

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

OCTOBER 29, 2016 This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of in loving memory of R' Moshe Chaim Berkowitz z'l - the visionary for whom our Yeshiva is named. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

27 TISHREI

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

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PARSHAS BEREISHIS

Death Becomes Us

Hashem Elokim created man from the soil of the earth (Bereishis 2:7).

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Midrash (*Tanchuma, Pekudei*: 3) which explains that Hashem gathered soil from all four corners of the earth to create man so that, regardless of where a person should die, the earth would absorb him in burial.

This is a highly perplexing statement. Ostensibly, one of the functions of the earth is to absorb any organic matter that is buried in it. Any living thing – an animal, bird, or fish – that dies and is buried in the earth will decompose and be absorbed by the soil. How can the Midrash assert that man had to be formed specifically from earth from all over the world in order for the earth to absorb his body? Shouldn't the natural properties of the earth have made it inevitable that the body would be absorbed?

The Torah (*Bereishis* 3:19) tells us that the phenomenon of death came about as a result of Adam Harishon's sin. Because Adam violated the prohibition against eating from the *Eitz Hadaas*, Hashem decreed that he and all human beings in succeeding generations would ultimately die. How are we to understand this decree?

On the third day of creation Hashem commanded the earth to bring forth fruit trees (1:11). Rashi (ad loc) relates a remarkable event that took place on that day: Hashem decreed that the earth produce fruit trees with the unique aspect that the tree itself would taste like the fruit it was supposed to produce. But the earth, fascinatingly, refused. The earth produced trees that merely brought forth fruit, not trees that actually tasted like the

fruit. Rashi (ad loc) notes that the earth wasn't punished until Adam sinned – at which point it was cursed.

Hashem created a world that was supposed to have the illusion of being separate from Him. This was done to give man free will and the ability to make a choice; thus providing the ability to earn reward and the ultimate good Hashem wanted to bestow upon mankind. Therefore, man was created as a synthesis of the physical and the spiritual.

The physical component was the earth from which Adam was formed. In fact, the name Adam comes from *adamah* (earth). The spiritual component was, of course, the soul which Hashem blew into his nostrils. When Adam chose to violate the one commandment Hashem had given him, he was actually accessing the earth aspect of his makeup, the very same earth which had refused to heed Hashem's command regarding the fruit trees.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 90b) relates that Cleopatra asked Rabbi Meir if the dead will be wearing clothes when they are resurrected. Rabbi Meir responded by likening the resurrection of the dead to the growth of grain. A seed, he explained, is completely bare when it is placed in the earth, yet the stalk of grain that grows from it consists of many layers. Likewise, a righteous person will certainly rise from the ground fully clad.

By comparing the burial of the dead to the planting of a seed, Rabbi Meir teaches us that when the deceased are interred in the earth, it marks the beginning of a process of growth and rebirth, a process



that will reach its culmination at the time of the resurrection of the dead. The burial of a human being is not like the burial of any other living thing after its death; when a dog or a fish is buried the purpose is simply for the creature's body to decompose and be absorbed by the soil – for which any soil will suffice.

But for a human being the process of death and burial is the process of shedding the physicality and reconnecting it back to the earth from whence it came. With that in mind, we can understand Rashi's comment that Adam had to be made from earth from every part of the world. Burial is not a mere disposal of the body, an act of discarding the deceased. On the contrary, it is the beginning of a process of recreation. Indeed, the Hebrew word *kever* also has two meanings: It is the term for the grave, but it is also a word for the womb. The grave, like the womb, is a place where the body is developed and prepared for its future existence.

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Lights of Our Lives

And God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night and the stars (1:16).

Rashi (ad loc) relates the incident that caused the moon to become a "lesser light." The Gemara (*Chullin* 60b) explains how this came to be: Rabbi Shimon b. Pazzi pointed out a contradiction, one verse says: And God made the two great lights, and immediately the verse continues: The greater light [...] and the lesser light.

The moon said unto the Holy One, blessed be He, "Sovereign of the Universe! Is it possible for two kings to wear one crown?" He answered: "Go then and make yourself smaller." "Sovereign of the Universe!" cried the moon, "Because I have suggested that which is proper must I then make myself smaller?" He replied: "Go and you will rule by day and by night." "But what is the value of this?" cried the moon. "Of what use is a lamp in broad daylight?" He replied: "Go, Israel shall reckon by you the days and the years."

"But it is impossible," said the moon, "to do without the sun for the reckoning of the seasons, as it is written: And let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years." "Go, the righteous shall be named after you as we find, Jacob the Small, Samuel the Small, David the Small."

On seeing that it would not be consoled, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Bring an atonement for Me for making the moon smaller." This "atonement" is the sacrifice that is brought on Rosh Chodesh.

What exactly is going on here? If the moon had a valid complaint then why did Hashem actually create them equally? If the complaint wasn't valid, why does Hashem try so hard to placate the moon, leading up to Hashem asking Bnei Yisroel to bring a sacrifice for His "transgression"?

What the moon failed to recognize is that Hashem had created a perfect system of time, the sun would control days, weeks, and years, while the moon would control months and all the times of holidays. This wasn't "two kings sharing one crown." Hashem had created the perfect union, and the original intent was that the sun and moon would work in unison, much like a marriage. In a marriage there are different roles, each person with the responsibility for their part of the whole. Marriage isn't a partnership between two kings; it's a union of two individuals for the greater whole. The sun and moon were supposed to represent the ultimate man-woman relationship.

But the moon didn't see the union for what it was, the moon felt that it needed its own identity. To that Hashem responded that if you don't see the value of the unified whole then you have to take a smaller role because you are absolutely right - "two kings cannot share one crown." But the moon's reduced role was really a function of its refusal to become one with the sun.

Ultimately though, the moon gets the last laugh, so to speak. Much like in a marriage, when the woman feels wronged it doesn't make a difference if the husband is right or wrong; he's always wrong. That's why the Gemara ends as it does; when Hashem saw that the moon would not be consoled he asked Bnei Yisroel to bring a sacrifice as an atonement. This was a recognition (and lesson for mankind) that being right doesn't really matter. What really matters is recognizing another entity's pain and accepting responsibility for their feelings; and of course doing what it takes to rectify it.

Did You Know...

Chazal teach us that Hashem created the sun and the moon to rule the day and the night, and that originally they were both the same size. The moon then complained to Hashem that "two kings cannot share one crown" so Hashem ordered the moon to become smaller.

Just how small did the moon become? It is interesting to note that the sun is a relatively small star in our galaxy and categorized as a yellow dwarf star. Still, you can fit almost 1,300,000 Earths inside it. You can fit fifty moons into the Earth. This means that the moon is approximately .0024 the size of the sun. Quite a reduction indeed!

In Chazal the moon represents the Jewish people and the sun represents the nations of the world. An example of this is the Talmudic teaching (*Sukkah* 29a) that a solar eclipse is an evil sign for the nations of the world and a lunar eclipse augurs evil for the Jewish people. Perhaps this is why the Talmud (*Shavuot* 9a) states that Hashem asked the Jewish people to "atone for him" for commanding the moon to become smaller, by bringing a sacrifice on Rosh Chodesh which is the beginning of the lunar cycle. In addition, the first *mitzvah* given to the Jewish people is that of *Kiddush Hachodesh*, sanctifying the new moon.

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