

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

Shemini Aseret and Bereshit

October 11-14, 2017 - 21-24 Tishrei 5778

**DEDICATION Le Refuah Shelemah Elisheva Bat Esther
And in memory of Pinchas – Phillip Deutsch**

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Below is an article that dates back to 2010 but before you read that, I would like to quote Rabbi Yissocher Frand who comments on the creation of Chava: "If He Does Not Merit", Then "Opposite Him"

The Torah says, "It is not good for man to be alone, I will make for him a help-mate (eizer), opposite him (k'negdo)." [Bereshis 2:18] Rashi comments (based on Yevamos 63a) "If he merits, she will be his helpmate; if he does not merit, she will be oppose him."

The simple interpretation of this Gemara is that if a person merits finding the right wife, then he will have a spouse who will be his helper. If, however, he does not have that merit, he will have a wife with whom he is constantly arguing.

This simple interpretation is by no means the only interpretation of the Talmudic passage. I saw an interesting explanation in the Sefer Duda'ay Reuvain from Rabbi Reuvain Katz. Rabbi Katz writes that this pasuk [verse] is not referring to two different types of wives. The entire pasuk is referring to the classic "good" wife. The pasuk is explaining that a good wife must perform two roles for her husband, even though the two roles are sometimes opposite in nature to one another.

Certainly the Almighty created the institution of marriage because a person should have a help-mate throughout life. If a person is doing the right thing with his life, then the Almighty wishes that his wife should help him reach his goal. However, there is another aspect to why the Almighty created wives. Chazal comment on the pasuk "And He formed [vaYiven] the rib that he took from Adam into a woman and He brought her to Adam" [Bereshis 2:22] that a Binah Yeseirah [extra understanding] was given to women [Gemara Niddah]. Sometimes it is the function of the wife to use that Binah Yeseirah to tell her husband "You should excuse me my dear husband, but this is NOT the way to go!"

The classic example of this is the famous Gemara that states: "the wife of On ben Peles rescued him." [Sanhedrin 109b] Even though he had initially joined Korach's rebellion against Moshe, he bailed out in the middle. Why did he bail out? It was because his wife

pointed out to him the folly of his ways: "Don't be an idiot. It does not matter to you in the least whether Moshe is the leader or Korach is the leader. You won't be the leader in either case." Even though this was a put down, it nevertheless saved him from destruction.

In the scenario above, Mrs. On ben Peles was not playing the role of the dutiful wife who always reinforces her husband's decisions and complements him on the wisdom of the path he has chosen. She was not playing the role of the "help-mate"; she was playing the role of being "opposite." She saved him with her Binah Yeseirah, with her different way of looking at things. She saved him – physically and spiritually, in this world and in the next!

This, says the Duda'ay Reuvain, is the exact role of "Lo zacha – k'negdo" [if he does not merit, opposite him] to which the Gemara refers. "If he does not merit" — meaning he is not acting in the meritorious way that the Almighty would want him to act — then she should stand up "in opposition to him" and tell him that he is being a fool!"

Back in 2010 I was invited to speak at a sisterhood meeting. I followed up the speech with an article, "Love – Torah style!"

I reflected on a call I received on Saturday night, which was followed by an e-mail and a text message. A man from out of town had visited our Synagogue regularly, needed to speak with me. He explained that he was having marriage problems and was seeking out the advice of a real "chacham". I had no choice but to laugh out loud. Who was he referring to? I suggested that he speak with a marriage counselor or a Rabbi with real experience. I offered to put him in touch with either or both, but I certainly was not the guy to come to. He insisted that he had heard me give speeches in Synagogue and had attended a number of classes and was sure that I could help.

I explained that I am nothing more than a human tape recorder and that all I can do is playback what I hear from others although I do provide knobs to adjust tone, speed and volume.

But he insisted, so I suggested we set some time to speak on Monday evening. I hoped he simply needed someone to vent towards. And if not, I would give him

the advice of a real Chacham, my Rabbi, Asher Chacham Abittan z'sl.

The Rabbi who was the Segan Av Bet Din told us of a man who showed up one day requesting a Get – a divorce. He told the Rabbis that his wife was becoming worse by the week. She now put her hand on the Mezuzah as he left each morning for work and cursed him and he was shaken to the bone and couldn't go on.

The rabbi continued the conversation with the man and went into some depth about the relationship and at the end asked if the man might try something and delay a month. He suggested that each week, the man bring home some small nice gift for his wife and to try only to speak with kindness and love. At first the man said it would never help, complaining she already bought whatever she wanted on the credit cards, but finally he agreed to try the Rabbis advice, but was certain he would be back in 4 weeks for the Get.

But 4 weeks passed and he didn't return. And 8 weeks, then 12 weeks passed too. And then one day Rabbi Abittan saw the man in the Bet Midrash. What happened with the Get asked the Rabbi. And the man hugged and kissed the rabbi for his advice. Once he made the effort and brought some token with kind words home each day and each week, everything changed. Now his wife prayed for him and blessed him as he left each morning. Business improved. The kids were doing great. He couldn't be happier.

So I figured, I could tell him the story, tell him what we had discussed in class a few weeks back when he was there about a man and wife being two parts of a single soul, about one partner's behavior merely reflecting the others, about a wife being ezer kenegdo and what the rabbis teach that when man is worthy his wife is his ezer, his helping partner and when man is not, she becomes kenegdo – against him.

Maybe I would quote from Rav Arush's book, The Garden of Peace which I saw work for so many people. Rav Lazar Brody who translated the book was in town, maybe I could send him to hear and speak with the Rabbi.

I needed some help from heaven, maybe a little luck here. Well my dad always says to us Luck or Mazal is made of up of the Hebrew words which translate as the right place, at the right time, and doing the right thing. Sunday afternoon we were at an engagement where the rabbi related the love of the couple to the

portion we just read where Jacob meets Rachel, where Jacob kisses Rachel and where Jacob falls in love with Rachel. He was speaking about the Jewish love story and I jotted on a napkin to my daughter the numbers 77 and 13. She understood. Romeo may have been 17 and Juliet 13 when they fell in love in Verona, and Rachel may have been 13 when she met her cousin Jacob, but Jacob was not 17. He was 77!

Still pondering on the drive home, my wife unaware of my dilemma but using her intuition and sixth sense asked me to listen to a message posted by her friend Rabbi Efim Svirsky a therapist and educator.

And the message began by asking, "What is Love"?

Referring to Jacob and Rachel the Rabbi explained that at 77 and 13 they certainly weren't Romeo and Juliet. I was psyched! He knew where I was coming from, now let's see where he goes with it.

Well one needed to ask if a 77 year old man falls in love, the last thing he is going to do is to delay the wedding for 7 years til his 84th birthday. If anything, he would want to marry tomorrow! And then waiting 7 years for the one you love must be like waiting an eternity, how could one possibly understand the Torah telling us the years flew by because of Jacob's love for Rachel?

The world often confuses infatuation and love. Too many people are infatuated and think they have fallen in love. We see someone who we are attracted to and we imagine they are perfect for us. We project onto them all the qualities of our image of the ideal person. We fall head over heels. We scream out that I've found her! So they get together and marry!

The problem is when they wake up one day and realize that we create our own false expectations. It was all phony and now we are terribly disappointed and we become depressed. We set ourselves up for a colossal fall.

This is infatuation!

And today beyond that confusion we have more problems. Some people are lonely and rush to marry before they are ready. So in their search they send two messages to the brain. Find me someone because I am lonely but don't forget brain that I am really not ready. They end up falling in love with the wrong person. They've built walls around themselves because they are afraid of intimacy. They worry about the divorce rate and isolate themselves within the relationship so whatever happens is fake.

And the worst case is caused by rampant low self esteem. People with a victim mentality who don't love themselves hear a message directing them to the wrong person often resulting in them becoming victims of abuse and unhappiness.

OK so these are not true love, what is?

We saw last week, our forefather Jacob, the choice of the avot, the beloved of Hashem, the scholar and prophet using his prophet's eyes, sees the other half of his own soul. He sees Rachel, the mother of the Jewish people. And through his understanding he perceives that they need 7 more years to arrive at the point they will be ready for each other. When we have common goals, when we share a joint mission and when we are on the path towards the same end, time flies. We know where we need to get to.

So what are the rules in finding a spouse (and this list is the reason for the column because after speaking Tuesday night so many people wanted me to include the speech in the newsletter)? And for those of us married, how can we improve our marriage.

1. Do we share common goals?
2. Does this person bring the best out in me? Do I bring out the best in my spouse?
3. What character traits do I need and does that person possess them? A secular author wrote, we marry for the features of the face and end up living with the features of the character.
4. Can I truly trust this person? Can I let down my guard? Can I reveal my weaknesses and can my spouse reveal his or her weaknesses confidently to me?
5. Is there chemistry and attraction? Number 5 is often the first we focus on, but in fact without the other four we can be swept away. Without the other four, attraction will over time dissipate and eventually fade away to repulsion.

Rabbi Abittan would tell us that the Torah is the guide to life. If we follow the guide book that the manufacturer provided, then everything will work and we won't void the warranty. He would remind us that what we see is often a reflection of what we project.

A home is a mini mikdash where the Shechina resides. But it only resides there as long as there is Shalom, peace and completion. My friend who called for advice should be zoche to rebuild his marriage and we should all be blessed with homes of health, happiness, peace, and tranquility. May we all be zoche to build a bayit ne'eman beyisrael!
Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Bereshit- Hashem creates the world, Adam sins

- 1- The events of the first 7 days of creation
- 2- The creation of Adam and Gan Eden
- 3- The creation of Hava. Adam and Hava eat from the tree and are punished.
- 4- Kayin and Hevel are born. Kayin kills Hevel and is punished.
- 5- The descendants of Kayin
- 6- The generations from Adam to Noach
- 7- The generations from Adam to Noach continued. Man becomes wicked and Hashem decides to wipe out man and animal.

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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G-d's Signature

Whenever an author or artist completes his work, he makes a point of appending his signature to the work. Somewhere on the title page of a book or a corner of a painting, we will find the author's signature.

In Parashat Bereshit, right at the beginning of the Torah, G-d puts His "signature" on the world's creation. Our Sages tell us, "Hotamo Shel Ha'kadosh Baruch Hu Emet" – G-d's signature is "Emet" – truth. The final letters of the first three words of the Torah – "Bereshit Bara Elokim" – are "Tav," "Alef" and "Mem" – the letters of "Emet." And the final three words of the creation story – "Bara Elokim La'asot" – likewise end with "Alef," "Mem" and "Tav," again spelling "Emet."

The centrality of "Emet" might also explain the reason why the Torah begins with the letter "Bet," rather than with the first letter of the alphabet – "Alef" – as we might have expected. The numerical value of "Emet" is 441, and when we add the digits (4+4+1) – a system called "Mispar Katan" – we arrive at 9. "Sheker" ("falsehood"), meanwhile, has the numerical value of 600, which results in a "Mispar Katan" of 6. When we add together the first three numbers – 1+2+3 – we arrive at 6, and we arrive at this sum when we add every series of three letters after that. For example, 4+5+6 equals 15, and the combined value of the digits is 6. Likewise, when we add 7+8+9, we arrive at 24, and the two digits combine to equal 6, and so forth. But if we start at the number 2, every three numbers combine to equal 9. Thus, 2+3+4=9, and then 5+6+7=18, and the two digits of 18 combine to equal 9, and so on. Hence, the Torah begins with the second letter, "Bet," which has the numerical value of 2, rather than "Alef," which has the

value of 1, because 1 begins a process of “Sheker” (6), whereas 2 begins the process of “Emet” (9).

The Torah is the only purely “true” book, because it was written by the Almighty, whose signature is truth. There is no other book in the world that we cannot question at all. Even honest and reputable publications contain errors. I recall once a local publication ran a story about a brief, three-day trip that I once took. I assume this wasn’t intentional, but the article was riddled with mistakes and inaccuracies. Anything we ever read or hear must be taken with some degree of skepticism, because the writer or speaker is flawed and imperfect, and any information he conveys reflects, to one degree or another, his personal biases and agendas. But the Torah is perfectly true. We can and must accept every single word fully, wholeheartedly and unhesitatingly.

Each year, when we start the Torah anew, we must recognize how fortunate we are to be able to study and practice the ultimate truth, the Torah, which expresses the wisdom of the Master of the world, whose signature is “Emet.”

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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Rabbi Wein

As is usual and customary, the reading of the Torah concludes and is resumed again in an almost simultaneous fashion on the day of Simchat Torah. This juxtaposition of the readings is especially noticeable this year with the immediacy of Shabbat Bereshiith to Simchat Torah itself.

The Torah concludes with the lesson of the mortality and the eternity of the human being. The Torah itself finishes with the mortality of Moshe but it is a physical mortality. There is no greater testimony to the eternity of the human spirit than the Torah that Moshe bequeathed to us and to the world at large. And this is also the lesson taught to us by the opening narrative regarding the creation and development of human beings.

The Torah tells us that we humans were and are invested with eternity, blown into our nostrils by God, so to speak, and endowed with enormous and gifted talents. But with all of this, our own mortality and the

constant reminder of its fragile state of being would always limit us. Humans are aware almost from the time of their birth of their mortality.

Paradoxically, it is this very knowledge of our temporary status on earth that provides the fuel and the energy that drives the engines of human creativity and civilization. We are always in a hurry for we are aware that passing time is our mortal enemy. Both the end and the beginning of the Torah come to reinforce this message of the duality of human beings – eternal and temporary at one and the same time.

The Torah concludes with the blessings of Moshe to his beloved people, the children of Israel. Those blessings are very detailed, individual and personal. The Torah begins with God’s blessings to the human race, which are general and universal in nature. This teaches us that although all humans are basically alike and desire health, material success, family and community, comfort and security, each human being is particular, differently talented and motivated in his or her own private world.

Judaism recognizes and reconciles this community and individuality, which is the basic cause of human tension and internal angst. Moshe taught us that we are to treasure our uniqueness as individuals and as a people. God, so to speak, taught us that each of us is part of a universal brotherhood, fashioned from the same mold, by the same Creator.

Seeing ourselves as being recipients of this gift of social and spiritual duality of identity and purpose is one of the main requirements of living a truly Jewish Torah life. That is why we treat the Torah readings as a seamless whole, really without beginning and end. It all flows together in the paradoxical condition of the human soul and its eternal search for a fairer society and a better world. The continuing, never ending cycle of the Torah itself is our greatest comfort.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

In stately prose the Torah in its opening chapter describes the unfolding of the universe, the effortless creation of a single creative Force. Repeatedly we read, “And God said, Let there be ... and there was ... and God saw that it was good” – until we come to the creation of humankind. Suddenly the whole tone of the narrative changes:

And God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of heaven, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every moving thing that moves upon the earth.”

So God created man in His image,

In the image of God He created him, Male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:26-27) The problems are obvious. First, why the preface, "Let us make ..."? In no other case does God verbally reflect on what He is about to create before He creates it. Second, who is the "us"? At that time there was no "us." There was only God.

There are many answers, but here I want to focus only on one given by the Talmud. It is quite extraordinary. The "us" refers to the angels with whom God consulted. He did so because He was faced with a fateful dilemma. By creating Homo sapiens, God was making the one being other than Himself capable of destroying life on earth. Read Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* or *Collapse* and you will discover how destructive humans have been wherever they have set foot, creating environmental damage and human devastation on a massive scale. We are still doing so. This is how the Talmud describes what happened before God created humankind:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create man, He created a group of ministering angels and asked them, "Do you agree that we should make man in our image?" They replied, "Sovereign of the Universe, what will be his deeds?"

God showed them the history of mankind. The angels replied, "What is man that You are mindful of him?" [in other words, let man not be created].

God destroyed the angels.

He created a second group, and asked them the same question, and they gave the same answer. God destroyed them.

He created a third group of angels, and they replied, "Sovereign of the Universe, the first and second group of angels told You not to create man, and it did not avail them. You did not listen. What then can we say but this: The universe is Yours. Do with it as You wish."

Then God created man.

When it came to the generation of the Flood, and then to the generation of the builders of Babel, the angels said to God, "Were not the first angels right? See how great is the corruption of mankind."

Then God replied (Isaiah 46:4), "Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient." (Sanhedrin 38b)

This goes to the core of the dilemma even God could not escape. Were He not to create humanity there would be no-one in the universe capable of understanding that he or she was created and that God exists. Only with the birth of humanity did the universe become self-conscious. Without us, it would be as if God had created billions of robots mindlessly doing what they been programmed to do for all eternity. So, even though by creating humans God was putting the entire future of creation at risk, God

went ahead and made humankind.

This is radical theology indeed. The Talmud is telling us is that the existence of humankind can only be explained by the fact that God had faith in man. As the Sifre explains the phrase in Moses' song, "the God of faith" – this means, "the God who had faith in the universe and created it." [1] The real religious mystery, according to Judaism, is not our faith in God. It is God's faith in us.

This is the extraordinary idea that shines through the entire Tanakh. God invests his hopes for the universe in this strange, refractory, cantankerous, ungrateful and sometimes degenerate creature called Homo sapiens, part dust of the earth, part breath of God, whose behaviour disappoints and sometimes appals him. Yet He never gives up.

He tries with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, a string of judges and kings. He tries with women also, and here succeeds much better. They are more faithful, less violent, less obsessed with power. But He refuses to give up on men. He has His most passionate relationship with the prophets. They understand Him and become bearers of His word. Yet most of the prophets end up as disappointed with people as God is.

The real subject of the Torah is not our faith in God, which is often faltering, but His unfailing faith in us. The Torah is not man's book of God. It is God's book of man. He spends a mere 34 verses describing His own creation of the universe, but more than 500 verses describing the Israelites' creation of a tiny, temporary, portable building called the Mishkan, the Sanctuary. God never stops believing in us, loving us, and hoping for the best from us. There are moments when He almost despairs. Our parsha says so.

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and He was grieved to His very core.

But Noah, good, innocent, upright, consoles Him. For the sake of one good man God was prepared to begin again.

Of course, all of this is a matter of faith – as is all belief in the thoughts and feelings of persons other than myself. Do I really know whether those closest to me – my marriage partner, my children, my companions, my friends – love me or have faith in me, or is that just wishful thinking on my part? Atheists sometimes think that belief in God is irrational while belief in other people is rational. That is simply not so. The proof is the failure of the man who, at the dawn of the Enlightenment, sought to put philosophy on a rational basis: Rene Descartes. Descartes famously said, *Cogito ergo sum*, "I think,

therefore I am." All he was sure of was his own existence. For anything else – the existence of physical objects, let alone other minds – even he had to invoke God.

I for one do not have enough faith to be an atheist.[2] To be an atheist you have to have faith, either in humankind as a whole, or in yourself. How anyone can have faith in humankind after the Holocaust defies all reason. The single most calculated, sustained crime of man against man happened not in some benighted third world country but in the heart of a Europe that had given birth to Kant and Hegel, Bach and Beethoven, Goethe and Schiller. Civilisation utterly failed to civilise. Humanism did not make men humane.

When I first stood at Auschwitz-Birkenau the question that haunted me was not, "Where was God?" God was in the command, "You shall not murder." God was in the words, "You shall not oppress the stranger." God was saying to humanity, "Your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." God did not stop the first humans eating forbidden fruit. He did not stop Cain committing murder. He did not stop the Egyptians enslaving the Israelites. God does not save us from ourselves. That, according to the Talmud, is why creating man was such a risk that the angels advised against it. The question that haunts me after the Holocaust, as it does today in this new age of chaos, is "Where is man?"

As for believing only in yourself, that is hubris. Every serious thinker since the dawn of history has known that this ends in nemesis.

There are only two serious possibilities to be entertained by serious minds. Either the one put forward by the Torah that we are here because a Force greater than the universe wanted us to be, or the alternative: that the universe exists because of a random fluctuation in the quantum field, and we are here because of a mindless sequence of genetic mutations blindly sifted by natural selection. Either there is or is not meaning to the human condition. The first possibility yields Isaiah, the second, Sophocles, Aeschylus and Greek tragedy. The Greece of antiquity died. The Israel of Abraham and Moses still lives.

I respect those who choose Greek tragedy over Jewish hope. But those who choose Judaism have made space in their minds for the most life-changing idea of all: Whether or not we have faith in God, God has faith in us.

There may be times in our lives – certainly there have been in mine – when the sun disappears and we enter the cloud of black despair. King David knew these feelings well. They are theme of several Psalms. People can be brutal to one another. There are some who, having suffered pain themselves, find relief in inflicting it on others. You can lose faith in

humanity, or in yourself, or both. At such times, the knowledge that God has faith in us is transformative, redemptive. As David said in Psalm 27:

Even were my father or mother to forsake me,
The Lord would still receive me. (Ps. 27:10)

We may lose heart; God never will. We may despair; God will give us hope. God believes in us even if we don't believe in ourselves. We may sin and disappoint and come short again and again, but God never ceases to forgive us when we fail and lift us when we fall.

Have faith in God's faith in us and you will find the path from darkness to light.

Shabbat shalom and Chag sameach,

[1] Sifre, Ha'azinu, 307.

[2] Of course an atheist might say – Sigmund Freud came close to saying this – that faith is simply a comforting illusion. That really is not so. It is far more demanding to believe that God summons us to responsibility, that He asks us to fight for justice, equality and human dignity, and that He holds us accountable for what we do, than to believe that there is no meaning to human existence other than ones we invent for ourselves, no ultimate truth, no absolute moral standards, and no one to whom we will have to give an account of our lives. Fifty years of reflection on this issue have led me to conclude that it is atheism that is, morally and existentially, the easy option – and I say this having known and studied with some of the greatest atheists of our time. That is not to say that I am critical of atheists. To the contrary, in a secular age, it is the default option. That is why now, more than at any other time in the past two thousand years, it takes courage to have and live by religious faith.

Rav Kook on the Perasha THE MERIT OF THE DANCE

Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, who served as Chief Rabbi of Yamit and founded the Temple Institute in Jerusalem, related this story from 1973, when he was a student at Mercaz HaRav and was called up to fight in the Yom Kippur War.

During the Yom Kippur War, the army called up reserve soldiers to defend the country against the surprise Arab attack. Heavy fighting continued in the Golan Heights and the Sinai Desert for several weeks, through the holiday of Succoth.

Immediately following Succoth is a holiday of exuberant joy — Simhat Torah, when it is customary to celebrate the completion of reading the Torah with singing and dancing. During the war, however, many felt that it was improper to rejoice while the soldiers were fighting on the battlefield. Some of the yeshiva students also felt that public displays of joy were inappropriate.

But Rav Tzvi Yehudah was adamant: "We will teach the people to rejoice!" The rabbi, accompanied by a

small band of students, danced on Simhat Torah morning in the streets of Jerusalem, as they made their way to the home of the Chief Rabbi. A few of the synagogue members also joined the yeshiva students, including my father.

When they reached King George Street, a passerby began to shout at them. "How dare you dance?" The man pointed an accusatory finger at the group. "The whole country is fighting for its life in this war, and you dance? Have you no shame?!"

Rav Tzvi Yehudah stopped and turned to him. "Why are you upset? Look at this Jew who is dancing with me" — and here he indicated my father. "His four sons are all currently fighting at various fronts. And yet he dances and rejoices in the simhah of the Torah. You should also come and dance with us!"

At the very time that my father was dancing with Rav Tzvi Yehudah in Jerusalem, I was stationed on Mount Hermon in the Golan Heights with my brother Rabbi Yaakov Ariel [now Chief Rabbi of the city of Ramat Gan]. We were in grave danger, sprawled out on the ground while enemy shells whistled above us, exploding to our right and to our left.

Who knows? Perhaps it was the merit of that holy dance in honor of the Torah that saved our lives....

(Stories from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Mashmia Yeshuah by Simcha Raz and Hilah Volbershtin, p. 504)

Braiding Eve's Hair Eve's Creation

"God built the rib that He took from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man." (Gen. 2:22)

The Midrash adds a curious detail to the Torah's account of Eve's creation. When God 'built' Eve, He braided her hair before bringing her to Adam. How do we know that God braided her hair? The Midrash brings a linguistic proof: in a certain language, the word for 'braid' is *binita*, similar to the Hebrew word *biniya* ('to build').

This idea that braiding hair is a form of building is not just a quaint notion, but has legal ramifications. The Talmud rules that it is forbidden to braid hair on the Sabbath, since braiding constitutes the *melachah* of building (Shabbat 95a).

What is the significance of God braiding Eve's hair? Is braiding hair truly a form of building?

Satisfying the Soul

Generally speaking, there are two objectives when building a structure. The first is utilitarian. We build houses in order to be sheltered and protected from the elements.

But there is often an additional aspect to building: the aesthetic value of a beautiful home. The Sages taught in Berachot 57b that the elegance of a well-designed residence can revive a one's spirits and "broaden one's outlook." An aesthetically-pleasing environment quiets the mind and soothes the heart.

What is so significant about the aesthetic side of building?

What makes humans special and is, in fact, their true strength, is their spiritual side. Our natural desire for beautiful living accommodations indicates that even that which would seem to be purely utilitarian — a structure to satisfy our need for shelter — should nonetheless contain elements of beauty and harmony. One might think that the function of a house is only to protect us from the rain and the cold. But in fact, beautiful surroundings can be inspiring, deepening one's appreciation for nobler aspirations. It is this innate pursuit of beauty and refined life that will eventually lead all of humanity, after purging the baser aspects of life, to a lofty and elevated state.

We can now better appreciate the Talmudic account of Eve's formation. The Midrash calls our attention to the fact that the very first "construction" undertaken for the sake of humanity already recognized this fundamental quality of human nature.

Eve's creation enabled humanity to reproduce, a basic physical function. Even so, her creation was accompanied by the aesthetic act of braiding her hair. Thus we find that even for those biological functions shared with the animals, the human soul demands that they be imbued with beauty.

The act of braiding Eve's hair established this inner truth: the human soul cannot be satisfied with the utilitarian fulfillment of physical needs. The soul's spiritual needs must also be addressed, as the practical is combined with a higher, aesthetic component.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, p. 237)

Rabbi Meyer Laniado The Message of The Sukkah

The category of misvot called huqim [ritual laws] are symbols meant to signify a message. To understand the message of a holiday one should think about the particular laws of that holiday. To understand Sukkot, it is important to understand that in an agricultural society, this was the time when most people felt wealthy, having seen their production for that year. It is the time that we celebrate and enjoy our productivity and wealth. During this time, we need to realize that it was not solely us that developed this wealth but through a partnership with The Creator. This message can be seen through the specifics of the misvot of the Sukkah.

The sekhakh must be from the ground, something natural, representing God's hand in the world and our lives, but we must do our part. We should never think that our wealth and prosperity are completely from the work of our own hands. That is why the sekhakh must neither be attached to the ground, i.e., completely from God, nor a show of man's domination over the world, i.e., a vessel which can receive impurity. The only kosher sekhakh is that which is in partnership, grown from the ground, detached, but not made into a vessel [M. Sukka 1:4]. The Arba Minim represents our productivity in this world. The Jews went from the desert with no produce, fruit trees, rivers, etc. and entered into a land plentiful of agriculture. In rejoicing over our newly found prosperity, now seemingly the work of our own hands, we celebrate with the most beautiful of fruits of the land, branches which smell nice and those that are beautiful [Moreh Nebukhim].

The significance of these symbols are universal and are a message which is applicable throughout time. It is very easy for one to think that their successes in this world are completely by their own hand or the reverse, that they have no part in their own success. The truth is that there is a partnership. We do have a choice, and we do trust in divine guidance and care, and through this combination, we do our best on this earth.

Moadim Lesimha!
Rabbi Meyer Laniado

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And Hashem Elokim formed the Man of Earth from the soil and He blew into his nostrils a breath of life and the Man became a living being (Nefesh)." 2:7

The "breath of life" which Man received was unique; no such procedure was mentioned in connection with any other living thing. This is the Living Soul ("the breath of life"). The nostrils are here merely a form of speech. Whatever was "blown" into Man came from Him that "blew", meaning that Man's inner identity (which makes him unique) came from the Creator Himself. Thus, in a sense, the Soul of Man comes from G-d.

That which G-d blew into Man's nostrils contained qualities which are semblances of G-d's qualities. Therefore Man inherently possesses endless wisdom and endless perfection. The creator did not give these qualities to be wasted; therefore we understand that Man's function is to bring forth from his hidden resources the wisdom and perfection which he possesses. In some instances, the processes and events of life and the phenomena help Man to accomplish this function. Man's thoughts, words and deeds bring forth his hidden greatness. His wife and his children, his kin and his friends, and even his enemies are opportunities for greatness.

In addition, all men provide tests for each other, in order to evoke the greatness in their souls. The phenomena of nature awaken in men responses, and the processes of life are intended to achieve this function of stirring the spirit into production of Excellence.

This is what David intended when he said: "Awake, my glory! Awake, O'harp and lyre!" (Tehillim 57:9). The "glory" is that which Hashem breathed into Man, and the "harp" includes all the stimuli which G-d created for the purpose of awakening this glory and causing it to emerge. Quoted from "The Beginning" By R' Miller