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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

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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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them we can convert icy misdeeds into beams of light. *Rabbi Lerner is the assistant rabbi of Congregation KINS in West Rogers Park, Chicago, IL.*

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

What exactly was the first sin? What was the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil? Is this kind of knowledge a bad thing such that it had to be forbidden, and was only acquired through sin? Isn't knowing the difference between good and evil essential to being human? Isn't it one of the highest forms of knowledge? Surely G-d would want humans to have it? Why then did He forbid the fruit that produced it?

In any case, did not Adam and Eve already have this knowledge before eating the fruit, precisely in virtue of being "in the image and likeness of G-d? Surely this was implied in the very fact that they were commanded by G-d: Be fruitful and multiply. Have dominion over nature. Do not eat from the tree. For someone to understand a command, they must know it is good to obey and bad to disobey. So they already had, at least potentially, the knowledge of good and evil. What then changed when they ate the fruit? These questions go so deep that they threaten to make the entire narrative incomprehensible.

Maimonides understood this. That is why he turned to this episode at almost the very beginning of The Guide for the Perplexed (Book 1, Chapter 2). His answer though, is perplexing. Before eating the fruit, he says, the first humans knew the difference between truth and falsehood. What they acquired by eating the fruit was knowledge of "things generally accepted." But what does Maimonides mean by "things generally accepted." It is generally accepted that murder is evil, and honesty good. Does Maimonides mean that morality is mere convention? Surely not. What he means is that after eating the fruit, the man and woman were embarrassed that they were naked, and that is a mere matter of social convention because not everyone is embarrassed by nudity. But how can we equate being embarrassed that you are naked with "knowledge of good and evil"? It does not seem to be that sort of thing at all. Conventions of dress have more to do with aesthetics than ethics.

It is all very unclear, or at least it was to me until I came across one of the more fascinating moments in the history of the Second World War.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, Americans knew they were about to enter a war against a nation, Japan, whose culture they did not understand. So they commissioned one of the great anthropologists of the twentieth century, Ruth Benedict, to explain the Japanese to them, which she did. After the war, she published her ideas in a book, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. One of her central insights was the difference between shame cultures and guilt cultures. In shame cultures the highest value is honour. In guilt cultures it is righteousness. Shame is feeling bad that we have failed to live up to the expectations others have of us. Guilt is what we feel when we fail to live up to what our own conscience demands of us. Shame is other-directed. Guilt is inner-directed.

Philosophers, among them Bernard Williams, have pointed out that shame cultures are usually visual. Shame itself has to do with how you appear (or imagine you appear) in other peoples' eyes. The instinctive reaction to shame is to wish you were invisible, or somewhere else. Guilt, by contrast, is much more internal. You cannot escape it by becoming invisible or being elsewhere. Your conscience accompanies you wherever you go, regardless of whether you are seen by others. Guilt cultures are cultures of the ear, not the eye.

With this contrast in mind we can now understand the story of the first sin. It is all about appearances, shame, vision and the eye. The serpent says to the woman: "G-d knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like G-d, knowing good and evil." That is, in fact, what happens: "The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked." It was appearance of the tree that the Torah emphasises: "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and desirable to the eyes, and that the tree was attractive as a means to gain intelligence." The key emotion in the story is shame. Before eating the fruit the couple were "naked, but unashamed." After eating it they feel shame and seek to hide. Every element of the story – the fruit, the tree, the nakedness, the shame – has the visual element typical of a shame culture.

But in Judaism we believe that G-d is heard not seen. The first humans "heard G-d's voice moving about in the garden with the wind of the day." Replying to G-d, the man says, "I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." Note the deliberate, even humorous irony of what the couple did. They heard G-d's voice in the garden, and they "hid themselves from G-d among the trees of the garden."

But you can't hide from a voice. Hiding means trying not to be seen. It is an immediate, intuitive response to shame. But the Torah is the supreme example of a culture of guilt, not shame, and you cannot escape guilt by hiding. Guilt has nothing to do with appearances and everything to do with conscience, the voice of G-d in the human heart.

The sin of the first humans in the Garden of Eden was that they followed their eyes, not their ears. Their actions were determined by what they saw, the beauty of the tree, not by what they heard, namely the word of G-d commanding them not to eat from it. The result was that they did indeed acquire a knowledge of good and evil, but it was the wrong kind. They acquired an ethic of shame, not guilt; of appearances not conscience. That, I believe, is what Maimonides meant by his distinction between true-and-false and "things generally accepted." A guilt ethic is about the inner voice that tells you, "This is right, that is wrong", as clearly as "This is true, that is false". But a shame ethic is about social convention. It is a matter of meeting or not meeting the expectations others have of you.

Shame cultures are essentially codes of social conformity. They belong to groups where socialisation takes the form of internalising the values of the group such that you feel shame – an acute form of embarrassment – when you break them, knowing that if people discover what you have done you will lose honour and 'face'.

Judaism is precisely not that kind of morality, because Jews do not conform to what everyone else does. Abraham was willing, say the sages, to be on one side while all the rest of the world was on the other. Haman says about Jews, "Their customs are different from those of all other people" (Esther 3:8). Jews have often been iconoclasts, challenging the idols of the age, the received wisdom, the "spirit of the age", the politically correct.

If Jews had followed the majority, they would have disappeared long ago. In the biblical age they were the only monotheists in a pagan world. For most of the post-biblical age they lived in societies in which they and their faith were shared by only a tiny minority of the population. Judaism is a living protest against the herd instinct. Ours is the dissenting voice in the conversation of humankind. Hence the ethic of Judaism is not a matter of appearances, of honour and shame. It is a matter of hearing and heeding the voice of G-d in the depths of the soul.

The drama of Adam and Eve is not about apples or sex or original sin or "the Fall" – interpretations the non-Jewish West has given to it. It is about something deeper. It is about the kind of morality we are called on to live. Are we to be governed by what everyone else does, as if morality were like politics: the will of the majority? Will our emotional horizon be bounded by honour and shame, two profoundly social feelings? Is our key value appearance: how we seem to others? Or is it something else altogether, a willingness to heed the word and will of G-d? Adam and Eve in Eden faced the archetypal human choice between what their eyes saw (the tree and its fruit) and what their ears heard (G-d's command). Because they chose the first, they felt shame, not guilt. That is one form of "knowledge of good and evil", but from a Jewish perspective, it is the wrong form.

Judaism is a religion of listening, not seeing. That is not to say there are no visual elements in Judaism. There are, but they are not primary. Listening is the sacred task. The most famous command in Judaism is Shema Yisrael, "Listen, Israel." What made Abraham, Moses and the prophets different from their contemporaries was that they heard the voice that to others was inaudible. In one of the great dramatic scenes of the Bible G-d teaches Elijah that He is not in the whirlwind, the earthquake or the fire, but in the "still, small voice."

It takes training, focus and the ability to create silence in the soul to learn how to listen, whether to G-d or to a fellow human being. Seeing shows us the beauty of the created world, but listening connects us to the soul of another, and sometimes to the soul of the Other, G-d as He speaks to us, calls to us, summoning us to our task in the world.

If I were asked how to find G-d, I would say, Learn to listen. Listen to the song of the universe in the call of birds, the rustle of trees, the crash and heave of the waves. Listen to the poetry of prayer, the music of the Psalms. Listen deeply to those you love and who love you. Listen to the words of G-d in the Torah and hear them speak to you. Listen to the debates of the sages through the centuries as they tried to hear the texts' intimations and inflections.

Don't worry about how you or others look. The world of appearances is a false world of masks, disguises and concealments. Listening is not easy. I confess I find it formidably hard. But listening alone bridges the abyss between soul and soul, self and other, I and the Divine.

Jewish spirituality is the art of listening.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The beginning of our communal Torah readings once again with the Book of Genesis on the first Shabbat following the intensive festival period from Rosh Hashanah through to Shmini Atzeret-Simhat Torah is much more than a calendrical accident; the first chapters of Genesis serve as a resounding confirmation of the true nature of the human being on earth and what it is that G-d expects of him.

In his groundbreaking work Family Redeemed, my teacher and mentor Rav J.B. Soloveitchik

typologically defines two aspects of the human being emanating from each of the first two chapters of Genesis. The first chapter is a majestic description of the Creation of the universe in six days (or epochs), with the human being emerging as an integral aspect of an evolutionary process of creation; the human may be the highest expression of this process, emerging as he does towards the conclusion of the sixth day after the earth has "brought forth every kind of living creature: cattle, reptiles and wild beasts of every kind" (Gen. 1:24), but he is and remains part and parcel of creature-hood nevertheless.

This becomes patently clear when the Almighty declares, "Let us make the human being in our image and as our likeness" (Gen.1:26), and Nahmanides (Spain, 12th century) interprets that G-d was addressing the animals and beasts: The human being will be subject to the same physical strengths and limitations, to the same cycle of birth, development, desiccation and death, to the same requirements of nutrition, procreation and elimination of waste, which characterizes the animal world formed together with him on that primordial sixth day.

Rav Soloveitchik calls this aspect of the human being Natural Man; I would suggest calling him Bestial Man. Herein lies the source for viewing the human being as no more than a complex animal, devoid of true freedom of choice to truly change himself or change the world; bestial man is naturally programmed, the world is based on a "survival of the fittest" and "to the victor belongs the spoils" mentality. War is an ideal because it tests physical prowess and courageous bravery, and the weak and feeble are there to be enslaved or snuffed out.

Morality is merely the hobgoblin of little minds and even weaker bodies, vainly attempting to curb the appetites of the truly powerful. This mind-set paves the way for totalitarian states, Aryan supremacy, Stalinist Soviet subjugation and the power of jihad to dominate the world. Might makes right. But this too must pass, for even the most powerful human being is, after all, only physical and mortal, a broken potsherd, a withering flower, a passing dream, so that a life becomes "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." ("Macbeth" by Shakespeare) Chapter 2, however, tells a very different story of the genesis of man, of a world created not only by a powerful Elohim but rather by a loving Hashem Elohim.

This chapter begins "when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted because there was no human being to till the earth" (Gen. 2:5), and so the loving "Hashem Elohim formed the human being from dust of the earth into whose nostrils He exhaled the soul of life." It is as though the entire physical world is waiting for the human being to activate it, to complete and perfect it, to redeem it; the human being, "the last for which the first was made." ("Rabbi Ben Ezra," a poem by Robert Browning).

And yes, the world is physical and the human being is physical, with all the strengths and the limitations of the physical, but it is an eternal and spiritual G-d who created the world, and it is an eternal and spiritual G-d who inspirited part of His own spiritual being within the human physical form; and how meaningful are the words of the sacred Zohar and the Ba'al Ha-Tanya, "whoever exhales, exhales from within Himself, from His innermost, essential being" (as it were).

This is the creation of Celestial Man.

"The loving Hashem Elohim….placed (the human) in the Garden of Eden (the world at that time) to till it (le'abed, "to develop and perfect it") and to preserve it (le'shomrah, "to take responsibility for it"). Yes, the world is an imperfect creation, filled with darkness as well as light, with evil as well as good (Isa. 45:7) and the human being will engage in a perennial struggle between the bestial and celestial within himself. But the Bible promises that "at the door of life, until the very opening of the grave, sin crouches, its desire energized to conquer [the human], but the human will conquer sin, will overcome evil" (Gen. 4:7).

And so we conclude Yom Kippur with the exultant shout that Hashem is Elohim, the G-d of Love is the essence and the endgame of the G-d of Creative Power, that Right will triumph over might and Peace will trump jihad.

And every human being must find within himself the G-d-given strength to be an emissary towards perfecting this world in the Kingship of the Divine (Aleynu): to recreate himself, to properly direct his/ her children, to make an improvement within his/her community and society. May we not falter on this G-d-given opportunity to bring us closer to redemption.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah at its onset here in the parsha of Bereshith describes itself as being "the book of the generations of humankind." Although the literal context of this verse of the Torah is referring to the generations and descendants of the first human being Adam, it has been widely interpreted by Jewish traditional scholars, in its broadest meaning, to refer to all of the generations and the human beings that have inhabited this planet over the many millennia.

Jewish tradition, in adopting this expansive interpretation, means to imply that all of the challenges, greatness, frailties and failures of our common ancestor Adam still exist in all of our societies and personalities. We are all trying somehow to get back into the Garden of Eden and we find the path to enter constantly blocked by fearsome angels.

In fact, if we wish to summarize all of human history it can be done by understanding the inability of humans and their societies to regain entrance into the paradise from which they were driven. In his classic work, Paradise Lost, John Milton summarized this theme. This loss of paradise haunts humankind till today.

It is what forces people and governments to search for scapegoats and to victimize others for the fact that we have not yet achieved entry into paradise. It is the source of war and violence, crime and terrorism and also of creativity, invention and the progress of technology. In a very simple metaphor, it describes the struggles of humanity in all ages and circumstances since the dawn of history.

In granting humanity the gifts of free will and action and of collective and personal memory, the Lord, so to speak, allowed human beings to remember that they were once in paradise and to allow them to pursue the goal of returning there once again. We all somehow remember ourselves as once being there. But the enormous frustration of not achieving this goal of returning distorts our lives.

The generations of Adam have always fallen prey to the weaknesses of temptation and immorality and are unable to regain their footing and begin their return trek to paradise. We cannot resist the temptations placed before us by the snake that is always there to entrap us. Every generation thrashes about with new ideas as to how to reach paradise or even, more dangerously, to redefine what paradise really is and what it should look like.

The Soviet Union called itself "the workers' paradise," even though it certainly was much more hell than heaven. All of the new social correctness, that has so weakened the moral stature of human beings and religion over the past few decades, is only a feeble attempt to redefine paradise. It is another way to avoid the harsh challenge of finding our way back and standing against the fearsome angels who inhabit our personalities and mindsets.

This entire preface to the story of Abraham and the beginnings of the Jewish people is meant to teach us that the Lord expects that the Chosen People will provide an example for the rest of humanity and mark the road that truly leads to the paradise of human happiness and serenity.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Much has been written (including by myself, several times) regarding the tension between the biblical story of creation and how science understands the formation of our world. This tension is based on taking the biblical story literally, and accepting the current scientific understanding as being accurate, despite there being constant changes -- and disagreements -- regarding what scientists hypothesize. One of the challenges regarding reconciling the two is the dearth of universally accepted traditional sources dealing with these issues.

This lack of sources is based primarily on two factors. First of all, the sources that the traditional community rely on for guidance (e.g. the Rishonim) lived well before this particular tension existed (as the scientists of their times had reached different conclusions than those reached by scientists in our generation); they could not comment on how to resolve an issue that did yet exist. True, there were other sources of tension between the Torah and science that they had to deal with, and we can learn much from how they dealt with them, but without any explicit direction about a specific tension, the traditional community has, to a large extent, been handicapped in its ability to confidently address issues that arose after those sources had a need to deal with them.

Secondly, the Talmud (Chagigah 11b) tells us that issues surrounding the creation story should not be taught publicly (even to more than one student, privately), preventing the dissemination (in person or in print) of the thoughts of traditionally-minded intellectual giants on the topic. Because of this ban, only obscure references to anything beyond what is written in the Torah (and is not included in, or consistent with, its literal creation narrative) appear in the traditional literature.

Although it is unclear precisely what does (and does not) fall under the category of "the creation story" and therefore cannot be shared, we can surmise that the age of the universe (if we assume it's older than 6,000 years) qualifies, and with good reason. Until the "big bang theory" was widely accepted by the scientific community (which was not until the 20th Century), the tension between the biblical creation story and science was whether the world had a beginning ("olam chadash," a "new" world), as the bible stated, or had always existed ("olam kadmone," an "old" world), as scientists maintained. In this context, teaching publicly that the world was millions (or billions) of years old would make it much more difficult for many to still believe in a "new" world, with a Creator. Even if there were individuals who understood that it didn't matter how many years it had been since creation, since as long as it was a "creation" there must be a "Creator," it was more advisable to keep the age of the universe under wraps so as not to confuse the many who would not (or might not) maintain a connection to the Creator if they knew how old the world really was.

Whether this still qualifies as "the creation story" and

should therefore not be taught publicly, or if the end of the "olam chadash/olam kadmone" debate means it no longer qualifies, doesn't mean there aren't other aspects that still qualify. [I am of the belief that even though there are valid, and strong, answers to the global flood issues, teaching them to others qualifies as "Ma'aseh B'reishis."] The bottom line, though, is that resistance to the possibility of a world created more than 6,000 years ago still exists in the traditional community, as does resistance to the notion that the Creator may have used evolution as part of His creation process, since many associate these concept with atheism. [How the Creator formed the world to get it to the state He wanted it, and the length of time He took to do so, has no bearing on His existence.] And because there is nothing overt in the traditional literature that teaches otherwise, this resistance will likely continue for a very long time (perhaps with good reason). Nevertheless, there may be a very traditional source (the Talmud itself) that opens the door to other possibilities.

When the Talmud (K'subos 8a) discusses the blessings made when a new marriage is celebrated (what we call "Sheva B'rachos," although one of the seven blessings is the one made over the wine), it relates how at the wedding that Rebbe made for his son they only said five blessings (besides the one over the wine), while at the wedding Rav Ashi made for his son they made six (plus one over the wine). The blessing that Rebbe didn't make that Rav Ashi did (as do we) was "Yotzer Ha'adam" (see Rashi), the second blessing (aside from the one over the wine), and the first (and shorter) of the two made that end with "Yotzer Ha'adam." After suggesting, and rejecting, that this difference of opinion was based on whether there were two separate acts of creation of mankind (one for the male and one for the female), and we therefore make two separate blessings over the creation of man, or there was just one act of creation (male and female simultaneously), and therefore only one blessing, the Talmud concludes that both agree that mankind was created with one act of creation; the difference of opinion is whether the blessings should reflect how mankind was actually created (male and female simultaneously, and therefore only one blessing), or how G-d had originally intended on creating mankind (separately, with two acts of creation, and therefore two separate blessings), even if, for practical reason, it was necessary to create man using one act of creation.

From the verses quoted (B'reishis 1:27 and 5:2; we'll put aside, at least for now, where 2:7 fits in, although from the connection the commentators make with Eiruvin 18a it is obvious that they understood 2:7 to be describing man's actual creation, not how G-d had originally intended to create mankind) it becomes apparent (see Maharsha) that the description of mankind as it appears in the sixth day of creation does not reflect how man was actually created, but how G-d would have created man if not for other considerations. Allow me to repeat that for emphasis: the creation story as it appears at the very beginning of the Torah, or at least the part of he sixth day that describes the creation of man, is not (at least according to the Talmud) literally the way man was created. Does this mean that nothing described in the six days of creation (1:1-1:31) reflects how G-d actually created them? Of course not. For all we know, the only exception is how mankind was created; G-d may have created everything else exactly as He had originally intended. Even the other things created on the sixth day may have been created exactly as described there. But it does indicate that what is described in the first six days of creation reflects G-d's original intent, but not necessarily how He actually created them.

Once we have established that the Torah's description of the six days of creation is not meant to reflect how G-d actually created the world (even if some of the descriptions could also match the actual creation), there is no need for it to match how scientists describe the formation of the universe (or any of its contents). If the scientists are wrong, their description is meaningless. But even if they are right, they would be describing how G-d actually created the world, not how G-d had originally intended on creating it. [Similarly, any discrepancy between the description of the first six days of creation and any subsequent description of creation could also be attributed to the difference between how G-d originally intended to create things and how He actually created them.]

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why does the Torah begin with the Genesis story? If it is a book of Law, ask the rabbis, why not start with the first commandment?

To teach us Rashi says, that G-d, having created the whole world, is its owner and has the right therefore to give Israel to the Jewish people. Here. Rashi turns a universalistic story into a nationalistic one.

The Midrash sees it differently. Why start with Genesis? To teach us that just as G-d created light from darkness, so too do human beings have the power to transform their lives, face all challenges and turn the deepest night into day. As the Hasidic rebbe said, a little bit of light has the power to drive away all the darkness.

But it's left for Ramban to suggest that we begin with the Genesis story to teach a fundamental truth—sin results in exile.

I've always been bothered by this idea. After all, many sinners live in mansions, and in the post Holocaust era it's impossible to conclude that those

who suffered sinned.

Perhaps Ramban was suggesting that exile is not only a physical but a psychological state. Sin, separates one from G-d, and in that metaphysical sense one is exiled.

G-d, for example, tells Cain after he murdered Abel, that Cain will be a wanderer. The text then says that Cain left the presence of G-d and lived in the land of Nod.

Is not the last part of this sentence contradictory? If he lived and took up residence why is he a wanderer?

But the answer may be; having sinned and left the presence of G-d he became a wanderer. Although living, physically in the land of Nod he was in perpetual inner exile.

One of the key messages of Judaism is to feel the presence of G-d. If I can feel Him, if I can feel that G-d cares about me and caresses me, says David in the Psalms, then even in the midst of suffering, I am not alone. *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 SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Adam said, "The woman that You gave to be with me - she gave me of the tree and I ate." (Breishis 3:12). Rashi explains that this is evidence of a lack of gratitude, which is why Adam was banished from the Garden, to work the soil from which he was taken (Breishis 3:23). Why was expulsion his just punishment?

A wealthy family raised an orphan in their home from infancy. His treatment and style of living was absolutely equal to the other siblings. One day a poor man came to the door of this wealthy man. A deep chord of sympathy was struck within the wealthy man, so he gave to him one hundred gold coins. The man started to praise his benefactor with every benevolent phrase. The wife turned to her husband and remarked on what a stunning display of gratitude they had just witnessed. She then addressed the phenomena that this fellow with a single donation could not stop saying thanks and is probably still singing praises as he sits in his home. In contrast, the orphan, who has been the beneficiary of kindliness worth much more, has never once offered even a hint of thankfulness.

The husband called over the orphan boy and pointed him to the door. He held his head low and left. The days to follow were a bitter example of how brutal life can be "out there". Without food and shelter he was forced to take the lowest job. For weeks he struggled and suffered just barely subsisting, and all the while looking longingly back at the blessed and dainty life he left behind. At a calculated time the wealthy man sent for the boy to be returned to his former status within the family. However, now having gone through what he had, he thanked his host constantly for every bit of goodness with the joy of genuine appreciation.

As a nation and as individuals we have all witnessed this pattern and experienced it too many times. The key to holding a blessing is appreciation. Without that attitude of gratitude the weight of the goodness that surrounds a man pushes him into exile till he is ready to gratefully surrender. This is only the most fundamental and the oldest lesson in history.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

The opening words of the Torah are too often misread, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth." That statement would imply that the Torah is communicating cosmology, as a science text book, and is interested in satisfying our curiosity about the order of creation. The Torah, Rashi relates, is rather a teaching book with a more important set of lessons to be learned in the first verse.

The first letter "Beis" taken as a prefix, meaning "for" or "for the sake of" when attached to the word "Reishis" means that the world was created for the sake of something called, "Reishis". Using the rest of Torah as a self-referential dictionary of sorts, Rashi qualifies and crowns two items with the title, "Reishis"-Primary. It is for their sake all is created. We are being told not "how" but rather "why" the world was created.

I have in mind a certain huge factory that I used to gaze at frequently when barreling down some New Jersey highway. The building was humungous. The Parking lot was jammed. The smoke stacks billowed constant smoke. I never figured out what it produced. I'm sure every car that pulls up in the morning represents another subset of activity at the plant. There's the accounting department, food service, janitorial crew etc.

There must be some prime product that justifies all the rest. It might be a slim vile of perfume or a variety of buttons but something of value must be exiting the assembly line that makes the entire complex worth its while.

Similarly, if I were to attempt to solicit from you a large donation to build a school building, you would be justified in asking a few questions. "Why do we need this school?" I'll answer, "We have a wonderfully unique curriculum." Then you might follow up and ask, "Who would attend this school? From where do you get your faculty?" Good questions!

Imagine the whole world is this school. Why is it here? What is it in this life that justifies the existence of all the world's parking lots? It may seem arrogant or ethnocentric to say so, but the Torah is saying it, right in the beginning, and not me. Why and to whom should

we apologize? The curriculum is the Torah. The students and the faculty are Israel.

Together they produce something so valuable that the Talmud tells us that whole world was created for "this" alone. What is this "this"? Something else is also called "Reishis"- Primary. "The primary wisdom is fear of HASHEM!" This profound educational process is meant to inspire in its students a sense of awe and ecstasy in relationship to The Creator.

And so over the course of centuries and millennium millions of worthy students have graduated from here and many with high honors too. It is for their great sake and for our blessed benefit as well that there has been made to exist this generously endowed and sophisticated school that offers such a superior primary education. *© 2003 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Spreading the Fate

What began as a good-will gesture turned terribly sour. Worse, it spurred the first murder in history. It could have been avoided if only...

The Torah tells us of Cain's innovation. He had all the fruit of the world before him and decided to offer his thanks to the Creator, albeit from his cheapest produce -- flax. Cain's brother Hevel (Abel) imitated his brother, by offering a sacrifice, too, but he did it in much grander form. He offered the finest, fattest of his herd. Hevel's offer was accepted and Cain's was not. And Cain was reasonably upset.

Hashem appears to Cain and asks him, "Why is your face downtrodden and why are you upset?" Hashem then explains that the choice of good and bad is up to every individual, and that person can make good for himself or find himself on the threshold of sin. Simple as all that. (Genesis 4:6-7)

Many commentaries are bothered by what seems to be another in a litany of questions that G-d knows the answers to. Obviously, Cain was upset for the apparent rejection of his offering. Why does Hashem seem to rub it in?

The story is told of a construction worker who opened his lunch pail, unwrapped his sandwich and made a sour face. "Peanut Butter!" he would mutter, "I hate peanut butter!" This went on for about two weeks: every day he would take out his sandwich and with the same intensity mutter under his breath. "I hate peanut butter sandwiches!"

Finally, one of his co-workers got sick and tired of his constant complaining. "Listen here," said the man. "If you hate peanut butter that much why don't you just tell your wife not to make you any more peanut butter sandwiches? It's as simple as that."

The hapless worker sighed. "It's not that simple. You see, my wife does not pack the sandwiches for me. I make them myself."

When Hashem asks Cain, "why are you dejected?" it is not a question directed only at Cain. Hashem knew what caused the dejection. He was not waiting to hear a review of the events that transpired. Instead Hashem was asking a question for the ages. He asked a question to all of us who experience the ramifications of our own moral misdoing. Hashem asked a haunting question to all whose own hands bring about their own misfortunes.

Then they mutter and mope as if the world has caused their misfortunes. "Why are you upset, towards whom are you upset?" asks G-d.

"Is it not the case that if you would better yourself you could withstand the moral failings and their ramifications? Is it not true that if we don't act properly, eventually, we will be thrust at the door of sin?"

Success and failure of all things spiritual is dependent on our own efforts and actions. Of course Hashem knew what prompted Cain's dejection. But there was no reason for Cain to be upset. There was no one but himself at whom to be upset. All Cain had to do was correct his misdoing. Dejection does not accomplish that. Correction does.

A person in this world has the ability to teach and inspire both himself as well as others. He can spread the faith that he holds dear. But his action can also spread more than faith. A person is the master of his own moral fate as well. And that type of fate, like a peanut butter sandwich, he can spread as well! *© 2002 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org*

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"G-d said, 'Let us make man...'" (1:26) R' Menashe ben Yisrael z"l (Amsterdam; 1604-1658; best known for his mission to persuade Oliver Cromwell to allow Jews to live in England) writes: Regarding all of the other creations, G-d said, "Let there be," i.e., He did not associate himself with them. In contrast, when He created man, He associated himself with the act ("Let us make") due to the man's inherent greatness. And, He thereby showed us a line, in the very first chapter of the Torah, between that which is holy (man) and that which is not (animals). The reason man is holy, of course, is because he has within him a Divine soul. (Nishmat Chaim Part I ch.1) *© 2012 S. Katz & torah.org*