

JewishTimes

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EDEN'S GARDEN

Amazing Discoveries

Abraham's
Trials

Is God
on Earth?

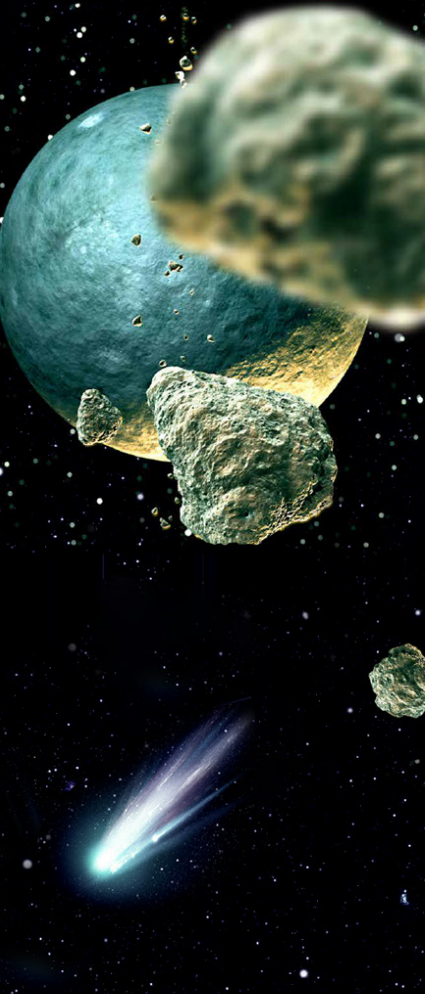
Sodom &
God's Justice

Abraham
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"One's mind is stronger than his emotions. One who fully comprehends what is harmful, can no longer hurt himself."

STUDENT PARAPHRASING RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Based on this, one must examine all his ways. Doing so, and following reality and truth, one will lead a joyful and beneficial existence.

PARSHA

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Trials of Avraham

This week's Parsha, Vayeira, continues with episodes from the life of our first Patriarch, Avraham. He was a man of great compassion who did not wish to see, even the wicked suffer. He believed in man's capacity to correct his flaws and do Teshuva.

Hashem told Avraham, that He was about to destroy Sedom and Amorah, because of the magnitude of their sinfulness. Avraham then "challenged" Hashem's decision, and prayerfully argued on behalf of the condemned cities. Hashem conceded to Avraham, that if ten Tzadikim (righteous people) could be found in Sedom, He would spare the city because of them.

Avraham "won" the argument but lost the engagement; because after all was said and done, the requisite number of righteous souls could not be

found. Still, it was extremely important for Avraham to delve into the deeper principles of Divine justice and make such a heroic effort to save nations from destruction.

The obliteration of Sedom and Amorah left the area a burnt out wasteland. As a result, people ceased to traverse that territory and there was no longer any passersby for Avraham to host. This seemingly insignificant detail was very consequential in the life of Avraham. Avraham's life consisted of deep involvement in study, and the performance of loving-kindness and good deeds.

His goal was to wean people away from idol worship and to instruct them about the True G-d; and the appropriate way to worship Him. In line with this objective, he offered generous hospitality to passing strangers. This created an ideal setting, in which to

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communicate his unique teachings.

Therefore, when the scorched earth prevented people from coming, Avraham found himself “out of business”. So he pulled up stakes and moved on, with the intention of going to the Negev; and he wound up in the land of Gerar, which was ruled by the King Avimelech.

At that point—Avraham realized that once again—he had to be concerned about people, who would be attracted to Sarah’s great beauty; and believing that he was her husband, would scheme to get rid of him. So, he resorted once again to put out the subterfuge that Sarah was his sister.

The subsequent events were basically a replay of what had happened in Egypt with a few differences. Sarah’s great beauty was duly noted, and she was brought to Avimelech, who took her as a wife. But before he could touch her, Hashem smote him with plagues, and he was forced to return her to Avraham.

Once again, Divine Providence came to the rescue of our illustrious Forefather. But the question arises, why did Avraham subject himself and Sarah to such a great risk? In explaining to Avimelech—why he felt constrained to pretend that Sarah was his sister—he said, “For I thought there is no fear of G-d in this place and they will kill me because of my wife.”

Thus, we see that Avraham had ample reason to be afraid that lust for Sarah might cause someone to plot his demise. So, why would he choose to settle in Gerar, knowing about the danger that he faced? The circumstances with the descent to Egypt was a different story, as he was forced to go there because of the famine. But it seems that settling in Gerar was a voluntary choice. So, why would he go there and place himself and Sarah in harm’s way?

Perhaps the answer lies, in the reason why he uprooted himself from his previous habitation. It was because the passersby had ceased traveling through the area, and there were no people whom he could instruct in Torah. He was compelled to seek out another locale, which was suitable to calling out to the masses, and instructing them to renounce idols and embrace the true service of Hashem.

From that perspective, Gerar was the most appropriate location to setup a new home. That is not to say that it did not contain dangers to Avraham’s safety, but he was willing to take the risks in order to engage in his Avodat Hashem (Divine service).

Just as the physical famine forced Avraham to endure the dangers of Egypt, so too did the threat of a spiritual famine compel him to seek out a place which was amenable to his mission; to spread knowledge of G-d. He did what he had to do—took the measures he had to take—and placed his faith in Hashem; and he prevailed.

Shabbat Shalom ■



Sodom & God's Justice

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

How did Abraham know what God’s justice was, prior to God’s communication with him? As he had yet, no Torah or any communication with God, by what means did Abraham arrive at a true understanding of God’s will? God said, “Will I keep hidden from Abraham what I will do to Sodom?” Of what knowledge was Abraham bereft, which couldn’t acquire on his own, and what was it in God’s words, which introduced Abraham to new concepts?

Without the Torah, Abraham first posited that there is a Cause for all existences. The sciences, which relentlessly guide the spheres and all matter, were all too well organized, catering precisely to the world’s daily needs, that it should exist without a Designer. There is a God. One initial Cause. Monotheism.

Abraham saw man as part of creation. He concluded: man is not merely to live his life without self-guidance, drifting aimlessly with no purpose. The existence of man’s mark of distinction—his mind—taught Abraham that the Creator desired man to engage this very faculty. It was given only to man, and thus, it must be God’s will that the mind is to be used by man, above all other faculties. Therefore, Abraham thought into all matters. Essentially, Abraham thought, “How does this Creator desire I live my life?”

Abraham understood that the primary acknowledgement of man’s thinking must be his complete understanding and embrace of monotheism. To this end, Abraham debated with many individuals and proved through rational arguments that atheism, ditheism and idolatry are false.

Once Abraham understood the pursuit of wisdom as God’s wish for man, Abraham pondered many aspects of the world. They included natural law, philosophy, and laws of government. Abraham thought, “As God desires many men to populate the world, and all men have the goal of learning, all mankind must work together to ensure a safe haven geared towards that goal of obtaining wisdom. Therefore, moral codes must be followed, i.e., man must ensure another’s pursuit of the good.”

As Abraham proceeded to teach his neighbors, God desired that Abraham have the correct ideas. Abraham was able to understand a great amount on his own, but many ideas would go unrealized without Divine intervention.

This brings us to God’s statement, “Will I keep hidden from Abraham...” God therefore introduced some new idea to Abraham. But what was it? God spoke very few words. He said (Gen. 18:20):

“The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I (God) will go down and see if in accordance with their cry they do, and I will destroy them, or not, I will know.”

In these words alone was a new lesson to Abraham. (It is essential when learning to isolate wherein lays the answer.) Upon this prophecy, Abraham thought, “God knows whether they deserve to be destroyed, He knows all, so he knows their sin. However, God is saying that there are two possibilities here, destroying Sodom, or sparing them.”

God is “in” the Garden?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“...and she took of its fruit and ate, and also fed her husband with her and he ate. And the two of them, their eyes opened and they understood they were naked and they seamed fig leaves and made for themselves garments. And they heard the voice of God traveling in the garden at the wind of the day, and they hid, man and his wife, because of God was in the midst of the trees of the garden. And God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And man said, “I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid, for I am naked and so I hid.” And [God] said, “Who told you you are naked; have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat?” And the man said, “The woman you have given with me, she gave me from the tree and I ate.” And God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The snake caused me to err and I ate (Gen. 3:6-13).”

God then punished the snake, then the woman, and then man. However, my focus is on the verses above: what occurred prior to the punishments. After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve “heard God’s voice moving in the Garden” ...and they heard this “at the wind of the day (Gen. 3:8).” There are many questions...

1) Did they truly hear a voice? If so, what was God saying? The verse does not teach of any words or communication.

2) What is the significance of hearing God at “the wind of the day”?

3) Why repeat God was in the garden, but add “in the midst of the trees”?

4) Why is God’s voice only mentioned ‘after’ the sin?

5) God questions Eve after Adam blames her, and God then punishes the snake when Eve blames it. Why does God seem to accept Adam’s blame on Eve, then accept Eve’s blame on the snake?

6) Why do they both shift the blame?

7) God does tell Cain about his inner world, that he can rule over it. Why does God not warn Adam and Eve prior to their sin?

We first learn that subsequent to the sin, the man and the woman received new knowledge, taught by the words “their eyes were opened.” From the every commencement of

this Torah section, metaphor is employed, as “opened eyes” truly refers to knowledge, not to the moving of one’s eyelids. Thus, other metaphors may be included.

The “wind of the day” is literal, referring to the dimming of daylight, at dusk, when the winds pick up (Ibn Ezra, Gen. 3:8). But here is the lesson... During the transition of daylight to darkness, a contrast presents itself to man. This caused man to distinguish, and reflect on both parts of the day. He then reviewed his actions; man reflected on his disobedience. (Ibn Ezra says this means they repented; *ibid*) God was going to keep His word of punishment. Man recognized God would be “coming for him” in the garden. Man felt remorse, and this remorse shortly followed man’s sense of nakedness. Remorse is part of the newly-born faculty of morality granted to man once he sinned. This morality is intended to offer man a secondary system of abstention from sin. If reason alone would not stop man from sinning, hopefully a sense of right and wrong will. Subsequent to the sin, the man and the woman received a new awareness, a conscience, which they did not possess previously. This explains why they were ashamed of their nakedness.

As the day subsided, man reflected, and with his new conscience, he then sensed his error conveyed as “hearing a voice.” Voice does not refer only to words, but also to “understanding.” Similarly at Sinai, Maimon-

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ides teaches the Jews heard no words, only a voice or a sound, based on the verse “a voice of matters you heard (Deut. 4:12)”. So, in the garden, God was not speaking, as we see no message recorded. Nor can God be located anywhere; neither in heaven, on Earth, nor “in” the garden. Hearing a voice in the garden means that man understood he violated God, Who knows all man’s actions, as if He is “in the garden,” and Who will now exact punishment.

“And they hid, man and his wife, because of God was in the midst of the trees of the garden.”

Notice in the second half of that verse, God is viewed as amidst the “trees” of the garden, not simply “in the garden” as in the first half of the verse. “Amidst the trees of the garden” conveys that God is aware of his trees, including the forbidden tree which now is missing some of its fruits.

This teaches a fundamental lesson: until they sinned, man and woman were not contemplating that they stood before God at all times. God was not “in the garden” while they sinned. Sin requires a denial of God, or that He is watching. One cannot sin if he feels he is before God. This explains why man only contemplated God ‘after’ the sin. King Solomon teaches “at all times let your garments be white (Kohes 9:8).” The king means that one should abstain from sin (stained garments) at all times. And this, Pirkei Avos teaches is achieved if we recognize that God records all. But man and woman were able to deny God’s presence, just as anyone must do today when he or she sins.

More startling, is the Torah’s method of conveying man’s mindset subsequent to sin. It is described as “God going in the garden” – a phenomenon external to man. Similarly, both man and woman blame another party when God inquired of their sin. And even God initially follows suit, seeming to initially accept their blame by seeking a response from the accused party: man blamed woman, and God turns to her and inquires of her. The woman blames the snake, and God turns and addresses the snake. Man and woman are punished after this, but at first, God entertains their blame. These acts of blame are significant enough that God records them in His Torah. And again, God also records man subsequent to sin, as hearing “God going in the garden,” a literal phenomenon, instead of describing man’s remorse. This is compounded by God being “amidst the trees of the garden.” What is this lesson?

But even with his remorse, man does not yet repent until God calls out to him, “Where are you?” God allows man to believe he has successfully hid himself, just as God asked Cain where Abel is, and asked Bilam “Who are these men?” (The Rabbis teach God does this so as not to suddenly accuse man, which would be too stressful) And even when Adam replies, he does not confess his sin, but says he was hiding due to his nakedness. It is only after God inquires if he

did eat the forbidden fruit, that man confessed to the act, and even so, he still blames the woman.

In contrast to man and woman where God does not warn them prior to sinning, we find God does in fact warn Cain before he murders his brother (Gen. 4:6,7). Furthermore, God informs Cain that he can rule over his desire to sin. Here, there is an identification of the part of man that sins, as separate from man himself. Was Cain – and not his parents – warned due to his young age, or due to his greater self-awareness of his internal world (instincts), or was he perhaps different in human design than his parents? I can only speculate, but my speculation is in line with an idea I heard years back...

The answer to all these questions might found in the difference in design between the first man and woman, and all subsequent people...

The idea I heard years back was that until they sinned, the instinctual drive was not an internal part of their makeup. Before the sin, it was only when man saw his wife, that he was sexually aroused. Otherwise, he was too engaged in wisdom, that his imagination would not naturally flow towards his instincts without external stimuli, as our instincts work today. Today, our imagination is strong, and is attached to our instincts from youth, as God says, “For the inclination of man’s heart is evil from youth (Gen. 8:21).” This means there was a change from Adam and Eve, to all their descendants. Adam and Eve did not possess an internalized instinctual drive. This is difficult for us to imagine, since all we know is our own makeup; our feelings have always been part of us. It is hard to grasp what we would be like if we didn’t have internal urges and a strong imagination. Yet, this appears to be the state of man prior to sin.

This would explain why after the sin man viewed the “external world” as different, as “God moving in the garden”, and not viewing himself as different...that there were now some internal workings to blame. Adam did not yet recognize this new, internal part of his nature. This explains why he blamed the woman, why she blamed the snake, and why God accepted their blame. For they had not yet grasped the change in their psychological makeup. Therefore, they only recognized the external world, and felt justified to blame something else for their sin. This is significant, so God records their blame. God also momentarily accepted their blame as they were as of yet, not ready to appreciate their new makeup. However, Cain was born with the instincts, and could understand God’s warning to control his internal urges. This is why God warns Cain, but not his parents.

Whichever explanation one accepts, we must appreciate God’s inclusion of the details of this story, the many questions, and the significance of God recording the fact that man felt “God was in the garden.” The fact the Torah does not share any words of “God’s voice”, adds support that there was in fact no voice, but that this conveys a different idea, as we stated. ■





HAVE WE FOUND THE GARDEN OF EDEN?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

The High Holidays and Succos have flown by, and so did our attention to the most fundamental Torah books read during these precious days. I refer to Genesis and Koheles. What compounds our lack of attention to both books, are their many cryptic riddles. We feel more grounded studying stories of Abraham and Sarah. But as God included Genesis in His Torah, and King Solomon toiled over writing Koheles, both demand our attention.

There are many questions, which I will first outline. I will proceed to suggest how, in these questions, we detect direction to the answers. And then I will return to answer these questions.

Genesis contains many themes. The topics of my inquiry are limited to the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, the snake, man's sin, God's punishments, and God's plan which will emerge from understanding the elements just cited.

To commence, what was God's purpose in giving Adam and Eve a command? God specifically states that man can eat of "all" the trees of the Garden of Eden. But of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, man must not eat...the punishment being mortality. This teaches that Adam had complete permissiveness, barring one fruit tree. God permitted all vegetation to man, except one fruit. What was this precise plan? Also, why was the punishment that man would become mortal? God apparently offered Adam to choose between obeying God and retaining his immortality. Or, if he disobeyed through unrestrained physical gratification by eating of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, he would sacrifice his immortality.

Interesting...there are two accounts of Creation: the first account is the Six days and the second is man in the Garden of Eden. We notice that the prohibition on eating of the fruit is found in the second account of creation. How is this account different than the Six days of Creation recorded earlier? What new category of creation is God describing? There are other details, such as the river that exited Eden and became four "heads." Mirroring the beginning of Genesis, King Solomon too, in the beginning of Koheles also discusses "water flowing." Is King Solomon duplicating God's lessons outlined in Genesis?

God places man in the Garden of Eden twice; Gen. 2:8 and 2:15. Why this duplication? In the first instance (2:7,8) man is described as "dust from the Earth" and that God "blew into his nostrils a living soul, and man became a living being. And God planted a garden in the east of Eden and He placed there the man whom He formed"...a physical description. Whereas in the second placement of man in Eden, God omits any details of man's form. Why is God placing Adam in Eden two times? Maimonides briefly discusses this: "Another noteworthy saying is this: "And the Lord God took the man, i.e., raised him, and placed him in the Garden of Eden," i.e., He gave him rest. The words "He took him, He gave him" have no reference to position in space, but they indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence[1]."

The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge are not mentioned in Genesis 1:29, when God first describes the permitted trees of fruit; it is only here in this second account of Creation, and Adam's second placement (omitting a description Adam's physical form) that God prohibits the Tree of Knowledge. This is significant. "Eden" sounds similar to "Adam." Any hint here? And why are these two trees "in the center of Eden" (Gen. 2:9)? What are these two trees, and why must they both exist? God does not prohibit Adam from eating of the Tree of Life...until he ate of the Tree of Knowledge. Why? And if God is concerned man will eat from the Tree of Life, why cannot God simply destroy it? Why does God, instead, create the "cherubim and the flaming spinning sword to guard the path to Tree of Life"? What are these two entities? (CONT. ON PAGE 9)

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What was God's purpose in creating a snake, an animal "more cunning than all the other beasts of the field"? This creature caused the sin. Why was it necessary? And what precisely was Eve's sin? God tells us how exactly what Eve responds in her thoughts: "the tree was good to eat, it was visually desirable, the tree was enticing for understanding...(Gen. 1:6)" Where else in Genesis are we told of something being "good?" What is God sharing with us here?

Further, Maimonides teaches that it was not the snake, but its "rider" that enticed Eve[1]. What is this rider? Maimonides states this rider was Samael. In Hebrew, Samael means blind from seeing God (sama-el). Maimonides further states that just as Samael has a meaning, the Hebrew term for snake, "nachash" has a meaning. What is Maimonides' message?

Why does God record Adam's blame of Eve, and her blame of the snake? What is this lesson God sees so essential for us to learn?

What is meant by God's punishing the snake? And what is the justice in God's punishments to Adam and Eve?

Detecting the Clues

Let's focus on a few of our observations, and elucidate them.

1) Maimonides said the snake has a "rider"...but the Torah text does not mention any rider.

2) Maimonides calls this rider "Samael" and then says Samael and the instincts are the same being: "The serpent had a rider, the rider was as big as a camel, and it was the rider that enticed Eve: this rider was Samael." Samael is the name generally applied by our Sages to Satan. Thus they say in several places that Satan desired to entice Abraham to sin, and to abstain from binding Isaac, and he desired also to persuade Isaac not to obey his father. At the same time they also say, in reference to the same subject, viz., the Akedah ("the binding of Isaac"), that Samael came to Abraham and said to him, "What! hast thou, being an old man, lost thy senses?" etc. This shows that Samael and Satan are identical[1]."

3) God places man in the Garden twice. How can that be? And only the first placing refers to man in his physical form. What does this say about the second placing?

4) There are two accounts of creation, the second is introduced as, "These are the products of the heavens and earth...(Gen. 2:4)". This section goes on to explain the behaviors or laws of vegetation, and then discusses man...as if saying, man too is discussed in his own productions, or behaviors.

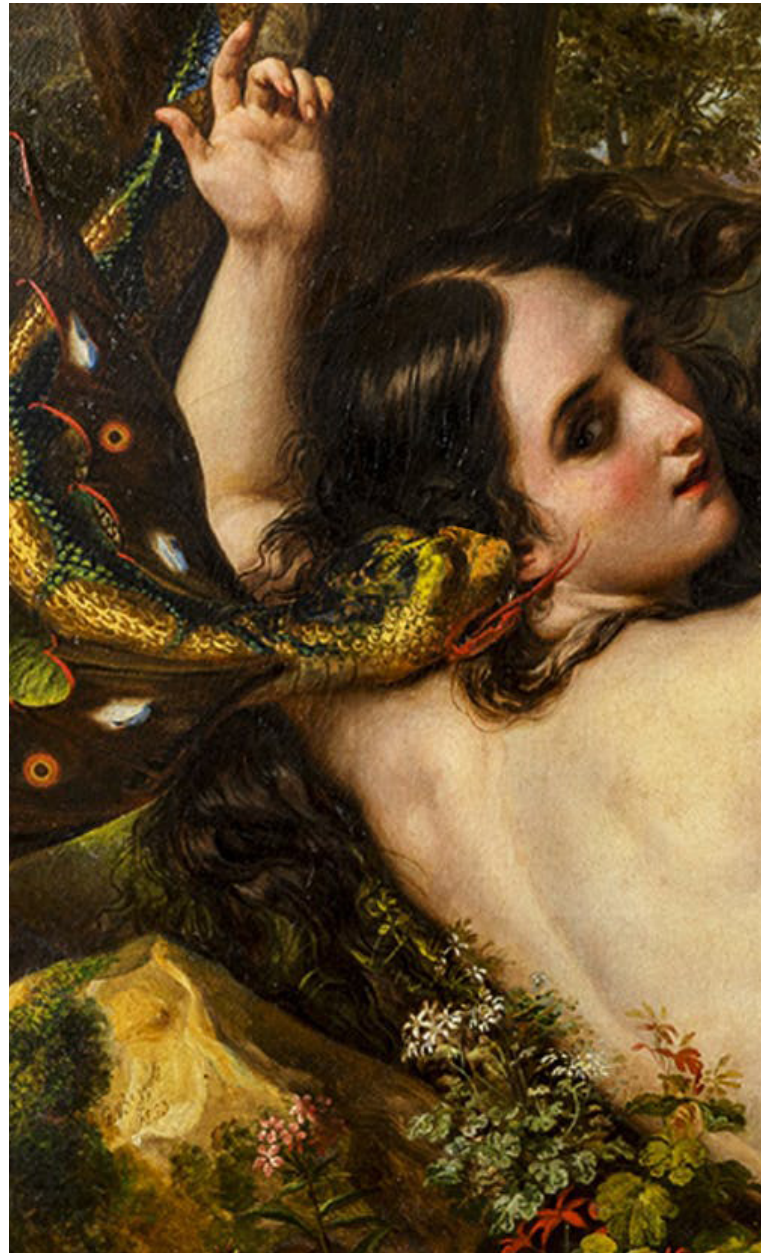
5) A river is described that flows out of Eden and divides into four "heads". Since when is a river called a head? One river called Pishon encompassed all of the land of Chavila, where there was "good" gold. Of what concern is this, and why state this here? After concluding the rivers, God places man a second time in Eden. As if to say, only now can we address man...but the man with no reference to his physical form. Which man is this?

6) There must be deeper meaning behind a literal spinning, flaming sword, and cherubim...and also why God didn't simply destroy the two trees.

Two Accounts of Creation

Creation had two parts: 1) creation of physical entities from nothingness, and 2) creation of their governing laws. When commencing Koheles, King Solomon says, "All the rivers go to the sea, but the sea is not full, to the place where the rivers go, there they return to go (1:7)." A wise Rabbi explained that the king was first educating us on how man's psyche works. Man has energies that "flow", but man is rarely satisfied, or "full." Man seeks accomplishments, novelty, happiness, success, and many other emotions. God and King Solomon commenced both books, Genesis and Koheles with lessons on human nature. For if we are to appreciate God's Torah guide to human life, and King Solomon's studies in happiness, we must first know the subject of these books, that being man's internal makeup. Only once we recognize our natures, can we appreciate the rest

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of His Torah and how each law benefits us. Torah is not to perfect our mortal bodies, but our immortal souls.

Just as God commenced the second account of Creation with a description of how plants behave, and in that same account refers to man, this suggests that God is describing man's behaviors as well. This theory finds support that man's sin is recorded, and also God's second placing of man, which does not make sense literally since man is already there in Eden. Furthermore, in the second account of man being "placed in Eden", God omits man's physical description. This leaves only Adam's non-physical components to somehow be termed as "placed." As Maimonides stated, "This has no reference to position in space, but indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence." So, this account is not discussing a location of man, but man's internal design. God does place the real, physical Adam in Eden, "And [God] blew into his nostrils a living soul, and man became a living being. And God planted a garden in the east of Eden and He placed there the man whom He formed (2:7,8)." But then in 2:15 God placed man in Eden again. Here, it is not the physical man put into a location, but God is placing man in a certain state of being, for no reference is made to man's physical form.

As a wise Rabbi said, "Man lives in his mind" or in his head. As is true in Koheles, the river in Genesis too indicates man's energies that flow toward various lifestyles, or "four heads". A primary drive is success. Man's energies first flow to Pishon, which encompassed a land called Chavila (when changed from *vav* to *vais*) means bundles. This land contained gold that was "good." But gold cannot be good, that is a moral value. Gold is either pure or impure. However, God is teaching that man's primary drive, what he values as "good", is wealth. Eve too said the tree was "good to eat". Man "encompasses" this bundling of wealth; he is quite attached to it. We are thereby taught that for man to pursue anything, he must value it as a "good." Eve too had to justify her violation, calling the fruit "good." We are also taught that bundling, or heaping up wealth, is a fundamental attraction of wealth. Thus, King Solomon teaches, "One who loves wealth will not be satisfied with wealth... (Koheles 5:9)." This is because the drive is not to attain a fixed amount; rather, it is the the process of "amassing", or "bundling" that one yearns for. We witness many wealthy people who cannot stop from piling up more and more, despite their inability to spend even a fraction of what they have attained.

Other people are driven by desires, to satiate their senses and fill their bellies. Gichone was the second river, and it means belly. It encompasses the land of Cush, and chush means the senses. The third river flows toward Ashur, and ashray means happiness. Other people long to simply be carefree and happy without conflicts; wealth and lusts are not their objective. They prefer instead a simplified euphoria. The energies of Adam flow towards many drives.

Eden: A Blueprint of Man The Sin and Punishment

It appears God wishes mankind to know why we were not initially created with a conscience. It was due to our inability to follow God's commands without it. Had God created Adam and Eve at the outset, including a conscience (the cause of man's shame of his nakedness) we would question its necessity. As God's wish for man is to engage our intellect – the one gift man possesses over all other creatures – we could engage our intellects and ponder the marvels of creation to a far greater degree, if not burdened with concerns for moral choices. We would declare it unjust to be burdened with this extra faculty. However, now that God recorded the account of man's sin, we appreciate that the conscience was actually a much needed gift. Adam was without a conscience; he viewed his nakedness as nothing different than a stone on the ground. It was simply a fact, with no moral value attached to it. He was initially enabled to have his mind 100% free to explore creation and uncover God's beautiful laws. He had no concerns about moral issues to cloud scientific inquiry. But God gave him one command. The command was so slight. He could enjoy literally all trees of the garden, except one. But Eve became fixated on satisfying her drives, instead of retaining immortal life in the Garden. Adam too succumbed to this desire. Both man and woman demonstrated their inability to abide by even the most minute limitation.

This is the lesson for mankind: man seeks unbridled gratification, even at the cost of his mortality. This is how powerful our instincts are. By gifting man and woman with a new faculty – the conscience – we now have one additional chance to abstain from sin. We now feel guilt, a new emotion. Adam and Eve hid once they ate, feeling ashamed of their nakedness. This shame can be applied to any wrongdoing, assisting us in refraining from self-destructive actions. So we appreciate that God initially created man without morality, which diverts our energies from worldly scientific study, towards internal conflicts. But this diversion was necessary, if we are to abstain from sin, and earn continued life.

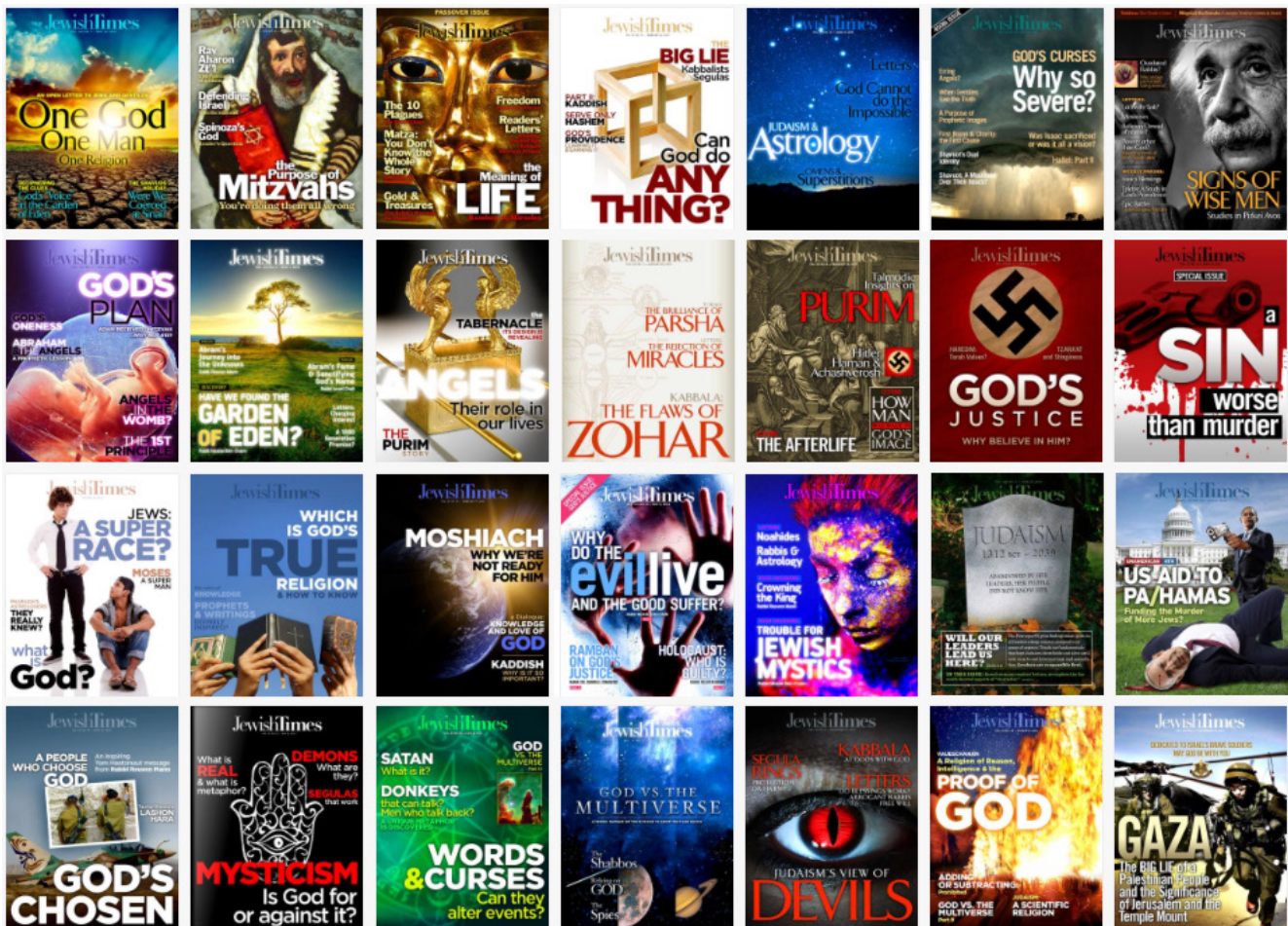
God also converted man from immortal, to mortal. Man's attachment to the physical gratifications was now severely curbed due to our recognition of our limited time on this planet. Mortality is the perfect response to a being seeking unlimited earthy gratification. We are thereby diverted somewhat back towards Adam's state prior to the sin: a being focusing less on gratification and more on God's wisdom.

God's plan was that man invest all his energies into pursuing wisdom as this will offer him the greatest satisfaction. To redirect man back to this lofty goal, God created the conscience, so as to slow us down before violating His will, and He also made us mortal, so we are less attached to this physical world. Coming to terms with our limited stay here, we are better equipped to focus on what is truly eternal, and that is God and His wisdom. The greatest good was

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not taken from Adam and Eve. They could have lived eternally in Eden, had they remained on the path of naming the animals and other pursuits of wisdom. But now as mortals, this eternal attachment to wisdom will occur only in the afterlife.

Regarding man's other punishments, man sought unbridled gratification, and therefore God cursed man with thorns and thistles, and farming his daily bread. Meaning, we would no longer find complete satisfaction when seeking physical gratification: food takes toil to attain, things rot, metal rusts, and we find aggravation in our daily tasks. Man is preoccupied with farming or work, and less energies are available to sin. All this is a blessing, to redirect our energies away from physical gratification, and towards the world of wisdom.

Eve dominated Adam in her act of causing his sin, and was therefore made subservient to man to a degree to correct this. She was made to be absorbed emotionally with birth pangs, difficult pregnancy and child rearing. This too disengages her from dominating man.

When confronted by God after they sinned, both man and woman shifted blame from themselves. Although a "great intellect"[2] Adam did not readily accept responsibility for his sin. Maimonides states there is meaning in the word "nachash", snake. Nichush is the same word and refers to superstition, a false imagined reality which man wrongly accepts as equal to what his senses detect. Eve created her own reality, despite the snake's deception. It was Eve, not the snake, that caused her sin: "the tree was good to eat, it was visually desirous, the tree was enticing for understanding...(Gen. 3:6)"

Her powerful emotions and imagination, termed by Maimonides as the "rider on the snake" are to blame. "Rider" means that there was something other than the snake that caused her sin. This something, was imagination. The snake deceives Eve, and Eve is blinded by her own fantasies, what Maimonides stated earlier is identical with Samael, that which "blinds one from God." Eve's imagination blinded her.

Now, as the snake was closely tied to Eve's sin, although a real creature, Sforno suggests it also embodies the working of the instincts. God curses the real snake, but simultaneously teaches us the modifications He now makes in man's instincts: the instincts will now "go on their belly and eat dust (Gen. 3:14)." Meaning, God slowed the movement of our instinctual drives and also made our attainment of our lusts as distasteful as eating dust. These two measures minimize gratification in the attainment of physical desires, helping us again to redirect our energies towards wisdom. But God curses the snake further, "Man will crush your head, and you will bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15)". This occurs literally, but there is an additional lesson as Maimonides states, "More remarkable still is the way in which the serpent is joined to Eve, or rather his seed to her seed; the head of the one touches the heel of the other. Eve defeats the serpent by crushing its head, whilst the serpent defeats her by wounding her heel [1]." Man defeats his instincts by crushing it at the "head" of the battle. Only if we thwart our emotional urges upon their very onset, do we succeed over them. But if we allow our emotions to swell, they eventually become too powerful to defeat, and the instincts defeats us in the "heel" of the battle.

Man still shifted the blame after the sin, and did not confess he caved to his instincts. God records both Adam and Eve shifting the blame, to teach us that they were less in touch with their internal words., despite God's efforts in creating a snake that they could use as a model of their instincts, to apply to themselves.

The Trees

Eden has two primary trees, I say primary, as God placed them in the "center" of the garden. Center denotes prominence. At the center of man's psyche is his feeling of immortality. It is this feeling of permanence that enables us the fortitude to progress in life. If death were a reality, we would live a morbid existence. King Solomon says "And also the world [God] planted in man's heart (Kohel 3:11)", meaning God saw it necessary that man feel a sense of immortality, as if eternity were planted in his heart. The Tree of Life is appropriately named. As man was immortal before his sin, he had no urge to eat of this Tree. It would do nothing for him. The tree alluded to what is in the core of man's psyche. Only once he was sentenced with mortality did this tree have any appeal, as God says, "So it is, man has become as one of us to know good and evil, and now perhaps he will send his hand and take the Tree of Life and eat and live forever (Gen.3:22)." Meaning, man sinned, and due to his sentence of mortality, man will deny this mortality. It was very disturbing, and so he yearned to recapture his immortality. God could not destroy the Tree of Life, as this would mean God is removing from man his vital sense of being, of enjoying life for a while. God did not want man to live a morbid existence, He desired man to retain some sense of permanence on Earth. The solution is that man retain some sense of immortality, but also guard him from investing too much of his energies into a temporal Earthly existence. This balance was struck by giving man some realization of his mortality, while also allowing him to feel a sense of youth. God created an unapproachable, spinning flaming sword and the childlike cherubim that guarded the path to the Tree of Life.

At his center, man possesses two faculties or counsels (etz). Man is essentially a moral being, and a mortal being. The Etz Hachaim and Etz Hadaas, the Trees of Life and Knowledge, are in the center of the Garden of Eden.

Summary

Man is complex. Our psyche contains energies that flow towards many lifestyles. We live without realizing our instinctual urges, to which we succumb after some time of conflict with them. Underlying all our imaginations and plans, are feelings of morality, immortality and a need to accomplish. Many of us ignore or even deny this internal world. Yet, we must know about it, confront it, and manage it, if we are to succeed and live based on reason, not our instincts. The Torah is our guide to navigate this course in life, informing us of values and actions our Creator deems most beneficial, and from what we must steer clear. Ultimately, we must choose between our drives and our intellects. We can.

The Garden of Eden is on earth. Yet, it embodied many lessons for understanding what type of creatures we are, providing us insight not available on the surface. ■

Footnotes

[1] The Guide, book II chap. XXX, p 217 Friedlander paperback

[2] Ibn Ezra describes man as a "chocham gadol" – a great intellect (Gen. 2:16)

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OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

MORE BELOW

Kindness: As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it. Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Eccl. 7-1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:17). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

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The Righteous Warrior

Rabbi Reuven Mann

A major portion of the Torah narratives are devoted to episodes in the lives of our Patriarchs. That is based on the principle of, *Maasei Avot Siman LaBanim* (the deeds of the fathers are a sign/guide to the children). Our forefathers experienced many of the challenges which the Jews were to confront throughout history and demonstrated the proper responses.

The objective of studying the lives of our role models is to discover the underlying principles which governed their behavior and apply them to our situation. A major aspect of Avraham's conduct was his inspired activism. He didn't sit back and wait for a miracle, but did everything possible to solve the problems, which came his way.

He even went so far as to undertake great risks for the sake of those close to him. His nephew Lot had settled in Sedom, because the area was rich in land suitable for grazing. But when that nation was conquered by the "Coalition of the Four Kings" Lot and his property was taken into captivity.

The news reached Avraham and he decided to embark on a rescue mission. He felt that he could not abandon his "brother"—who had left his birthplace behind—in order to join Avraham on his epic journey. Amazingly the initiative achieved total success. The midnight raid caught the enemy by complete surprise and all the captives and their property were freed.

But, in spite of his success, Avraham's behavior raises many questions. Did he not engage in recklessness? What chance did this elderly religious personality have of

defeating the mightiest military force on earth? And why would he subject the 318 youths who had been raised under his tutelage to what seems like a sure disaster?

It is important to remember that the validity of actions cannot be determined by their results. Just because Avraham was effective doesn't necessarily mean he was right. It seems like his victory was truly miraculous, yet our religion forbids us from relying on Divine intervention. So what chance could Avraham and his homegrown team of warriors have had, against the mighty Coalition?

I am of the opinion, that Avraham knew exactly what he was doing—and although, he took a great risk—it was a calculated one.

In describing the adventure the Pasuk says:

When Avram heard that his kinsman was captured, he armed his disciples who had been born in his house—three hundred and eighteen—and he pursued them as far as Dan. And he with his servants deployed against them at night and struck them; he pursued them as far as Chova which is north of Damascus. He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his kinsman, Lot, with his possessions, as well as the women and the people."

The basic elements of sophisticated modern warfare are hinted at here. Avraham led his trained men on a carefully calculated commando raid—which, while dangerous, had a reasonable chance of success.

He utilized the element of surprise as the victorious army was returning home from its great triumph; they had no reason to fear anyone and clearly had their guard down. Avraham employed speed, night fighting and the division of forces; and struck a quick blow which disabled and defeated his enemy.

Of course Avraham had Divine Providence on his side; but that is because he operated with superior Chachma and bravery. This is reminiscent of another great warrior who followed in our Patriarch's footsteps. As the Tanach says, "And David was wise in all of his ways and Hashem was with him." Nonetheless, how was it possible for the 318 men of his household to pull off such an operation?

I think it is fair to say that Avraham trained

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Abraham & the Angels

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

his students in the arts and tactics of self defense. He was quite aware that he lived in a dangerous world and that the religious doctrines he taught went against the prevailing idolatrous outlook. He clearly recognized his obligation to take measures for the protection of himself and his family. He therefore trained his 318 discipleship and formed them into an effective fighting force; to be prepared if a situation requiring their capabilities should arise. To strengthen his position he arranged for alliances with his neighbors, Aner, Eshkol and Mamrei. When news reached him about Lot, he calculated the dangers and determined that he had a good chance of pulling off a coup.

And this caused a widespread sensation, as news of Avraham's amazing exploit got out. On his return from the battle the king of Sedom came out to greet him. In addition the priest known as Malki-Tzedek of Shalem, who served the true G-d, brought out bread and wine and proclaimed:

Blessed is Avraham to the Supreme G-d, the Most High, Maker of Heaven and earth. And Blessed is the Supreme G-d Who delivered your foes into your hands.

Avraham's brave undertaking resulted in a great Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of Hashem). When the wicked triumph, the Name G-d is desecrated; but when the righteous fight back and prevail, His Name is glorified. The great leaders of the Jews, such as Avraham, Moshe, Yehoshua, King David and many others, were—in addition to their great spiritual qualities—great fighters as well.

In recent years Israel has found itself in a situation very much like that of Avraham. In 1976 Arab terrorists seized a French airliner carrying many Jews and landed it in Uganda. The terrorists threatened to execute the Jews, if their demands were not met. The Israeli government agonized over the matter, until its elite combat unit put together a rescue plan, which was deemed to have a favorable chance of succeeding. The raid on Entebbe achieved its goals, and liberated the prisoners to the acclaim of mankind. This type of courageous behavior emulates the heroic action of Avraham Avinu.

The need for Jewish self-defense has become extremely significant of late. There has been a marked increase of anti-Semitic violence around the world, which has rendered the security of Jews quite precarious. In response, some Jewish organizations have organized protests which are insufficient to really change things.

It is necessary to establish Jewish defense organizations—which will operate within the law—with wisdom and judiciousness, but will be ready to visit violence on aggressors in order to defend Jews.

The world needs to know, that the era of Jewish weakness—when the Jews couldn't or wouldn't fight back—is over. This is the time when Jews need to confront their enemies and fight back. This will increase the security and well-being of Jews everywhere, and sanctify the Name of Hashem in the world.

Shabbat Shalom ■

One must repeatedly revisit Torah portions to uncover God's numerous lessons. What catches our attention during our first few reads of a given area, often obscures other questions and insights. However, if we follow the halacha of reading each weekly portion twice yearly, and we are fortunate, new questions arise leading to new discoveries. I will address this account of Abraham and the angels, following God's words that all prophets excluding Moses received prophecy only while unconscious.[1]

Three angels visit Abraham. We read five times how fast Abraham "ran" and "hurried" to prepare a meal for these guests, described as men. What is God's intent in, 1) giving a vision to Abraham that highlights Abraham's kindness to people, and 2) repeating the haste in which Abraham served them? Since God ultimately discusses Sodom with Abraham, of what purpose is this vision of the three men?

Only one angel appears required for this vision, since only its news of Isaac's forthcoming birth was announced. The other two angels were silent the entire visit and could have initially "arrived"[2] at Sodom. The Rabbis teach that the other two angels had the respective missions of destroying Sodom and saving Lot. Thus, there was no need for them to accompany the angel assigned with the mission of the birth announcement. What then was the purpose of the two other angels visiting Abraham?

One angel asked Abraham, "Where is Sarah your wife?" We would assume this was intended to call her to share the news. But this did not occur. As Abraham responded, "She is in the tent", the angel then announced to Abraham alone the news of Isaac. Why then did the angel inquire of Sarah's whereabouts? It appears inconsequential. The Torah then tells us that Sarah "in fact" heard, as she was behind the angels. She denied her ability to become pregnant at ninety years old. God then ridicules Sarah addressing Abraham, "Is anything impossible for God?" As Abraham was alone in communion with God, what purpose was served by God including Sarah's words in this created vision? (Although this was Abraham's vision, God accurately depicts Sarah's true feelings, which no doubt, Abraham discussed with Sarah in his waking state subsequent to this prophecy. For she too would be instrumental in transmitting God's justice. Alternatively, Sarah might have very well participated in this prophecy; similar to when God gave a joint prophecy to Miriam, Aaron and Moses [Num. 12:4].)

This is followed by the angels "gazing at Sodom", but not yet leaving. Their departure is suddenly delayed, and interrupted by God's following consideration:

"Shall I keep hidden from Abraham what I plan to do? And Abraham will surely become a great, mighty nation, and all nations of the land will be blessed due to him. For he is beloved on account that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will guard the path of God, performing charity and justice, so that God will bring upon Abraham what He has spoken. And God said [to Abraham], 'The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I will descend and see if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me I will annihilate them; and if not, I know'(Gen. 18:17-21)."

Following God's words, we read in the very next verse (ibid. 18:22) that the angels departed for Sodom. Again, the angels gazing towards Sodom should be immediately followed by their leaving. What is the meaning behind God's words above interrupting the angels' departure? And what is God's message here?

Abraham's Concern for Man

Why the emphasis of Abraham "running" and "hurrying" the meal preparations? Abraham was experiencing a vision, and to him, he was relating to men, not angels, as the verses

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

state. Abraham had a keen sense of kindness, and wished to give honor to his fellow man. One can serve others, but if he runs to serve them, this expresses the height of honoring others, as we see regarding Rivka “running” to draw water for Eliezer’s camels (Gen. 24:20). One feels more appreciated when another person runs to assist them, and does not merely walk. Abraham desired to make the three men feel most appreciated. Abraham prized human dignity. Typically, a leader seeks honor. But the perfected leader views all others as equals, and even forgoes personal rights and feelings to accommodate others. But why was this part of the vision God created? How is this related to Abraham learning God’s justice?

Men such as Abraham, who are genuinely concerned for his fellow, and who teach others God’s ways of “charity and justice” (Gen. 18:19) will be the recipient of greater knowledge in this area. God therefore teaches Abraham not only His ways, but also, that man (Abraham) earns this knowledge due to his acts of kindness to his fellow. Thus, Abraham sees himself showing kindness to the three men, and this is followed by God’s dialogue on Sodom’s justice. God says in other words, “Abraham, due to your kindness, justice and concern for mankind, I am revealing greater knowledge with you on how My true kindness and justice operate.”

Angels

Angels are not omniscient; they are God’s metaphysical agents to perform events on Earth. As King David said, “He makes His angels winds; His ministers [He makes as] blazing flames (Psalms 104:4).” Each angel controls a particular sphere within natural law, and nothing outside that law. As Rashi taught, “...one angel does not perform two missions (Gen. 18:2).” We also read, “And the angel of God that went before the Jewish camp traveled, and it went behind them; and the pillar of cloud that went before them traveled and stood behind them (Exod. 14:19).” There is no redundancy. This verse teaches a fundamental: there are two entities: 1) the metaphysical angel, and 2) the physical entity (here, a cloud) over which God places the angel as a supervisor. God controls nature through an angel, charging the angel over a specific sphere of nature; here, the specific task of repositioning the cloud to protect the Jews from the approaching Egyptian army. Thus, angels themselves are not physical, but they control physical phenomena. This explains why this verse describes the angel traveling, and then again, the cloud traveling. We are taught that the angel controls the cloud. And angels only control the sphere of laws determined by God. Thus, the angel did not know where Sarah was and needed to ask, since this knowledge was outside its specific sphere of control. Yet, the angel somehow knew Sarah’s name. This I believe further proves that this story was a vision. For if it were a literal event and these three were men and not angels, they could not know Sarah’s name.

The angel did not intend to share the birth announcement with Sarah. It is my opinion that it was ascertaining that Sarah was not in earshot of this announcement. The angel’s inquiry “Where is Sarah your wife?” is understood as ensuring she did not hear the birth announcement. Why? I believe this teaches another lesson about God’s justice. For it was Abraham who taught monotheism and God’s justice to his children and mankind (Gen. 18:18). Therefore, the news of Isaac’s birth — the son who would continue Abraham’s legacy — related primarily to Abraham, and not Sarah.

The Vision

This entire vision dealt with God’s justice. Justice is not merely the destruction of evildoers. A primary aspect of God’s justice is educating man about His ways. Therefore, the two other angels, although silent the entire time, came along with the announcing angel to convey a relationship between all three angels. Isaac’s birth was vital to continue Abraham’s teachings, and the destruction of Sodom and Lote’s salvation comprise important lessons on God’s justice, the

very substance of Abraham’s teachings. Thus, all three angels’ missions related to Abraham, and therefore were all part of this vision.

The Interruption: God’s Dialogue with Abraham

God’s will is to teach man. The angels were about to leave to Sodom, but not quite yet. First, God shares with Abraham a clue to greater knowledge of God’s justice. This knowledge would have been “hidden” from mankind — “Hamichaseh ani may’Avraham?” (Gen. 18:17) — had God not suggested to Abraham that although exceedingly great in sin, Sodom might be spared if certain conditions were met. God knew there were not 10 righteous people, and therefore the angels proceeded to destroy Sodom, prior to Abraham’s dialogue with God. But the message of the angels not departing to Sodom until God commenced a dialogue with Abraham indicates that the angel’s mission of destruction played a great role in Abraham’s knowledge of God’s justice. So we can read the verses as follows: God is about to destroy Sodom (the angels gaze at Sodom) but God first shares knowledge of His justice before doing so. Once this dialogue ensues, the destruction can take place, and Abraham will attain greater knowledge. Again, God’s dialogue is inserted between the angels’ gaze towards Sodom and their departure for Sodom, conveying a relationship between Sodom’s destruction and Abraham learning God’s justice.

Sarah

What purpose did Sarah serve in this vision? The Torah makes it clear that Sarah viewed natural law as absolute, “After I have aged, will I truly give birth?” (Gen. 18:14) Thus, God’s response, “Is anything too wondrous for God?” (Gen. 18:14) The lesson to Abraham by God’s inclusion of this scenario within the vision is this: knowledge of God’s justice must include the idea that God’s justice is absolute. Nothing—not even nature—overrides God’s justice. This is expressed throughout Torah in the many miracles God performed to benefit righteous people. As God was teaching Abraham new insights into His justice, this lesson was of critical value.

Summary

God gives Abraham a vision intended to further educate him on His ways, and for him to teach his son Isaac and the world. But God only does so, since Abraham was perfected in his concern for man. Abraham is taught through the vision that this concern is what earned him new insights from God. The other two angels visiting Abraham, and the interruption of the angels’ departure by God’s dialogue, teaches that man’s knowledge of God’s justice is a primary purpose in His meting out of justice. Thus, the angels did not leave to destroy Sodom until Abraham was engaged in learning a new insight into God’s justice in this destruction. Abraham also learns that God’s justice is absolute, expressed in God’s rebuke of Sarah. ■

[1] “...If there will be prophets of God; in a vision to him I will make Myself known; in a dream I will speak to him. Not so is it with My servant Moses; in all My house he is trusted. Face to face I speak with him and in vision and not with riddles; and the form of God he beholds... (Num. 12:6-8)”

[2] I say “arrived”, but in no manner do I suggest that angels are an earthly phenomenon. Rather, as I elaborated within this essay, that the two other angels could have “addressed” God’s will for Sodom without connection with the announcing angel. (Similarly, the angels of God addressed God’s will that the pillar of cloud relocate behind the Jews. But angels are not on Earth; only the cloud is. See Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed, book II, end of chapter 6.)

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Abraham then responded:

“Will you wipe out these cities if there are 50 righteous souls there? It is mundane that You should kill a righteous person with a wicked, and the righteous will suffer the same as the wicked, the Judge of the entire world won’t do justice?!” God then responds, “If I find 50 righteous in the midst of the city, I will spare the entire place for their sake.”

What did Abraham ask, and what did God respond? Abraham made a few statements, but one was not a question. When Abraham said, “It is mundane that You should kill a righteous person with a wicked, and the righteous will suffer the same as the wicked, the Judge of the entire world won’t do justice?!” he was not asking, but rather, he was stating fact, “This is not how You work.” Abraham repeats the concept of justice in that passage, teaching us that he was only talking about justice. Abraham had no question on this: a righteous person should live, and a wicked person should die. Justice demands this; God won’t operate otherwise. What Abraham was asking on was “tzedaka”, charity, i.e., whether God would save even the wicked, if enough righteous people were present in the city. And this is precisely what God answered Abraham:

“If I find 50 righteous in the midst of the city, I will spare the entire place for their sake”.

The question is, from where did Abraham obtain this idea, that God would not only work with justice, but He would engage traits over and above pure justice, something we would call charity, or tzedaka?

Abraham realized this idea from God’s few words, “I (God) will go down and see if in accordance with their cry they do, and I will destroy them, or not...” God said there was an option: although God knew Sodom and Amora were sinful, and He knew the exact measure of their sin, nonetheless, there was an option regarding their fate. Abraham deduced from God’s words that there are criteria, other than the sinners’ own flaws, from which God determines the sinners’ fates. This is precisely what God intended Abraham to learn. This is not something a person can determine from observation or thought. And since Abraham was to be a “mighty nation,” to “teach his household to keep the ways of God” (Gen. 18:18-19), Abraham needed to be instructed in those ways. (We learn that God teaches man through engaging his mind, and not simply spelling out the idea. God made Abraham use his reasoning to learn the concept.)

Why will God spare even the wicked, provided righteous people are present? I believe it teaches us that God will tolerate the wicked,



provided there are proper influences with the potential to change the wicked. In such a case, the wicked are not doomed to a failed existence, not yet, provided a possible cure is close at hand. This teaches us the extent to which God endures sinners. “...do I desire the death of the wicked? Rather, in the repentance of the wicked and that he lives. Repent, repent from your evil ways, and why shall you die, house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11)

We also see earlier that God desires Abraham to know both charity and justice, (Gen. 18:19) “...and he will keep to God’s ways to do charity and justice.”

What is the difference between charity and justice, and why is charity so essential, that God made certain Abraham possessed this concept? Justice, we understand, is necessary for any society to operate. Deterrents must exist to prevent people from expressing their aggression and destroying society. Where does tzedaka come in? I believe tzedaka is necessary for the individual, as opposed to justice, which is for the society. If there is injustice, it must be corrected so a society may continue. But what if a person has endured a tortured existence, now facing penalties from a justice system, which treats him equal to all others, with no consideration for the unique side effects affecting him, resultant from pure, strict justice? Won’t this person have the potential to break at some point? He may even commit suicide. Without tzedaka, charity, one may feel that his specific situation is not recognized. Feelings of persecution and victimization may lead him to self-destruction.

It is man’s nature when things go bad, to close in on himself, feeling that a streak of misery is upon him. This feeling strips him from all hope. He eventually feels alienated from society at large which seems to be “doing fine,” and the “why me” attitude sets in. He begins a downward spiral. Without another person showing him pity, and a desire to assist, he may be doomed.

This is where I feel tzedaka plays a vital role in society. If we are to ensure the well being of society with the aforementioned goal of securing mankind’s haven for intellectual pursuits, we need to recognize and insure the presence of more than justice alone. We must also recognize that man needs individual attention in the form of sympathy, empathy, care, hospitality, generosity, and all other forms. The fortunate among us must also initiate such care, and not wait until the fallen person calls out, for it might be too late, and he never calls out, but ends matters drastically. For this reason, the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) teaches that giving tzedaka is not simply giving money. We are obligated to commiserate with the unfortunate soul. The uplifting of his countenance is the goal, and money is only one item through which we accomplish this goal. Maimonides states that the highest level of man is when he is concerned with his fellow man.

Man’s nature is that he needs to be recognized as an individual. Without this recognition, man feels no integrity, and will not move on with his life. Therefore, tzedaka is essential to a society’s laws. Justice and charity must go hand in hand. Justice serves the society, while charity addresses the individual. Both are essential. ■

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