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B'REISHIT

DIVREI TORAH

- The Torah begins with the story of creation where man finds himself in the center of the universe. The upshot of the narrative is to teach man that God is the Creator and that he is one of the objects of His creation. From the story it is clear that God takes pride in His work as when it states, “and God saw that it was good.” God’s greatest delight is to rejoice with His creation and especially with man, the crown of His creation. Israel represents the most precious jewel in God’s crown. Consequently, when we read this narrative, we should not overlook the central position that we play. Individual man should not be looked upon as an inconsequential small aspect of creation, but rather as the centerpiece. Every Jew should look upon this story with great pride knowing that he is truly the purpose of creation and he will afford God great simcha. When we do not observe God’s commandments, then as the Torah describes it, God is grieved in His heart. We can bring God joy and we can bring him grief, just like every child can do to his

parents. When a Jewish person walks in his neighborhood, he should carry himself with pride and conduct himself in a manner which would give his Parent, his Father, the greatest joy.

- As the centerpiece of creation, man should have experienced the greatest feelings because he was granted dominion over all other acts of God’s creation. Man was placed in the Garden of Eden where he was entitled to a very close relationship with the Almighty. “He perverted his ways and destroyed his livelihood” (based on Kiddushin 82b) and was driven out of the Garden in order to labor in a harsh world. His relationship with the Almighty would never be the same, and this expulsion and looser connection with the Divine created a downward spiral for man. By the third generation man introduces idolatry. The Rambam understood well the appeal of idolatry to the human being. Since he no longer had direct communication with the Almighty, man had difficulty relating to the Divine presence in his life. He looked upon an item in creation like the sun and saw it as an awesome symbol of the Divine presence. He began to worship it because it represented God. That introduction proved to be a monumental mistake as his descendants would no longer understand the symbolism and would treat the sun as a deity unto itself. If we were to look at Egyptian theology and note

the items in nature which they deified, in particular the sun and the Nile River, we would understand well how the Rambam understood the evolution of idolatry. Those features of nature which were predominant and looked upon as the most powerful in society were consequently thought to be independent powers and would become deities. By doing so, I see the act of idolatry to be the first act that would negate God's statement that man would have dominion over all the other acts of creation. By placing other acts of creation above us we demonstrate our willingness to negate our dominion. Idolatry therefore is not only an insult to the Almighty; it is also a negation of the Divine plan instituted in the initial act of creation.

- “And God saw that the light was good, and God divided between the light and the darkness” (1:4). Our Sages infer from this verse that God saw that the ethereal light of Creation was too precious to be exploited by the wicked. He therefore stored it away for the future to be enjoyed by the righteous. (See Rashi.) This raises the obvious question echoed by Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (1892 Lithuania to 1953 Bnei Brak, Israel): Why did God create this light in the first place if He was only going to store it away? The underlying principle is that once a light of such supernal quality has existed in the world, the path to reaching it has

been cleared. Traveling this path means returning to a preexisting, albeit latent, condition. The most amazing part of Rabbi Dessler's comments here resolves the meaning of an enigmatic Midrash. The Midrash states that when a fetus is conceived and develops within the womb it learns Torah. In the moments prior to its birth, he is shown the vast expanse of the universe and is taught all the wisdom contained in the Torah. The instant he is born, he forgets it all. Why bother teaching him the Torah if the angel touches him in a way making him to forget it? Rabbi Dessler remarks that here too the purpose of imparting the soon-to-be forgotten knowledge is to pave the way for him to return to this level of understanding by his own initiative and effort.

- Hashem decides to create man and says that He creates man in His image. Rashi explains that the image and likeness of the Divine is the ability to understand and communicate with intelligence. Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm (the Alter of Kelm, 1824-1898, great ethicist and Talmudist) expounded on this concept in stating that thinking is a process that is unique to mankind, distinguishing man from all other living creatures. The reasoning power that exists in every human being is the very essence of man; it constitutes the “image of God” intrinsic to man. The intellect opens man's eyes and leads

him on the path of understanding and insight, and by means of his intellect he acquires wisdom and knowledge. A failure to think leads to man's downfall. Without a probing, searching, and contemplating mind, there can be no hope for man. The Alter of Kelm truly understands not only the significance, but the responsibility that man has in understanding what distinguishes him from the animal world. By acting without thinking, man reduces himself to an animal and is allowing that aspect of his being to be dominant, which in turn is a true negation of the essence of creation.

- As a result of the story of the creation of man and woman, we come across an important line that helps us to define the marital relationship between man and woman (2:24) "Therefore man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and they shall become one flesh." The "cling to his wife" aspect of the verse can be looked upon as

(a) a source of prohibition to homosexuality because it is to the woman that he should cling, and not to a man, and

(b) as a statement of monogamy. The Talmud understood from this verse an inference to a prohibition against adultery because the man should cling to his wife and not to his neighbor's wife. According to the Vilna Gaon the phrase "and cling to his wife" refers to a husband's

responsibility to support his wife. Man's economic responsibility to his parents must now be deferred in favor of the needs of his wife. In the 19th century, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch comments on a very modern thought: Man is not unique among living beings in having a sexual life. Other creatures require mating only for the purpose of breeding. Because male and female were created simultaneously, they can function independently of one another. Man on the other hand is different. Woman was created from man to show that only in partnership do the two form a complete human being. Man's sexual life with his partner is required for procreation, and for a maturing sense of companionship. We might add to this picture of marriage that the latter clause is an effect of the former clause being the cause. If a man truly does cling to his wife then his ability to create a perfect marriage will result. They will feel a fulfillment of their union and become as one flesh, as a total picture of a harmonious and suitable perfectly whole marriage.

- In the Kayin and Hevel story the initial rivalry that existed between the two brothers manifests itself in God's act of accepting Hevel's sacrifice and rejecting Kayin's. Kayin became angry and jealous of his brother, whose offering was accepted by God. The Torah seems to

separate God's act as being one of judging the sacrifice, but also a judgment of the donor of the sacrifice. The Torah mentions this in a way to implicate that God examined the character and motivation of the person bringing the sacrifice, and not only the animal or produce brought. While Hevel measured up on both accounts, Kayin failed to do so. It is possible that God judged Kayin in this way to teach us a very important lesson in the performance of mitzvot in general. God not only looks at the mitzva per se, but also the performer of the mitzva. It is not enough that the mitzva is done in a halachically accurate fashion, but the person doing the mitzva is judged independent of the mitzva. Our attitude, our character, will determine whether the mitzva is accepted by the Almighty. It is an immensely powerful message to think that in our world of mitzva performance, the judgment is not defined just by the halachic nature of the mitzva. In other words I can daven and observe the Shabbat in its very finest detail, and yet be rejected because of a character flaw in my personality and in my Midot. We should prepare the proper mindset, emotionally and cerebrally, before doing any mitzva so that the mitzva and the performer of the mitzva will be consistent and accepted by Hashem.

Questions by RED

From the text

1. What are the first items created on Day One of Creation? (1:1-5)
2. On what day was Man created? (1:23)
3. What were the punishments given to the serpent, Adam, and Eve for the sin of the Garden of Eden? (3:14-19)
4. What was Kayin's punishment for killing his brother? (4:12)
5. When did the world begin to worship idols? (4:26)

From Rashi

6. What fruit was the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden? (3:7)
7. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd and not a farmer? (4:2)
8. Why was it customary in those days to have two wives? (4:19)
9. What did No'ach invent? (5:28)
10. Who were the "sons of Elohim" who married regular women? (6:2)

From the Rabbis

11. What was the main point of Chapter One of B'reishit? (RED)
12. Which Christian scholar disagreed with the Church and agreed instead with the Jewish view that Chapter One should include the Creation of the Shabbat?

13. “No'ach found grace in the eyes of Hashem” (6:8). What benefit did No'ach receive by his righteousness? (S'forno)

Midrash

14. In Creation, each item had its match (i.e. the seas were created on the second day and the aquatic life was created on the fifth day...). Shabbat complained to Hashem that it had no match. What was Hashem's answer?

Haftara - Machar Chodesh

15. Which two men of the royal families validated their relationship in this Haftara?

Relationships

- a) Adam - Enosh
- b) Tuval Kayin - Na'ama
- c) Chanoch - Metushelach
- d) Lemech - Lemech
- e) Kayin - Sheit

ANSWERS

- 1. Heaven, earth, water, darkness, and light.
- 2. Day Six
- 3. Serpent: he shall crawl on the earth and eat tasteless earthly things. Have strife with humans.

Woman: painful childbirth. Man will have dominion over woman.

Man: work strenuously for food.

4. The land won't yield its produce well, plus he will be a vagrant, moving from place to place.

5. During the time of Enosh, Adam's grandson.

6. Figs.

7. Because Hevel saw that the ground was cursed since Adam and Chava's sin.

8. One for having babies and the other one for enjoyment.

9. No'ach invented the plow.

10. The sons of officers and judges.

11. That Hashem is the sole Creator of the world; and He is in charge.

12. John Milton (17th century England)

13. That his whole family was saved.

14. That the Jewish people will be Shabbat's mate.

15. David and Yehonatan.

Relationships

- a) Grandfather - Grandson
- b) Siblings (children of Lemech)
- c) Father - Son
- d) Mechutanim (their children No'ach and Na'ama married)
- e) Brothers