

MAN IS THE PINNACLE OF CREATION

W
 hat connection is there between the human body and the earth, given that they do not resemble one another in any way? The answer is that we can learn a great deal from both: From the earth, which was created at the beginning by the word of Hashem, and from the human body, which Hashem formed from the earth. When a person looks at the dust of the earth, he remembers that he was taken from it. He realizes that he is really nothing but dust, and that he will return to dust. The Name mem hei (same numerical value as adam) that is inscribed in a person, and the Torah of Hashem that is also inscribed in him, are what make him a man. When he merits it, a person differs both from animals and the earth. After creating all the land animals on the sixth day, Hashem said: "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26). Hashem made man and then his wife Eve from him. He called them adam, this name being in keeping with the earth (adama), since their creation originated from the earth. In fact it would seem that there's no real difference between man and beast, since animals were also created on the sixth day, and even before man. However there is a divine spark in man that sets the two apart. Hashem breathed a divine spark into man's nostrils so he could sanctify himself in everything he says and does. What Hashem breathed into man came from within Him. This is why man is called adam, a name with the same numerical value (45) as the Tetragrammaton (when "filled" with three alephs, two vavs, and one dalet), which represents greatness and loftiness. Furthermore, man has the power to prolong Creation, creating or destroying what he wishes. In fact a tzaddik rules through the fear of G-d (II Samuel 23:3; Moed Katan 16b) and possesses real power, for Hashem does "the will of those who fear Him" (Psalms 145:19).

Hashem imposed a condition on Creation, namely that it must obey the words of a tzaddik. We know that certain tzaddikim of Morocco were able to stop the sun in order to prevent a desecration of Shabbat. That is, in order to reach their destination before Shabbat, they could stop

the sun in the sky just as the prophet Joshua did when he said: "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon in the valley of Aijalon" (Joshua 10:12). We also know the amazing story involving my grandfather, the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto (may his merit protect us), who on the eve of Passover helped a Jew by taking out a small suitcase from his kiddush cup, one that had miraculously grown in size and become filled with seawater. Rabbi Haim Pinto wanted to help this Jew after he had miraculously survived a shipwreck, one in which his small suitcase (containing all his wealth) had been lost at sea.

It is therefore clear that each person is comprised of two components: Physical and spiritual. A person should not make the mistake, however, of thinking that the physical is greater than the spiritual component, for in that case he is liable to lose whatever spiritual strength he has. A very bad idea indeed! If that were the case – if a person were incapable of overcoming a physical trial – Hashem would have had no reason in creating him. This is because He only tests a person with what he is capable of overcoming. Hence the spiritual is greater than the physical.

What is the source of our spiritual strength? It is the living soul that Hashem breathed into man. Before doing this, man was like a corpse, and what Hashem breathed into man came from within Himself, meaning that it was divine. It is therefore the soul that sustains man, and without this soul his body is but a corpse. Thus man's life derives from his soul. What levels of holiness can a person reach? We all know that everything which the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world was for the purpose of holiness. Everything is therefore holy, whether it be nourishment, fragrance, or even what the eyes see. At the same time, every created being has an angel that looks over it and says, "Grow" (Bereshith Rabba 10:6). Now it is clear that anything having an overseer to protect it is important. Otherwise there would be no need to appoint a guardian for it. Thus the fact that Hashem created guardians for every created being proves that all of Creation is holy.

As for man, he is at a higher level than all other things. He has no angel responsible for protecting him or making him grow, for he is truly G-d's handiwork (Bereshith Rabba 24:5; Aggadah Bereshith 11). The Holy One, blessed be He, personally saw to his creation and formation. The dust from which he was drawn was holy and spiritual, and he was infused with life from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He. His hands touched man as he was being formed, making him even more sanctified than the rest of Creation.

Thus everywhere that Hashem touched man, He commanded him to use his 248 members and 365 sinews to observe the Torah and its mitzvot. This is like the sound of the human voice being good for fragrant herbs (the analogy being that fragrant herbs are the Torah and man has the importance of a Sefer Torah). Hence when Hashem touched man's body and breathed into him a living soul, he became so highly sanctified that the angels mistook him for a divine being. They even wanted to exclaim, "Holy" before him (Bereshith Rabba 8:10). In fact until the angels saw him eating, they did not realize that he was only a man created in G-d's image.

It is true that man eats the same things that an animal does. However man differs from and is loftier than an animal because the latter is entirely physical, whereas man is made in G-d's image. This is only true of an individual person, however, when he conducts himself like a being created as G-d's handiwork. If a person fails to safeguard the divine characteristics that Hashem has placed in him (namely holiness, the Torah, and the Names of Hashem), he no longer differs from an animal.

Now that we have explained, to some extent, man's greatness and importance in Creation, it does not take much to realize that we cannot derive satisfaction from the world for a single instant without praising the Creator. In fact our main purpose and goal in this world is to serve Hashem, to separate ourselves and be distinct from all other created beings. It is only in this way that we may bring satisfaction to the Creator.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Faith in the Existence of G-d

The book *Chovot HaLevavot* (Sha'ar HaBechina, chapter 5) states that the more we need something, the easier it is to find. Similarly if we can do without something, the harder it is to find. Thus the air we breathe, since we cannot live without it for even a short time, is found everywhere on earth, at all times and in every place. Concerning this subject Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, the Alter of Kelm, said that because everything in the material world that is necessary for life (such as air) has been created by Hashem in all places and at all times, it is clear that – since a person cannot live without faith in G-d – there is no place that is completely devoid of faith. We see proofs for the existence of Hashem and His incredible deeds everywhere.

The Mishnah states, “The world was created by means of ten utterances. What does this come to teach us, for indeed it could have been created by one utterance? However it was to bring retribution upon the wicked, who destroy the world that was created by ten utterances” (Perkei Avot 5:1). Now if a tailor can stitch a garment together in one day, yet he takes several days to do so and charges accordingly, what prevents the Holy One, blessed be He, from creating the world with but one utterance? Why punish the wicked for ten utterances? In his book *Darchei Mussar*, Rabbi Yaakov Neiman explains that if Hashem had created the world with but one utterance, it would have only contained that which was strictly necessary for man to survive, in which case Creation would have been less grand. Why did Hashem create it with ten utterances? It is because things were added to Creation with each utterance, things such as various kinds of animals, fish, plants and trees, the absence of which does not endanger man’s survival. It is in this regard that the Mishnah asks why Hashem created the world with ten utterances, meaning that many things are not strictly necessary in Creation. The answer is that it was meant to punish the wicked, for Hashem provides man with what he needs to develop faith in whatever direction he turns. Hence He created numerous creatures and an immense universe to ensure that wherever man looked, he would be in awe of G-d and His wonders, for everything witnesses to the existence of the Holy One, blessed be He.

The Emet in Rashi

The three last letters in the expression *Bereshith bara Elokim* (“In the beginning G-d created” [Genesis 1:1]) form the word *emet* (“truth”). We also know that “Your very first utterance is truth” (Psalms 119:160), meaning that the beginning of the Torah – *Bereshith* – is indeed *emet*. Now the Ten Commandments, symbolizing the written Torah, begin with the letter *aleph*, while the oral Torah begins with a *mem*: “*Me’ematai* [From what time] may one recite the *Shema* in the evening?” What letter does the *Gemara* begin with? It begins with a *tav*: *Tanna* (*Berachot* 2a). It follows that the word *emet* is found at the outset of Hashem’s word, the *mem* being found at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, the *aleph* at the beginning of the oral Torah, and the *tav* at the beginning of the *Gemara* (*Otzar HaChaim*). Rabbi Avraham Ashkelon stated that Rashi also wanted to begin his commentary on the Torah with the letter *aleph* (hence he began with the words *Amar Rabbi Yitzchak*). He also ended his commentary with the letter *tav* (*sheshibarta*). The middle letter of the Torah is found in the term *gachon* (*Leviticus* 11:42; see *Kiddushin* 30a), interpreted by Rashi as meaning *me’av* (“belly”), a word beginning with the letter *mem*. Hence we also find the *emet* in Rashi.

Well Worth the Price

It is written, “G-d said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the heaven, over the cattle and over the entire earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth’” (*Genesis* 1:26).

Rashi comments: “‘Let us make man.’ From here we learn the humility of G-d. Since man was [created] in the image of the angels, they were jealous of him. He therefore consulted them. ... ‘Let us make man.’ Though they did not help in his creation, giving heretics an opportunity to rebel, Scripture does not refrain from teaching courtesy and the attribute of humility, that the greater [should] consult and ask permission of the lesser. Had it been written, ‘I will make man,’ we would not have learned that He consulted with His court, but only with Himself. The response to heretics is written alongside: ‘G-d created man.’ It does not say, ‘They created.’”

Is it worth the effort to teach proper conduct, including the fact that the greater should consult the lesser, given the danger of heresy that might result? Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman *Zatzal* stated that Hashem said: Make man, and if you are worried about heretics, I have a remedy for them: I am teaching proper conduct! I am teaching humility! The greater should consult with the lesser, and if there is humility and proper conduct, there will be faith. Heresy stems from wicked character traits, and if we teach good character traits there will be no heretics! It is therefore well worth the price, and we have no reason to fear heresy.

When the Evil Inclination Flees

It is written, “The woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise. She took its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate” (*Genesis* 3:6).

Rashi states that the expression, “The woman saw” means that she approved of the serpent’s words and believed them. That is, she believed the serpent when it told her, “You will surely not die, for G-d knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like G-d” (*vv.4-5*). Now if she had been absolutely certain that eating the fruit was fatal, she certainly would not have eaten it. Nevertheless, Rashi states that she gave some of it to her husband to eat “so that she would not die while he would live and marry another.” How could Rashi say this, given that she only ate the fruit because she was convinced that she would, in fact, not die! The *Steipler* says that we learn an important lesson here, which is that before a person commits a sin, the evil inclination convinces him that there is much to gain from it, and that in any case he can always repent afterwards. However after a person sins, the truth suddenly reveals itself and the evil inclination flees. A person is thus alone in his shame, left on his own to repent. Before she sinned by eating the fruit, Eve believed that she would not die. However after she sinned, the evil inclination fled and she remained alone in her predicament. However at that point she knew the truth, which is that she would, in fact, die.

He Saw Two Things, Not Three

The *Midrash* states, “Why did the first man sin? It was because he saw two, not three.” The *Vilna Gaon* notes that it is written, “Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin” (*Perkei Avot* 3:1). The first man, however, only considered two things: “To where you are going” and “Before Whom you are destined to give an accounting.” The third, “Know from where you came,” he did not consider.

– Aish Dat

What are Cherubim?

It is written, “He stationed at the east of the Garden of Eden the cherubim and the flame of the ever-turning sword” (*Genesis* 3:24).

The first mention of cherubim in the Torah occurs here in *Genesis*, when man was chased from the Garden of Eden. Rashi explains that these cherubim were “angels of destruction.” The next time the subject of cherubim appears is in *Parsha Terumah*, where the Torah states: “You shall make two cherubim of gold” (*Exodus* 25:18). On this verse Rashi comments: “They had the likeness of a child’s face.”

Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein Zatzal said regarding this subject: "By giving us these two explanations, Rashi is alluding to the fact that a child's future depends on the education he receives. If he is educated on the right path and is brought into the Tent of Meeting – the Beit Midrash – he may spread his wings over the holy Ark. Conversely, if we distance a child from the Temple and the holy Ark, he is liable of turning into an angel of destruction."

Overview of the Parsha

The book of Genesis gives the account of man and the earth, wherein lie the origins of the Jewish people, later described in the book of Exodus. Parsha Bereshith deals with the creation of the world and the beginnings of humanity until it became corrupt, meaning from Adam until Noah. During the first three days of Creation, G-d established the foundations of the universe in the heavens above and the earth below, and during the last three days He filled them with their hosts. He also established day and night. After this work G-d rested on the seventh day, Shabbat Bereshith, blessing and sanctifying it as a day necessary for life, prepared from the outset of Creation. Creation's development began with the connection between adam (man), adama (earth), and the Garden of Eden, where man was placed. Even when he gave names to every living thing, Adam did not find a suitable helper for himself, until finally Hashem built a woman from his side. The seduction of the serpent through the intermediary of the woman led to the sin of eating from the Tree of the Knowledge, a failure that damaged the connection between man and the earth. Thus to prevent him from eating from the Tree of Life, mankind was chased from the Garden. Adam and his wife had Cain and Abel, and strife arose among human beings following the murder of the latter. Furthermore, the damage done to the connection between man and the earth increased. Cain was banished from the land, and humanity learned to construct cities and fashion tools. Men began to call upon Hashem's Name in Enosh's time, while Cain's offspring continued to exist among men – counted among the descendants of humanity, from which Israel emerged – until the time of Noah, who brought consolation regarding the desolation of the earth. In Noah's generation, mankind's evil had reached such a point that Hashem wanted to wipe man and all created beings from off the face of the earth.

A TRUE STORY

Question for Question

Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon, one of the greatest Sages of Israel during the era of the Gaonim, once asked a lighthearted question to a tailor who had made him a new garment: "Do you know how many stitches you made today with that needle in your hand?" The tailor was taken aback by the gaon's question, and out of embarrassment he asked a question in return: "The general view is that the Rav is a great master in every field of Torah. Therefore let him tell me how many letters there are in our holy Torah." Rav Saadia grew a little pale, for no one had ever asked him this question before, and he had no clear answer to give to the tailor. Since the gaon had always found the right answers for the numerous questions presented to him throughout his life, the matter greatly upset him. The gaon eventually merited having the number of letters in the Torah revealed to him. Not only that, but he learned how many times each letter appears in the Torah, which gave him great delight. He even composed a poem consisting of 27 stanzas, one for each letter (including end variations) in Hebrew. By using a kabbalistic math riddle for each stanza, he indicated the number of times that each letter appears in the Torah.

–From the Chida's Shem HaGedolim

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Mitzvah of Having Faith

We have received the mitzvah to believe that a supreme and all-powerful force exists, as the Rambam states: "The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of all wisdom is to know that there is a First Being Who brought everything into existence. All existing things, whether celestial, terrestrial, or belonging to an intermediate case, exist only through His own existence. If it could be supposed that He did not exist, it would follow that nothing else could possibly exist. If, however, it were supposed that all other beings were non-existent, He alone would still exist. Their non-existence would not involve His non-existence. For all beings are in need of Him; however He, blessed be He, is not in need of them, nor any one of them. Hence His real essence is unlike that of any of them. This is what the prophet means when he says, 'The L-RD is the true G-d' [Jeremiah 10:10]. That is, He alone is real, and nothing else has reality like His reality. The Torah expresses the same thought in the text, 'There is none else besides Him' [Deuteronomy 4:35]. That is, there is no being besides Him that is really like Him. This Being is the G-d of the world, the Master of all the earth; it is He Who directs the world by a power without end or limit. In fact the celestial bodies are in constant motion, and it is not possible to have an effect without a cause, that cause being Him. He makes them turn with neither hand nor body. To acknowledge this truth is an affirmative precept, as it is said, 'I am the L-RD your G-d' [Exodus 20:2]" (Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 1:1-6).

In his book Pri Tzaddik, Rabbi Tzadok Hacohen of Lublin writes: "At the giving of the Torah, the light that they perceived at the splitting of the sea was fixed in them. It constitutes the power of faith that is found in the depths of every Jew's heart, and it is impossible to rattle or remove it (by force). Even if a Jew sins, he remains a Jew in all things, for sin comes solely from the leaven of the dough, not from faith that is found in the heart."

We are familiar with what the Rambam wrote in the second chapter of Hilchot Gerushin concerning the reason for the Gemara's decision that: "We coerce him until he states, 'I agree!'" (Rosh Hashanah 6a), and which can also apply to one who deliberately transgresses the entire Torah. This relates to the root of Judaism's holiness, which was permanently fixed in the heart of every Jew at the giving of the Torah. It is the revelation of the light that the people witnessed at the splitting of the sea. We have already mentioned that by the exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the sea, the Holy One, blessed be He, acquired the hearts of all the Jewish people in order for them to cleave to Him with faith and confidence.

EISHET CHAYIL

The First Garments

The clothing that we wear brings us honor. The Holy One, blessed be He, created numerous living beings in His world, yet none merited having anything to cover their bodies – none wear garments – except for man. Furthermore, Hashem went to the trouble of personally making them for man, as it is written: "The L-RD G-d made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). Just how honorable are garments, for they are placed over the crowning achievement of Creation, over man himself. Just how precious are man's garments, since they were first prepared by G-d Himself – not by man, nor by an angel or a seraph – but by the Holy One, blessed be He!

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Preserving Anonymity

We know just how difficult it is to control our words. We have become accustomed to saying almost everything that comes to mind without thinking about it first. In fact it becomes second nature to us, and thus a difficult habit to break. Let us examine one way that we can control our words so as to avoid, as much as possible, speaking about others. We often feel the need to relate a “juicy” story about someone. However we must realize that such a story will not lose any of its “juiciness” by withholding the names of those involved. True, people find it almost impossible not to speak about others. However if we decide to put an effort into avoiding such conversations, we have already achieved a great deal. This is because it is very often not necessary to mention the names of the individuals whom we are discussing.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

It is written, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a help as his counterpart” (Genesis 2:18).

“This time it is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (v.23).

“They shall become one flesh” (v.24).

The solution to man’s solitude does not come from the animal kingdom, nor does it come from the company of men in general. It comes from becoming one with the flesh of his flesh. A large proportion of family problems, such as an absence of peace in the home and the neglect of children, as well as a great number of spiritual and moral problems, stem from a man’s lack of understanding as to his rightful place in society. There are all kinds of “experts” who extol the virtues of a home in which men spend their extra energies outside, only to recharge themselves at home for their next outing. It is true that this is preferable to a house filled with anger and arguments. However this is nowhere near the goal of the home. Viewing the home as a refueling station is a sign that a man’s true place in life – be it his career, social position, or otherwise – is found outside the home. It betrays the view that the home is nothing but a means for a man to realize his dreams of grandeur in the outside world. Insofar as women are concerned, at least there still exists the notion of “the daughter of the king is all glorious within” (Psalms 45:14). However for men, almost no trace exists of the concept, “Let your house be a meeting place for Sages” (Perkei Avoth 1:4). Even one who proclaims that he does not want to be different than others, even he does not like the idea of being considered an ordinary person. Hence the home is liable to become a place where one develops a personality that is independent of “everyone else.” It is true that a man must go outside the home to earn a living. However the goal of doing so is to put money on the table – to bring it back home – because the outside world is where we should enable ourselves to live at home, not vice versa. Torah scholars should exile themselves to a place of Torah, yet what they study and absorb from the Torah must be brought back as a blessing for the home. Those who occupy themselves with the needs of the community must have an influence on society, and leaders must open their doors to those in need. However on a personal level, their place in life is “to walk discreetly with your G-d” (Micah 6:8). Men must not construct their personalities based on the opinions of others, for becoming dependent on one’s position in society completely rattles a person’s faith in Hashem. When we ask a confident and well-balanced man questions such as, “Who are you?” he will usually give his first name. Only if he deems it necessary will he describe where he is from, his community, the group he belongs to, the profession that he learned in order to deal with the curse of having to earn a living, or the activities he is forced to take on due to the needs of the community. The home must not be destroyed on account of things outside of it. The principle is, “He who is dependent on another’s table, the world is dark to him” (Beitzah 32b).

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Hearing and Seeing

“O deaf ones, listen; and blind ones, gaze to see” (Isaiah 42:18).

This verse may be understood as alluding to the fact that by not listening to forbidden words in this world, a person will merit hearing the Torah from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the future. Likewise a person who avoids looking at forbidden sights in this world will merit gazing upon the Shechinah in the future. This is somewhat like a statement found in the Talmud: “In the future world there is neither eating nor drinking...but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the Shechinah” (Berachot 17a). The verse in Isaiah is telling us, “O deaf ones, listen” – those who were like “deaf ones” in this world because they avoided listening to forbidden words will merit, in the future, to hear the Torah from the mouth of Hashem Himself. So too for “blind ones, gaze to see” – those who resembled “blind ones” in this world, since they avoided looking at forbidden things, will merit to gaze upon the Shechinah in the future.

In his book Tzavarei Shalal, the Chida gives us another interpretation for this verse. He says that the prophet Isaiah was reprimanding the tzaddikim of the generation, for although they themselves were connected to Hashem and His Torah, they remained deaf to those in the street. They were also blind to what the people of their generation were doing, neither reprimanding nor helping them to mend their ways. To such tzaddikim, the prophet said: It is true that you are accomplished individuals, working towards personal perfection, and that you are servants of Hashem and possibly even angels. However if you do not pay attention to what is going on around you, the spiritual state of the masses, then you are nothing but “deaf ones” and “blind ones.” The prophet Isaiah told them: “O deaf ones, listen; and blind ones, gaze to see,” meaning that it is not enough for you to be tzaddikim for yourselves. You must also listen to and see what is happening outside. You must find ways to better the situation of the people.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev – The Defender of Israel

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was born in the year 5500 to the saintly Rabbi Meir Zatzal in the town of Hoshakov. At the time he was born, the Baal Shem Tov said, “A great soul has just descended into the world, one that will become a defender of Israel.” In fact Rabbi Levi Yitzchak always defended the Children of Israel before the Holy One, blessed be He, to the point that everyone knew him as “the defender of Israel.”

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak continued to study Torah after his marriage to the daughter of Rabbi Israel Peretz of Libertov. However he began to get closer to Chassidut through the intermediary of Rav Shmelke of Nickelsburg, eventually becoming the main disciple of the holy Maggid of Mezritch, Rabbi Dov Ber (may his merit protect us).

When Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s father-in-law grew poorer, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was forced to leave town. He arrived in the city of Berdichev in 5545, and it was there that he lived until his dying day, the city becoming associated with his name to the present time. Everyone saw Rabbi Levi Yitzchak as a miracle worker, and he warmly greeted everyone as thousands sought his blessing and asked for his advice on every possible subject. He once told Hashem that He had to forgive the Children of Israel, otherwise His tefillin were invalid. The reason for such an allegation? It is because Scripture states, “Who is like Your people, like Israel, a unique nation on earth” (II Samuel 7:23). Thus if Hashem did not forgive them, they would no longer be unique. On Tishri 25 of the year 5570, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s life came to an end as his soul ascended to the celestial academy. He is buried in the city of Berdichev in the Ukraine. May his merit protect us all.