

By Rabbi
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REFLECTIONS ON BERESHIT & NOACH

Adapted from the Shiurim of HaRav Shimon Kessin, SHLITA
In Memory of Eliyahu ben Yehuda, Dr. Elliot Hahn

A person could devote decades to the study of the first three chapters of Sefer Bereshit and find that it is not enough time to fully understand everything presented therein. This essay will cover one issue in Parashat Bereshit and one referred to by Rashi at the end of Parashat Noach.

We all know the story line of the Torah's first Parasha. Adam and Chava are given one command, one Mitzvah to observe which is not to eat from the Aitz Ha'Daas, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If they succeed, with the onset of the first Shabbat, Adam becomes Mashiach ben Dovid and begins the process of *zichuch*, transforming Olom HaZeh into Olom HaBah. World transformation - what a huge privilege!! What we often overlook is that this would have resulted by simply *not eating* the forbidden fruit. For Adam to become Mashiach ben Dovid did not require anything positive, active to be done. We all know that with the coaxing of the snake, Adam and Chava chose wrong and failed. Although part of the punishment given to each of them is clearly delineated in the Torah, there are more consequences brought down. It is one of those punishments that I would like to focus on.

Adam and Chava were created as twenty-year old adults. The concept of childhood was totally foreign to them. From this moment on, pregnancy with a nine-month gestation period would result in the birth of an infant. When the *nochosh* seduced Chava into sinning, one of the arguments he provided was that if she ate from the tree, she would be like G-d, knowing good and evil, (Bereshit 3:5). Infancy is a consequence of Chava buying into this argument. What Hashem was saying to Chava and by extension to Adam was, "Do you want to be like Me? I'll give you a corrupted taste of what that is all about." Hashem's entire Reality can be summed up in three words: *Ain Od Milvado*. Many translate this to mean that there is nothing like Hashem, whereas the more accurate translation is that there is nothing except Hashem. To say that Hashem exists is not correct. Hashem does not possess existence. **Hashem is existence** more accurately defines His Infinite Reality. Our ability to fully comprehend this is impossible in Olom HaZeh. We will be able to more fully conceptualize this in Olom HaBah, but only part way. The chasm between our finite world and the Infinite world that defines Hashem is one that the *Zuloso* and by extension us will never be able to transverse, even in Olom HaBah. Therefore, at no time and under no circumstance can anything outside of Hashem coexist with Him. It's a conflict in the reality that differentiates that which is finite in contrast to Hashem in His isolated Infinity.

After nine months in the womb of its mother, a new baby is born into this world. As beautiful as the infant may be, it does not recognize anyone and is totally helpless. As Hashem is alone in His world of Infinity, so too is the infant isolated in its own world. Rav Kessin calls this the corrupted - *zuhamah* - version of Hashem's totally private domain. The infant instinctively knows how to cry but doesn't even realize that by doing so its needs will be met. The child has no idea who is taking care of him/her. Chava wanted to experience what it was like to "be G-d", so Hashem provided every person in their infancy with the ability to live in isolation as Hashem does. What makes this a *zuhamah* version of Hashem's reality, though, is the fact that Hashem knows every detail of what's occurring in our world whereas the infant is totally clueless regarding its surrounding and from whom his/her life support is coming. What Hashem and the infant share are an "*Ain Od Milvadee*" – "There is nothing except me" type of isolation. For Hashem, that isolation is not at the expense of being Infinitely Omniscient (all knowing), while for the infant, his/her knowledge reality starts at the *zuhamah* level of zero. Isolation is the only reality that Hashem and the infant share, a consequence of Adam and Chava wanting to be like Hashem. The moral learned from Adam & Chava: Be careful what you wish for. Hashem knows what we need far more accurately than we do.

Every person's life matures through four stages. As expressed above, every infant finds itself in a world of "*ain od milvadee*". For the first few months, every child lives in the isolation of their helpless reality, not recognizing where their support is coming from. Within a few months the child begins to recognize his/her mother followed by his/her father. In a short while, family

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members begin to receive that classic smile of recognition, a strong sign that familiarity is being achieved between the child and people beyond him/her. What began as *ain od milvadee* morphs into *yaish od milvadee*. The child still sees itself as the center of attention, and no wonder. Look what everyone does in response to an infant's simple smile. He/she is beginning to learn that there is a world beyond the totally egocentric *milvadee* reality of a newborn. *Ain od milvadee* becomes *yaish od milvadee*.

Our children grow into boys and girls and with the proper education, begin to learn about Hashem and the holy relationship our people enjoy with Him. An understanding of "*Milvado*" begins to take root and with the proper role modeling and *chinuch* at home and in school, a praiseworthy Jewish child begins to emerge. Childhood morphs into young adulthood and *yaish od milvadee* begins to mature into "*yaish od Milvado*". Yes, there is Hashem *Yisborach*, but coming to understand Him in full form requires development – emotional and intellectual – that requires more than the twelve or thirteen years needed to achieve Halacha based adulthood. (Conjecture on my part, but this may be the reason a person is not a "*bar onshin*" – held responsible for their actions until they are twenty.) To a teenager, what *yaish od Milvado* means is that Hashem is everything that Hashem "*IS*". What a young adult cannot fully comprehend is Hashem as "*Yochid b'Olo-mo*" as expressed by Rashi: Bereshit 1:5 & Devarim 4:35. (I'm not confident that most adults fully understand what this means.) For a young adult, Hashem occupies Infinity beyond the top rung of life's ladder. Nonetheless, there is still everyone and everything on that ladder as well.

The most important and significant stage in life is the fourth one, which is *Ain Od Milvado*. A small percentage of our people truly achieve this understanding in their lifetime. We may plan, strive, work hard, do everything in our power to achieve a goal. Many are challenged in recognizing the line between proper *hishtadlut*, human effort with a strong focus on Hashem's role in every life process, and the idea that *b'kochi v'otzem yodi*, I can achieve this. The *Ain Od Milvado* philosophy of *Yom Echod* – day of the One – is as much a reality today as it was when Hashem created the world. When Rashi in Parashat *V'eschanan* states that at Har Sinai, Hashem opened the seven heavens, what it means is that every person saw the reality of *Yom Echod*. What that means is that for a short period of time, we (and I do mean WE), were able to comprehend how the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans are an extension of Hashem. We understood how *Eretz HaKadosha*, *Eretz Yisrael* is an extension of Hashem. We comprehended how we are all extensions of Hashem. *Ain Od Milvado* means Hashem *IS* everything, Hashem *IS* existence. It takes the likes of our *Avot*, *Yosef HaTzadik*, *Moshe Rabbeinu*, *Aharon Kohen Gadol*, *Dovid HaMelech* and his son *Shlomo* along with all our *Neviim* who chose to live "selfless" lives in recognition of the reality that in place of the "self" is Hashem from whom we are derived. We are all a "*Chaylek Eloka M'Maal*", a derivative from Hashem above. What starts out as the *zuhama* of the infant's *ain od milvadee* should eventually grow into the holy person recognizing the Infinite reality and *Kedusha* of *Ain Od Milvado*.

Psychology is the study of the human "mind". Many would call the mind the most significant characteristic of any person. It defines our uniqueness, our personality, indeed our spirituality. All that said, no person can put their hand on another and say, "This is where the mind is located". Although our understanding of the mind has grown over the centuries, much of it remains a mystery, which is what makes the proper study of psychology so fascinating. (Please note the word "proper".) As per *Rov Kessin*, (himself a psychologist), a well-trained therapist with a solid understanding of Hashem and His Torah will find that many of the psychological disorders that plague people today come down to one's inability to get beyond a particular place in the four stages of development described above. As an example, narcissistic people are stuck in an "*ain od milvadee*" mindset. Paranoid people have trouble in the realm of "*yaish od milvadee*". People with challenges in addictions, at best are stuck in a *yaish od Milvado* reality. They may believe and serve Hashem, but the other "*milvado*" in their life is whatever they are addicted to. It's only a matter of time before the drug or (hopefully) Hashem *Yisborach* wins out. This problem is far greater in the United States than many want to believe. Hashem *Yerachaym*! What this paradigm suggests is that the very root of the psychological challenges people face today may begin in the spiritual aspect, the soul of the person as manifested in the mysterious mind. One solution may be to "fight fire with fire". By addressing the psychological challenges from a spiritual perspective, we will be able to heal the mind as we grow the soul. What is the difference between religion and spirituality? Religion is for people who don't want to go to Gehinnom. Spirituality is for people who have already been there.

AVROHOM & THE KIVSHAN HA'AISH

Even though this monumental event is not part of the Torah but brought down in the Midrash, it is as well known as most of the events found in *Sefer Bereshit*. At the end of Parashat *Noach*, Rashi quotes the Midrash by telling us that *Horon*, the brother of *Avrohom* and the father of *Lot* died in the same furnace that was meant to kill *Avrohom*. Let's expand on the story and understand it fully.

We all know that *Avrohom* was the rebel of his generation. He and his wife *Sarah* devoted themselves to bringing the reality of Hashem *Yisborach* to the society in which they lived. *Ur Kasdim* was a major metropolis and the ruling authority of that time was *Nimrod*. The events brought down by the Midrash relate that *Avrohom's* father, *Terach*, was an idol merchant. Before going out for lunch one day, he placed *Avrohom* in charge of the store. Every person that came in while *Avrohom* was there was ridiculed and left the store having purchased nothing. One woman walked in with a plate of flour and asked *Avrohom* to offer it to the idols. In response, *Avrohom* picked up a mallet and destroyed all the

stone images in the shop. He placed the mallet in the hand of the largest idol. Terach returned to a grand mess, all his merchandise having been destroyed. He asked his son what happened, to which Avrohom responded that all the idols got into a brawl over a plate of flour and the destruction was a result of the fight. Terach looked at Avrohom in amazement. "They are stone – they cannot fight each other", he replied. Avrohom asked his father why he devoted himself to something this fake, this ridiculous. Totally exasperated with his son, Terach turned Avrohom over to Nimrod for judgment. Nimrod said to Avrohom if one should not bow down to stone, then let's bow to fire. Avrohom replied that fire is extinguished by water so let's bow to water. Nimrod agreed, let's bow to water. Avrohom said in that case they should bow to the clouds that collect and carry the water. When Nimrod said ok to that, Avrohom said they should bow to the winds which scatter the clouds. When Nimrod agreed, Avrohom again claimed they should bow down to a man since man can retain the air, despite his bodily openings. Nimrod realized he was being played and concluded Avrohom would be thrown into a fire blazing furnace. If his G-d was real, He will save him.

Over seven hundred thousand people came to witness this event. Avrohom was fifty-two years old and known throughout the world for his belief in a single, benevolent Deity. It was the moment. His hands and feet were bound, and he was cast into the fire. The only thing that burned were the ropes securing Avrohom Avinu. What hundreds of thousands of people witnessed over a three-day period was *our Father* enjoying fruit from an orchard the furnace had been transformed into by Hashem Yisborach. After the three-day period, Nimrod had seen enough. Having been made the fool, he ordered Avrohom removed from the furnace – a process that cost many of his men serious pain and even death. Nimrod asked Horon, Avrohom's brother, whose side he was on. When Horon declared that he stood with Avrohom, he was cast into the furnace and burned to death. That's how Avrohom ended up caring for Horon's son, Lot.

There are many questions we can ask on this event. This was not Horon's first exposure to the monotheistic philosophy of his brother. He believed in Hashem, albeit not at the level Avrohom had achieved. If he was a believer, a follower of his brother, why did Hashem not spare him? Secondly, how do we understand the response, or lack of one from the huge audience that witnessed this spectacle? Logic dictates they should have killed Nimrod and made Avrohom king. What were the consequences of them ignoring a miraculous event of this magnitude and continuing in a lifestyle that spits at the reality of Hashem's Existence? How are we to understand them ignoring the merit of witnessing Hashem's power first-hand as He saved Avrohom, and their continued involvement in idol worship as if nothing happened? Lastly, the parasha ends with Terach taking his family and heading for the land of Canaan. They get as far as Choron. Logic dictates that if anyone was going to take the lead in relocating the family, it should have been Avrohom, since he was the one who was cast into the furnace. If we look at these events from Terach's perspective, what we are left with is a man going through an

existential crisis and in an emotional state of mind bordering insanity. Turning Avrohom over to Nimrod cost him his son Horon and almost brought an end to the one person whose representation regarding the truth of Hashem's existence was proven correct. Terach was in no state of mind to take anyone anywhere!! How do we understand the Torah expressing that Terach rather than Avrohom took the lead?

The reason Avrohom lived through this event is because Avrohom was fully prepared to sanctify Hashem's Holy Name and die by fire rather than give into Nimrod. What those in attendance would think was not near as important as remaining true to his relationship with his Heavenly Father. Horon, as a student of Avrohom's had a firm belief in Hashem. He felt he was worthy of believing that a miracle would occur on his behalf and he would be saved. Horon learned the lesson that we don't rely on miracles the hard way – at the expense of his own life. The reason for this is because doing so infers that we understand the heavenly based system of who is worthy and who is not, who is going to live and who is destined to die during times of great crisis. The rules of nature and when exceptions can be made are authored exclusively by Hashem and not comprehended by anyone other than Hashem Yisborach. This is His domain, not ours, and relying on an exception which is outside of our domain may be compared to the additional incense brought by Nadav and Avihu, an event that may have come with the best of intentions but cost them their lives because the incense was not commanded. Which korbanot were to be brought during the dedication of the Mishkan were under the exclusive authorship of Hashem. The highest levels of belief and the best of intentions cannot justify changing the domain of authorship, be it the relationship between nature and miracles or how we are to worship Hashem within the realm of sacrifices.

What happened to the spectators that walked away from this unchanged? Why did they remain idol worshippers? There are three parts to the answer, two of which will be addressed here and the third which will be shared in two weeks. Many today think that the people of Avrohom's era were, from an intelligence perspective, one step above cavemen. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, our level of "knowledge" is miniscule compared to theirs. We may understand physics. They understood metaphysics! What do I mean? As per Rov Kessin, the history of mankind is divided into two periods: The age of direct access which lasted from Adam & Chava until the Babylonian exile and the end of prophecy, followed by the age of indirect access which formally began with Persia and Greece and has not yet come to an end. Direct access means the people of that era were able to harness the spiritual powers of the heavens to do their bidding. The stone idols were like radio receivers upon which the heavenly powers were planted, after which they were able to enjoy the spiritual powers they harnessed. All this magic, this kishuf was authored by Hashem and controlled by Him. We don't understand how any of this was achieved, but we do know

that it was intoxicating, as per the Gemara in Sanhedrin (102b). In a dream, Rav Ashi meets the idol worshipping King Menashe and asks him how he can be involved in such behavior. King Menashe responded, "Had you been there, (had you lived during those times), you would have lifted the bottom of your garment and run after me". This is the reason that when Moshe transforms the water of Egypt into blood, Paroh is not impressed. His magicians could do the same and more. It all came down to how mankind interacted with spirituality. Did they find their way to Hashem directly, (via the "Force"), or did they engage the dark side? Was it about Avodat Hashem or about their power and what they wanted?

Seven-hundred thousand plus people were treated – free of charge – to a glimpse of Hashem's reality and the miracle earned by Hashem's paradigm servant of that era, Avrohom Avinu. They were not moved to alter their lives, to acknowledge the truth. (The concepts of Chesed, Din & Rachamim are realities that were authored by Hashem Yisborach. Throughout our Holy Writings they either take on a personality of their own, or angels represent what each Midda stands for. Hashem's desire to answer to them represents how important they are in the continued existence of mankind and our world.) The Middat HaDin in the form of the Satan comes before Hashem, and he is angry for good reason. He demands justice for the response of the people of Ur Chasdim, representing how far mankind had descended. The Satan provides Hashem with enough evidence to call for the total destruction of the world. Although Hashem acknowledges that the Satan is just in his demand, He has one problem; mankind are Hashem's children, and He loves them. The Satan pushes hard, demanding that Din be exercised. There is not enough merit in those seven hundred thousand plus spectators, nor in the rest of the world to justify the continued existence of our world even via Rachamim. Satan to Hashem: "Push the destruct button." The very existence of the world is on the line, and this time, no ark carrying the life of the world will be built to continue after that destruct button is pushed. Hashem acknowledges that the Satan is correct and, in the place of Rachamim, makes a deal with him. You will have to wait two weeks for the rest of this to unfold.

Let's conclude by understanding the post-kivshan Terach more clearly. As expressed above, no one should presume that Terach left this three-day event unscathed. He had to deal with the death of his son Haran, and two facts regarding Avrohom: First, what became abundantly clear was that everything Avrohom stood for was Emet. Secondly, Terach was responsible for coming within a hair's breadth of causing our world to lose this Emet. Our Messorah tells us that Terach did Teshuva. This event had to be the launching point that altered his life forever. When the Torah tells us that Terach took his family and left Ur Chasdim, we are being told much more than what is being conveyed. This thought is expressed by HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, ZT'L. The motivation to move the entire family started with Avrohom. Nonetheless, it was Avrohom who insisted that his father take the lead. The message Avrohom was conveying to his

broken father was that their relationship was totally intact, and the love and honor due to him never changed. Menchlechkite trumps everything!! Avrohom encouraged his father to stand tall and lead the family. He would never allow his father to walk behind him, physically or emotionally. He was the family leader before the kivshan ha'aish and Avrohom insisted he retain that honorable position following the event.

The lesson this understanding leaves us with is truly the story of our people. The tapestry that makes up our people, the Jewish nation, is as diverse as any tapestry the world has seen – as we continue to not just exist but thrive. With all our differences, there are certain ethical standards that have been a part of our people going back to Avrohom Avinu. (We call him "Avinu" for good reason!!) One of those is respecting our parents, and Avrohom established the 'standard of excellence' with which this should be accomplished throughout the ages. It behooves us to remember that what binds us together as one family and Hashem's children and chosen nation is much stronger than the challenges that threaten to divide us. Ahavat Yisroel is an attitude, a state of mind and the main ingredient needed to bring the Geulah we await. Had Avrohom taken the lead in relocating the family, all of us would have understood why. Understanding why he did not, the ethical message that became the fabric of our people, is far more important. When it comes to our people and especially our families, whatever legitimacy exists in maintaining our position and remaining divided is not as important or correct as finding reasons to reestablish and maintain peace. Sinat Cheenom destroyed the Bait HaMikdash. The attitude expressed herein has greater potential than any other attitude to bring the Geulah and the Binyan Bayit Shlishi. May all of us be zoche in the days to come to enjoy this long awaited moment – TOGETHER!