INTRODUCTION TO PARASHAT HA-SHAVUA

In memory of Yakov Yehuda ben Pinchas Wallach
and Miriam Wallach bat Tzvi Donner

PARASHAT BEREISHIT

IN THE GARDEN

By Rabbi Yaakov Beasley

A. INTRODUCTION – THE STORY AND THE STRUCTURE

We begin our series on Introduction to *Parasha* 5769 with the story of the Garden of Eden and with an inquiry into the nature of man's first sin. In this series, we will approach each text looking to discover the structure that frames each passage, and we will investigate specific insights from Rabbinic thought and medieval commentators, both to learn what they say and to see how we can use their comments to understand an approach towards the text.

In trying to define the parameters of a particular Biblical passage, we find ourselves bereft of the traditional signs and cues that a modern reader takes for granted: headlines and subtitles, punctuation marks, and indentations (let alone the italics, underlines, fonts, etc. available on the word processor). The division of the text into chapters was completed by English bishop Stephen Langston only in the 13th century; these divisions were incorporated by scribes in Hebrew manuscripts by 1330. The verse divisions, predate the Mishna, but they do not appear in the text of a Torah scroll, (and they were not standardized until the text of Ben Asher in the 10th century).[1]

The only visual cue available to a reader are the breaks between large sections of the text, known as a *parshiot*. There were two forms of breaks, the *parasha petucha* (marked by the letter *peh* in *Chumashim*) and the *parasha setuma* (marked by the letter *samech*). The *parasha setuma* is comprised of a break of 9 letters in the written text, while the *parasha petucha* is a beak until the beginning of the next line. The Torah contains 290 *parashiot petuchot* and 379 *parashiot setumot*.

The story of the Garden of Eden begins with the new *parasha* in 2:4, which begins the second recounting of the creation story, and concludes with the end of Chapter 3 and the expulsion of humanity from the Garden of Eden.

The implications of the above are profound – to understand properly how Adam and Chava erred and the purpose of narrating this failure for eternity, we cannot limit our exploration to Chapter 3 and begin with the dialogue wherein the serpent successfully convinces Chava to eat from the tree. We must also attempt to include what occurs in Chapter 2, from the creation of the Garden and the rivers within it, the placing of man in the Garden and his charge, the naming of the animals, and the creation of woman.

What, then, is the structure of our story? Reading the story of the Garden from the beginning of Chapter 2, we can suggest the following structure:

A. CREATION OF MAN (2:4-2:17) – his placement in a garden where he has unlimited access to food, without effort, and access to the tree of life.
B. CREATION OF WOMAN (2:18-2:25) – she begins as an equal helpmate to Adam.
C. SERPENT (3:1-5) – able to walk and converse with man, attempts to convince the woman to sin.
D. SIN AND DISCOVERY (3:6-13) – the woman eats, man eats, *Hashem* confronts them and they shift the blame.
C'. SERPENT PUNISHED (3:14-15) – loses ability to walk and relationship with humanity destroyed.
B'. WOMAN PUNISHED (3:16) – her equal and happy relationship with man destroyed.
A'. MAN PUNISHED (3:17-24) – expelled from the garden, must work now for food, loses access to the tree of life.

Clearly, within this structure, Chapter 2 plays an important role in understanding the penalties that*Hashem* metes out to the participants. Each punishment reflects the reversal of the idyllic situation that previously existed. In unlocking the meaning of our narrative, we must play close attention to this structure.

B. CHAVA'S ERROR

In studying the above structure, the sin and its aftermath clearly serve at the center of the story. However, before we analyze the sin itself, we should investigate the first conversation between the serpent and the woman to understand what precisely was said that precipitated her downfall.

"Even has (if) God had said it, should you not eat from all the trees of the garden?" (3:1)

The Ohr Ha-Chayyim HaKadosh notes the cleverness in the serpent's words, suggesting that the prohibition was all-encompassing:

> It is the manner of a seducer to indulge in exaggerating the stringency of the prohibition, in order to persuade the victim that all efforts to resist temptation are useless … therefore, he might as well give up the struggle from the first, rather than try the impossible. (Commentary to 3:1, as paraphrased by Nechama Leibowitz)

The wording of the serpent's question is ambiguous. Is it as we have translated it, "Even has (if) God had said it, should you not eat…"- in derisive questioning; or did the serpent assume a posture of disinterested curiosity, "Is it true what I've heard that God has prohibited you from eating from eating of the garden's trees?"

However we translate the serpent's question, it is clear that his insinuations had their desired effect. We will investigate Chava's response, in contrast with God's original command.

CHAVA'S RESPONSE (3:2-3)	ORIGINAL COMMAND (2:16-17)
We can eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden. However, of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God said, "You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die."	And *Hashem* God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree in the garden you may eat freely. But of the tree of knowledge of good an evil, you shall not eat from it; for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die."

There are several glaring differences between the original command and Chava's recapitulation of them to the serpent. Rashi was the first commentator to note that Chava had extended the extent of the original prohibition from eating to even touching the tree, an error which, according to the Midrash, the snake utilized to implant doubt into her mind by pushing her into the tree. The original command does not locate the tree. Suddenly, it stands in the garden's center, as if it were the only tree that mattered. Its title, the Tree of Knowledge, has disappeared. Similarly, Chava softened the force of the prohibition from an absolute command and imperative to a statement.

Two other difference stand out s worthy of note. First, the consequence of transgression has changed. Benno Jacob comments that what originally constituted, in *Hashem*'s wording, a moral connection between sin and punishment, Chava transformed into a mere mechanical link of cause and effect. To this subtle but noteworthy change, the serpent immediately responded, "You shall not die" (3:4). In his commentary, *Ha'amek Davar*, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin explained the progression from the serpent's original statement to this bald-faced lie:

> Since Chava herself changed the wording from "In the day that you eat from the tree, you shall surely die" to "perhaps you will die," the serpent found an opportunity to introduce doubts into her mind and deny the truth of her statement. How is it possible for the Creator to have said "Perhaps" (an expression of doubt)? Surely the Creator knows, without any doubt, what will ensue? The serpent then used this as an argument to cast doubts on the serious of the Divine prohibition. Rather, [the serpent suggested that] God merely intended to frighten them and intimidate them, because He did not want them to eat from the tree. This is a standard method used by the seducer, to insinuate that the punishment threatened will never really happen.

From a pedagogic point of view, the *Meshekh Chokhma* noted the perhaps the most significant difference between the original command and Chava's retelling of it:

> The interpretation [of "And *Hashem* God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree in the garden you may eat freely.'"] is that it is a commandment, a requirement, to eat freely and enjoy from everything in the garden, as the Talmud states, "In the future, a person is required to give an accounting for every opportunity that they had to enjoy this world and refrained from it." (Talmud Yerushalmi, *Kiddushin* 4:12) … However, Adam did not convey to Chava this aspect of the commandment; but only the negative dimension, "But of the tree of

knowledge of good an evil, you shall not eat from it." Therefore, when she retold the command to the serpent, she only mentioned the prohibition. (Commentary to 2:16)

A quick review of Chava's words confirms the *Meshekh Chokhma*'s thesis. God's name is not mention in the first half of the verse – "We can eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden." Only when mentioning the prohibition does Chava mention God's name. By associating *Hashem*only with the negative and not the positive aspect, Adam sows the seeds for Chava's future rebellion.

C. SERPENTINE SPEECH – SLY OR SIMPLE TRUTHS

Looking carefully again at the serpent's speech, however, we discover that the tactics he uses penetrate precisely to what Chava understood and how she, and ultimately Adam, fail. If the serpent had simply stated "Rebel against *Hashem*," Chava would not have listened. Instead, the serpent craftily suggests that even if *Hashem* had prohibited eating from the Tree of Good and Evil, this was not *Hashem*'s true intention. Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains:

> *"Even has (if) God had said it, should you not eat from all the trees of the garden?"* The contrast to animals is the touchstone and the rock, by which and on which, the morality of man proves itself … it was animal wisdom which lured the first human beings from their duty, and today it is the same animal wisdom which serves as midwife to every sin … Animal are really creatures that "are like God, knowing good from evil." They have innate instinct, and this instinct is the Voice of God, God's will for them. Accordingly, what they do in accordance with this Divine Providence which rules within them … is good, and everything which this instinct keeps them back from doing is bad. Animals do no wrong; they have only their one nature that they are to follow.
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> Not so man. He is to decide for the good and eschew evil from his own free choice, and from the conscious of his duty; he is also to give his sensuous nature its due, but not from the allure of his senses, but out of a feeling of duty. Sensual enjoyment for him is to be a moral free-willed act; he is never to be an animal. For that purpose, he has sensuous and goodness both within him; that which is good and right must often oppose his sensuality. Bad and evil must often appear attractive and tempting to him, so that for the sake of his high godly calling he practices the good and eschews the evil with the free willed energy of his godly nature, in spite of his sensuality, and never yield to passion…
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> Animals have only to develop their sensual nature, and their intelligence is completely in the service of this nature. Man was not set in paradise on the earth to satisfy his sensual nature on the delights and food that it proffered. "To serve it and to guard it" – it was to the service of God and His world he was called there. This service was his mission, and for this service, the delights of the paradisiacal fruits were permitted to him. Animals … are there only for themselves. But Man is there for God and the World, and is joyfully to sacrifice his personal nature to this higher calling.
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> The wisdom of the animal world approached him in its cleverest representative, the serpent. To an animal, even the wisest, it is incomprehensible how anybody could pass over the most beautiful, most alluring, and enjoyable food … "Is not the urge within in (to partake) also the Voice of God? If eating is bad for you, why

did He give the food the appeal to you, and you the urge to eat it? … Is not this voice His earlier, clearer Voice?" (Commentary of Rabbi Hirsch to 3:1)

To Rabbi Hirsch, the theme of this story is the question of man and animals – what is the difference? The gift of free choice and moral reasoning occurs precisely when we confront that side of ourselves that is most animal-like – the side that desires, craves, and follows our urges and impulses. We sense our attraction, and tell ourselves that this to is from God. Surely God did not implant within us something wrong? The ability to forgo those desires, implanted by God, in order to follow and obey the explicit word and command of God is what differentiates man from animals; according to Rabbi Hirsch, this is the fundamental question, theme, and lesson of the Garden of Eden.

We recognize this theme throughout the chapter. Upon eating, man and woman recognize their animal instinct for the first time – they are naked, and they are ashamed. While fig leaves can cover intimate body parts temporarily, they cannot erase the sense of shame and failure Adam and Chava felt. Confronted with their actions, like fearful, cornered animals, they attempt to avoid pain and punishment by shifting the blame upon another. Within the punishments, we see the serpent lose precisely those characteristics, upright walk, speech, and the enjoyment of the senses, which had made it human-like. From now on, people will more easily note the difference between animal and human. We can interpret the punishments given to man and woman similarly – no other animals suffers from such a painful birthing process, and no animal is forced to labor in activities that carry little guarantee of success in order to eat.

D. BETWEEN HUMANS AND ANIMALS

Returning to our beginning, we can reread the whole of the *parasha*, from the beginning of Chapter 2, and understand how prevalent this theme, the difference between man and animals, is throughout the story. The Torah already highlighted this distinction in chapter 2. From the beginning, we sense that man is separate from the animals that also inhabit the garden.

The Torah begins with a description of the four tributaries that flow from the garden. Unexpectedly, we find these lands described by their natural resources: "And the gold of that land was good; there are the bdellium and the onyx stone" (2:11). Precious stones and metals are not mentioned in the first chapter, where the creation of man is part of the creation of the entire natural kingdom. Suddenly, the Torah emphasizes those resources that animals would find useless; only man assigns value to what are ultimately shiny rocks and stones.

The process of differentiating man from the animal kingdom continues when *Hashem* creates woman. Between *Hashem*'s statement in verse 18 that "it is not good that Man is alone, I will create a help-mate for him" and the actual creation of woman in verses 20-22, we find a strange interlude:

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof.

> And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help-mate for him.

The act of naming and categorizing reflects a level of contemplation and separation of the namer from the object being named, if not a level of superiority. The Midrashic literature is rich with interpretation regarding this interlude. Rashi chooses the interpretation that connects the act of naming with the creation of woman:

> When He [*Hashem*] brought them [the animals before Adam], He brought before him of every species male and female. He [Adam] said, "For each one there is a mate, but for me there is no mate." Immediately, 'He caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man' (v. 21).

Clearly, the Torah contrasts man's relationship with woman with those of the animals. They mate naturally, as part of a biological process. The supernatural creation of man's mate demonstrate that even this relationship, potentially the most 'animal-like' of all of man's behaviors, is on a qualitatively different level. If in Chapter 1, mankind was part of the animal kingdom, in Chapter 2, mankind is commanded to recognize what distinguishes him from the animals around him, as well as the animal in him. This, ultimately, is the test of the Garden and of humanity in our attempts to return to that Garden.

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[1] Further discussions of the standardization of the text and its marker can be found in Emmanuel Tov's *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible,* 50-52.