mitzvos, he was teaching us that the Torah could have been just the stipulations of the covenant between us and G-d, i.e. the commandments themselves, but because G-d wanted to give us the historical perspective within which the covenant was enacted (including why it was enacted only with us and not with all of humanity), G-d included, as part of the Torah, the historical perspective He presented to the nation when the covenant was first enacted. "The strength of His actions He told to His people," i.e. the creation story, mankind failing several times, Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov reintroducing G-d to the world, the exodus from Egypt, etc., "to give them the inheritance of nations," i.e. the role of fulfilling G-d's purpose for creation, which could have been shared by all the nations, but instead became the responsibility of the Chosen Nation.

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Clouds of Chesed, Rain of Din

"Now all the trees of the field were not yet upon the earth, and all the herb of the field had not yet sprouted. Hashem Elokim had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to work the soil."

Beer Mayim Chaim: "How should we look at rainfall? Should we attribute it to din, the attribute of judgment within G-d, or to chesed, to His attribute of lovingkindness?"

We may not have to look any further than our pasuk, and its puzzling use of two of G-d's Names: Hashem and Elokim. The pasuk may be hinting to us that rain should be appreciated as a combination of both attributes -- of chesed and of din.

Without our pasuk, we could make the argument on behalf of either attribute. On the one hand, rain is so vital to life, that we would place it squarely in the chesed column. We depend on what we grow for our nutrition. The success of agricultural endeavors depends on adequate rainfall. If life begins as chesed, rainfall sustains it.

Chazal, on the other hand, apparently link rain to din. They call the berachah in Shemonah Esrei that speaks of precipitation gevuros geshamim; (Taanis 2A) gevurah, of course, is practically synonymous with din. They point to the phenomenon of rain sometimes falling with great -- even destructive -- force as the reason for linking rain with din. The Zohar (Terumah 154B) speaks explicitly of rain originating in chesed, but handing it off, as it were, to din, which becomes an active agent in its delivery. (Think, says the Zohar, of the way we perform netilas yodayim. We hold the vessel in our right hand -- which is associated with the primary attribute of chesed -- in order to fill it. We then pass it to the left -- or din. It is the left that pours the water, but those waters were obtained through the right!)

It seems, then, that both chesed and din are important. We can offer a simple reason why. Chesed, as we experience it, comes about as a kind of partnership with din -- a mixture we sometimes call rachamim. The pure form of chesed is so powerful that it would overwhelm us. This world cannot deal with the intensity of its power. In effect, pure chesed must be tempered by the limitations of din to be available and useful to us. Rain, an offshoot of Hashem's chesed, reaches us in a cooperative venture between chesed and din.

This amalgam is expressed in the Name Hashem Elokim, combining both attributes. Seen this way, our pasuk says that this combination did not result in rain falling upon the earth, because Man had not yet been created to perform the work, the avodah, that was necessary. That avodah is Man's occupying himself with Torah and with prayer at all times. Hashem made His responsiveness to the needs of the earth contingent upon Man living up to Hashem's expectations of him.

How does Man's spiritual output relate to this special Name: Hashem Elokim? We need look only so far as another pasuk (Devarim 4:39) that uses this Name. "You shall know this day and take to your heart that Hashem, He is Elokim." The word for "your heart" is levavcha, which is a plural form. Chazal take that plural to suggest that Man need serve His Creator with two hearts, as it were. He need serve Hashem with the two opposing tendencies he finds in his heart: the yetzer tov, and the yetzer hora. Now, the very existence of a yetzer hora and Man's capacity to make poor choices are sourced in din. Din, which limits the illumination of Hashem's chesed, allows Man to look away from it, or not notice it at all, and thus leaves room for finding evil attractive. Man often, however, summons up the determination to tame and even break the powers of evil within him. He finds that strength through joyously attaching himself to the yetzer tov, which is sourced in the goodness of Hashem's chesed.

In other words, Man is the constant platform upon which two Names of G-d -- Hashem and Elokim -- contrast with each other through their outgrowths: the yetzer tov, and the yetzer hora. By resisting the message of pure yetzer hora, Man "sweetens" din by forcibly combining it with the chesed of the yetzer tov.

The unusual implication of our pasuk turns out to be understandable. Our pasuk uses a full, compound Name to relate how Hashem did not make it rain in the Garden of Eden. Why would the Torah such a full Name to convey not what Hashem does, but what He did not do? We now understand. The blessing of rainfall, containing aspects of both chesed and din, requires that the two midos be merged. This could only happen through the avodah of Man.

Only Man, by virtue of the exercise of his free-will and suppressing his yetzer hora, can make a contribution to the cosmic drama of producing a gentler, kinder form of din. *© 2013 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org*

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"Hevel became a shepherd, and Kayin became a tiller of the ground." (4:2)

The midrash Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (ch.21) relates: Kayin enjoyed working the ground and Hevel enjoyed shepherding sheep. This one gave the fruits of his labor to the other one to eat, and the other one gave the fruits of his labor to the first one to eat. When the night of Pesach arrived, Adam said to his sons, "On this night Yisrael is destined to offer Pesach offerings. You, too, should offer offerings before your Creator." Kayin brought the leftovers of his meal -- flax seed, while Hevel brought the best of his flocks -- lambs which had never been shorn. Kayin's gift was despised by Hashem and Kayin's gift was found to be desirable, as is written (verse 4), "Hashem turned to Hevel and to his offering."

R' David Luria z"l (Poland; 1798-1855) comments: From the beginning of Creation, Hashem implanted in man's heart the idea to prepare what others need and to barter with them to obtain one's own needs. This is what the sage Ben Zoma meant when he praised G-d by saying, "How many tasks Adam [who was alone in the world] had to perform before he found bread to eat -- plowing, planting, harvesting, gathering, threshing, winnowing, selecting, milling, sifting, kneading, and baking, while I wake up and find everything ready for me!" (Be'ur Ha'Radal)

R' Avraham Aharon Broide z"l (early 19th century) observes: The sheep products that Hevel gave Kayin must have been milk, butter and wool, since eating meat was forbidden before the flood. Alternatively, perhaps they were permitted to eat an animal that died of natural or accidental causes. (Bayit Ha'gadol -- Be'ur Maspik)

R' Yitzchak Binyamin Wolf Gottingen-Ashkenazi z"l (Poland and Germany; died 1686) asks: The Torah says about the korban Pesach (Shmot 12:48), "No uncircumcised male may eat of it." If so, how could Kayin and Hevel have brought a korban Pesach? Do not say, R' Gottingen-Ashkenazi, writes, that this prohibition did not apply to them since they lived before the mitzvah of circumcision was given. They also had no mitzvah of korban Pesach, but Adam told them to observe it. Presumably, then, they observed it correctly to the extent possible [though they were not actually permitted to slaughter a lamb].

So the question stands: How could they bring a korban Pesach if they were not circumcised? The answer, R' Gottingen-Ashkenazi writes, is found in the Torah commentary of R' Moshe Alshich z"l (1508-1593). He writes that, if not for Adam's sin, all men would have been born circumcised, just as Adam himself was. If so, continues R' Gottingen-Ashkenazi, Kayin and Hevel, who were born before the sin, must have been born circumcised as well. Thus they could offer a korban Pesach. (Nachalat Binyamin, mitzvah 2)

R' Eliyahu Hakohen Ha'Itamari z"l (Izmir, Turkey; died 1729) asks: Why didn't Adam himself practice what he preached and offer a korban Pesach himself? He explains:

Earlier, the quoted midrash Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (as explained by the commentaries) stated that the souls of all tzaddikim are offshoots from the soul of Adam's third son, Shait, while the souls of all wicked people are offshoots from the soul of Kayin. When Adam told his sons to bring a korban Pesach, writes R' Ha'Itamari, his intention was to test Kayin. Kayin was the spiritual ancestor of Pharaoh. Indeed, Kayin was a farmer of flax, a crop for which Egypt would later be known. Would Kayin rejoice at the news that Bnei Yisrael would bring a korban Pesach and escape Pharaoh's grip, or would he be saddened by the news? (The answer, as events revealed, was that Kayin was saddened.) In any event, Adam's intention wasn't that his sons would fulfill the mitzvah of korban Pesach. Thus, one cannot ask why Adam did not bring that offering himself. (V'lo Od Ela) ***© 2013 S. Katz and torah.org***