

INTRODUCTION TO PARASHAT HASHAVUA

Parashat Bereishit

BETWEEN SIN AND PUNISHMENT

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As we begin our series of Introduction to Parasha series once again at Parashat Bereishit, we note the sense of optimism and order that begins the Torah's account of creation. Everything occurs in an orderly fashion, everything is evaluated by Hashem and found to be good. When, before the first Shabbat, Hashem takes one last look at His endeavors, He is pleased enough to pronounce the result as "very good."^[1] However, though the second chapter begins promisingly, the reader senses that the impending collapse of the Edenic world created, and by the time that Chava takes the bite from the Tree of Knowledge, a cycle of sin and punishment has begun that will culminate in the eventual destruction of the entire world and all of Hashem's handiwork by the end of the chapter. This week, however, we shall interrupt the cycle of sin and punishment that the Torah portrays so that we appreciate the subtle wisdom it conveys regarding the effects of sin. We shall study the following verses:

6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. 7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves girdles. 8 And they heard the voice of Hashem God walking in the garden toward the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Hashem God amongst the trees of the garden. 9 And Hashem God called unto the man, and said unto him: 'Where art thou?' 10 And he said: 'I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' 11 And He said: 'Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?' 12 And the man said: 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.' 13 And Hashem God said unto the woman: 'What is this thou hast done?' And the woman said: 'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.'

Between sin and punishment, we notice the space between when the first people sin and when Hashem confronts Adam and Chava with their actions. The Torah allows us a glimpse at both their immediate reactions upon realizing their error, and Hashem's gentle approach towards the ashamed couple. The Midrash captures the realization that encompassed Adam and Chava at that fateful moment:

Shir Hashirim Rabba 3:5: Before Adam sinned **he was given** fear and the creatures feared him; once he sinned fear **was put on him**, and he is afraid of others. Rabbi said thus: Before Adam sinned he heard God's words, while standing on his feet, and was not afraid. After he sinned he was afraid when he heard God's voice and hid, as it is stated (Bereishit 3:10), "I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid."

Before his failure, man was confident, unafraid, and possibly overconfident in his ways. Afterwards, we sense his losses; a loss of self-confidence, loss of courage, loss of respect.[2] More than any external factor, sin itself becomes the punishment. The power of sin to cause man to degenerate, to lower him and his sense of self from previously held pedestals is a major theme in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's lectures on repentance:

However, sin also has a polluting quality. The Jewish view recognizes a state of "impurity of sin" (*tum'at ha-chet*). The entire Bible abounds in references to this idea of self-pollution, contamination, rolling about in the mire of sin. This impurity makes its mark on the sinner's personality. Sin, as it were, removes the divine halo from man's head, impairing his spiritual integrity. In addition to the frequent appearance of this idea in Scriptures and in the homiletical teachings of the Aggadah, we also find many concrete references to the "impurity of sin" in the halakha (Jewish Law) ...The moment a person sins he lessens his own worth, brings himself down, and becomes spiritually defective, thus forgoing his former status. Sin deprives man of his natural privileges and unique human attributes. He is subjected to a complete transformation as his original personality departs and another one replaces it. This is not a form of punishment, or a fine, and is not imposed in a spirit of anger, wrath, or vindictiveness. It is a "metaphysical" corruption of the human personality, of the divine image of man. (from "On Repentance")[3]

With man in this lowered state, they become aware for the first time of Hashem's Presence: "And they heard the sound of Hashem God walking (*mit'halekh*) in the garden in the breeze of the day." Owing to the problem of personification of Divine behavior, the commentators wonder as to how either Hashem or His voice could be portrayed as walking:

Rashi Bereishit 3:8: ... they heard Hashem's voice walking in the garden.

Rambam, Moreh Nevukhim I, 24: The term "halakh" is likewise one of the words which denote movements performed by living beings, as in, "And Jacob went (halakh) on his way" (Bereishit 32:2) and in many other instances. The verb "to go" was next employed in describing movements of objects less solid than the bodies of living beings, cf. "And the waters were going on (halokh) decreasing" (Bereishit 8:5); And the fire went along (vatihalakh) upon the ground" (Ex.9:23). Then it was employed to express the spreading and manifestation of something incorporeal, e.g., "The voice thereof shall go like a serpent" (Jer.46:22) [comparing Egypt to a serpent for hurting and killing (J.Kapach)]; again, "The voice of Hashem walking in the garden" (Bereishit 3:8). It is the "voice" that is stated to be walking (mit'halekh).

The Radak v.8. And they heard: According to some, Adam, while walking in the garden, heard Hashem's voice. "They heard" ought to be followed by mit'halkhim (walking in the plural). However, mit'halekh refers to Hashem's voice to which (voice) "walking" applies (e.g., "The voice thereof shall go like a serpent" (Jer. 46:22)).

Ramban: Bereishit 3:8: (After citing the Midrash and the Guide for the Perplexed): In my opinion "walking" (mit'halekh) in the Garden of Eden" has the same meaning as "Vehit'halakhti and I will walk among you" (Lev. 26:12) *, "And Hashem went (vayelekh) [His way] as soon as He had left speaking to Abraham" (Bereishit 18:33), "I will go and return to my place" (Hoshea 5:15), all of which refer either to the place of the Revelation of the Shekhina (Divine Presence) or to its departure from the place where it appeared. "In the breeze of the day": The Revelation of the Shekhina is accompanied by a great and strong wind, as in, "And, behold, Hashem passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke the rocks in pieces before Hashem " (1 Melakhim 19:11), or, "He soared on the wings of the wind" (Tehillim 18:11), or "Then Hashem answered Iyov out of the storm wind" (Iyov 38:1). Hence it is stated here that they heard the voice of Hashem, i.e., the Shekhina had revealed itself in the Garden as it approached in the breeze of the day, since a wind blew it - in the Garden, an ordinary wind, not a great and strong one in a vision as in other prophecies, lest they be frightened.

According to the Radak and the Rambam, it is Hashem's voice that was walking while Rashi and the Ramban understand that "mithalekh" referred to the Divine Presence. According to the

Ramban, this was the appearance of the Shekhina in the Garden. However, the Midrash brings an alternative approach in the name of R. Abba bar Kahana:

“And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the breeze of the day”:
R. Chalfon said: We have heard about the walking of the voice, as it is stated, “And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden” and likewise of fire, as it is stated, (Ex. 9:23), “And the fire ran down upon the ground. Said R. Abba bar Kahana, It does not say mehalekh (intensive present form) but mit'halekh - skips and rises - the Shekhina (Divine Presence) was mainly below (see Guide), but when Adam sinned the Shekhina moved to the first Heaven, when Cain sinned it moved to the second Heaven, the generation of Enosh, to the third, the generation of the Great Flood, to the fourth...”

R. Abba bar Kahana interprets “*mit'halekh*” as departing. Sin causes the Presence of Hashem to leave – or in other terms, to be less perceptible to human awareness. This becomes the greatest consequence of sin, as explained by R. S. R. Hirsch:

Our Sages comment: “The *Shekhina* (Divine Presence) dwells mainly on earth” (Bereishit Rabba 19:13). At first the Lord wished to let His *Shekhina* rest **on earth**. We are used to thinking that God’s proximity to the Prophets is an exceptional state. Hence many doubt and deny the possibility of prophecy. The opposite is the view of our Rabbis: The mission of the Prophets, God’s revelation to the Patriarchs, Moses and Israel, are not exceptions. The opposite is true: The distancing of God from man - six thousand years - represents the unnatural state, since “The *Shekhina* (Divine Presence) dwells **mainly** on earth.”

We learn this from the Garden of Eden: Not in the World to Come, but **in this world** can peace dwell with man - peace in his heart, peace with nature around him, peace with his God above, peace and harmony with the world and its fullness. Nature - the blooming garden, animals of the field at his feet, and even the creatures creeping in the dust are his friends. And in the midst of all this stands man, in God’s image and upright. He lifts himself up toward his God, and God is near to him, talks with him, teaches and directs him. However, all this only if man, in all his splendor, submits to his God from Whom he will hear “what is good and what is bad.” However, man’s crown will be removed from him if he “seeks his teachings from the animal and wishes to emulate it.”

To open again the gates of the Garden of Eden, to **bring back** peace to earth, peace from animal to man, to turn the *Shekhina* back to earth - this is the purpose of the Torah and its reward, that is written on every page of the Holy Writings. It is important to learn this from the beginnings of man’s history. If afterwards we read about the mission of the Prophets or the ideal state in which all the

people of God are prophets - let us not regard all these as supernatural situations, let us rather see them as they really used to be: **The return of the world to its original state** - a momentary return through the power of the Torah.

Let us hope that the beginning of the new year, as symbolized by our beginning a new reading of the Torah, brings with it a greater appreciation and ability to perceive Hashem, with no barriers between us.

Shabbat Shalom

[1] For further reading on the significance of the phrase “very good,” we suggest the article “And God Saw that it was Good” by Rabbi Chanoch Waxman at <http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.62/01bereish.htm>, and “How Good is Very Good” by Rabbi Yaakov Beasley at <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/intparsha68/01-68bereishit.htm>.

[2] The Midrash returns to this theme of sin as weakening man in several places:

On [Num.5:2](#): Put outside the camp everyone with tzara’at and everyone that has an issue.

Sifre Parashat Naso Paragraph 1: R.Yose the Galilean says: See how strong the force of the sin is; before they committed a sin there were none among them with tzara’at (“leprosy”) or an issue; after they sinned there were among them those with an issue and tzara’at!... R.Shimon ben Yochai says: See how strong the force of the sin is; what is stated about them (Sh.24:17) before they sinned? “And the sight of the Glory of Hashem was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel,” and they were not afraid and did not tremble; after they sinned, even the shining face of Moshe frightened them.

Midrash Rabba Bemidbar Section 11:3: Before David committed that sin, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” ([Tehillim 27:1](#)). After he sinned, it is stated (2 Sh.17:2), “And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed...”

[3] Excerpt from On Repentance available online

at http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Yom_Kippur/Themes_and_Theology/Repentance/Attitudes_Towards_Repentance/Cleansed_from_Sin.shtml.