

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Bereishis

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Zalman Leib *ben* Moshe *a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

The Way it was Supposed to Be...

If Adam had not been chased out of Gan Eden, the world would have looked a lot different than it does today. Not just in physical appearance; the entire order of man's existence would have taken on a different face.

And yet, there are some things that have not changed – as we shall soon see.

Not Your Conventional Landscaping

When Adam was first installed in Gan Eden, the world showed great promise. Creation had reached its pinnacle, and the interaction between man's service of Hashem and the functioning of the universe was apparent for all to see.

One way this phenomenon was demonstrated was through the vegetation of the Garden. Of course, the flora of Gan Eden was unequaled in its beauty, as the *passuk* in this week's *parshah* states: “And Hashem caused to sprout forth from the earth all trees that are pleasing to behold and good to eat” (*Bereishis* 2:9). And, of course, there were the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge.

Now, Adam was originally charged with a task. The Torah tells us that Adam was installed in Gan Eden לְעֲבֹדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ “to work it and to keep it” (*ibid.* v. 15). While our first instinct would be to interpret this command in the literal sense – i.e., to serve as a groundskeeper and tend the garden – Chazal reveal that this is not the case. What was Adam's real job? “‘To work it’ – this refers to the fulfillment of positive commandments; ‘To keep it’ – through the observance of the negative commandments” (referenced in *Shem Olam, Sha'ar Hachzakas HaTorah, ch. 10, second footnote; cf. Targum Yonasan, Bereishis, ibid.*).

The upkeep of this garden took a very unique form. The Chofetz Chaim (*Shem Olam, ibid.*) explains why the aforementioned verse cannot be referring to conventional gardening. If the plantings in Gan Eden required such maintenance – pruning and watering the plants, removing weeds, mowing the lawn, etc. – then who takes care of them today? When Adam sinned and was expelled from the Garden, no one was left there to perform horticultural work!

And so Chazal surmised that the Garden was not tended through physical labor, but through the fulfillment of *mitzvos*. In other words, the upkeep of and functioning of the garden life was intrinsically bound with the precepts of the Torah. Had Adam not been evicted from the Garden, he would behold the immediate and amazing results of his service to Hashem – the fruits of his labor. After putting on *tefillin*, a beautiful new tree would appear before his eyes, sprouting forth in a wondrous display of blossoms and lush foliage. By refraining from evil gossip, the harmful effects of disease and decay would be automatically neutralized.

This made up the original plan. Chazal tell us that Hashem was ready to give the Torah to Adam in Gan Eden (*piyut for Shavuos, second day*). Adam was initially placed there to perform the 613 Commandments of the Torah, which would maintain the Garden. Unfortunately, because of his sin, he was banished from that place before the plan could come to fruition.

The Chofetz Chaim explains, however, that *the original system is still in effect*. While we do not reside there, the Garden is still inextricably tied to the fulfillment of the Torah. As the people who received the Torah, it is

we who maintain it through our observance of its precepts. True, Adam would have had the advantage of actually witnessing the immediate effects of his *mitzvos*, while for us, it is a matter of *emunah* (faith). Nevertheless, the original arrangement remains in place. Each time a Jew performs a mitzvah, he is adding to and enhancing the portion in Gan Eden that is reserved for him; by refraining from sin, he safeguards it.

Better Get Going

There is yet another aspect of this “original plan” that bears great relevance for us. And this facet sheds new light on the well-known Mishnah in Avos (2:15-16), which states:

היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה... ל' א עליך המלאכה לגמור, ול' א אתה בן חוריו לבטל ממנה. אם למדת תורה הרבה, נותנים לך שכר הרבה.

“The day is short, and the workload is great... it is not incumbent on you to finish (the job), but you are not free to opt out, either. And if you learn much Torah, you will be granted abundant reward.”

The Chofetz Chaim (*ibid.*, *first footnote*) understands this Mishnah as referring to the master plan and the aftermath of Adam’s downfall. To appreciate his approach, let us focus one more time on the way life would have proceeded, had things gone “according to plan.”

A major development in light of Adam’s sin was the introduction of a new concept to the world – death. Had Adam not sinned, he would have lived forever (or, more precisely, for the 6,000 year pre-Messianic period, following which a period of global transformation will arrive, as delineated in the final chapter of Gemara Sanhedrin). Not only would Adam have continued his daily existence in Gan Eden for six millennia, but all of his children would likewise have been unfettered by the curse of death. This goes for all of his descendants, of course. In other words, the world’s population would increase to astronomical levels, as more would be born, and none would die. (Not to worry; Gan Eden is designed to function at high capacity.)

What would all of these myriad people, who would have had plenty of time (thousands of years) on their hands, do to occupy themselves? As stated, Adam was originally slated to receive the Torah. And so this would form the chief occupation – involvement in Torah study.

This should give us some idea of the boundless enormity and depth of Torah wisdom. Apparently, there is more than enough ground to cover and delve into to keep trillions of people busy around the clock for thousands of years.

Alas, Adam sinned, and death entered the scene. The state of the world deteriorated, and man’s lifespan was infinitely shorter than originally intended.

But that immense volume of Torah study, which could keep a world full of immortal people busy for millennia, has not decreased at all. And the obligation of Torah learning – now solely in the jurisdiction of the Jewish people – is still in full force.

How, then, is it possible to tackle this project of mammoth proportions? How could a people so few in number, in such a (relatively) short time span, accomplish so much?

The Mishnah therefore comes to offer encouragement and guidance. True, this is the situation: the “day” (man’s lifespan) has shortened, while the “workload” remains massive. Hashem does not expect us to completely “finish the job” and do more than we are capable of doing. But that doesn’t give us, of course, license to fold our hands, give up, and drop out. Instead, if we put in the effort of which we are truly capable, a tremendous reward awaits.

לזכר נשמת ציפא רבקה בת ברוך ע"ה