LIKKUTEI SICHOS   
AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

# BEREISHIS

## WHY COULDN’T ADAM PRACTICE RESTRAINT?

Parshas Bereishis is read at the end of Tishrei (the month which begins the new year), and contains guidelines for the coming year.

Of the concepts it mentions is G-d’s first command: the directive to Adam not to partake of the Tree of Knowledge. It is apparent from the Midrash1 that this command applied only on the day after Adam’s creation. Indeed, when considering the events which occurred on the sixth day of creation, it appears that the command was to be in effect for only three hours. G-d’s command was given in the ninth hour after day- break. Three hours later, the day was to end, the first Shabbos to begin, and the prohibition was to be lifted. But despite the short time involved, Adam could not restrain himself, and violated G-d’s commandment.

The question arises: “Adam was fashioned by the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself,” and heard this prohibition directly from Him. How is it that he was unable to restrain himself for even three hours?

It’s true that many mystical secrets are associated with this sin, but every Biblical narrative is also to be understood in a literal sense. Why did Adam trespass?

## THE FOCUS OF THE YETZER HORA

The answer becomes clear when one realizes that the entire intent of the yetzer hora (the evil inclination) is to cause a person to do the opposite of what G-d wants. All the arguments offered by the yetzer hora to convince a person to transgress a prohibition, or not to perform a mitzvah have one motive: that the person should transgress G-d’s will.

There are situations (either because of the individual involved, because of the place, or because of the time) in which the observance of a mitzvah takes on particular importance. In these situations, the yetzer hora makes a special effort. Although in truth such mitzvos can be easily kept, since their observance is of great importance, the yetzer hora will present all kinds of demands and rationales with the intent of keeping the person from fulfilling G-d’s will.

There are times when each of us can “hear the voice” of our evil inclination trying to persuade him in this manner. Certain aspects of the observance of the Torah and its mitzvos should logically be far easier to perform than others. And yet there are times when a person feels that it is actually these “easy” matters which present the greatest challenge. For as explained above, it is precisely with regard to the matters which are most relevant to a person that the yetzer hora presents the greatest challenges.

The halachic weight of the questions involved is not significant. There are times when the matter which presents a challenge is Rabbinic in origin, or merely dictated by Jewish custom, while a mitzvah of Scriptural origin will be far easier to observe. And yet, where a person’s spiritual welfare is considered, the Rabbinic mitzvah or custom can be more important (at that time).

To refer to a parallel concept: Chassidic thought interprets the quote: “With regard to [the observance of] which [mitzvah] was your father more careful?” as meaning that every soul has particular mitzvos which are more connected with its mission on this physical plane than others. Since the yetzer hora knows that these mitzvos are more important, it presents greater obstacles to their observance.

In this vein, we can explain our Sages’ statement: “Whenever a person is greater than a colleague, his yetzer hora is greater than he is.” For the greater a person is, the more important are the mitzvos he performs. And therefore, the yetzer hora presents him with greater challenges.

(There is also another explanation for this concept. To allow for free choice, the powers of holiness must be equally balanced with the forces which oppose holiness. Since he is “greater than his colleague” — i.e., he has been endowed with greater powers in the realm of holiness — “his yetzer hora is greater than he is” — his yetzer hora is also granted increased power.)

On this basis, we can understand why Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Since he was “fashioned by the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself,” he was “greater than his colleague[s],” and thus “his yetzer hora [was] greater than he.” This is particularly true since the command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge had far-reaching implications — as reflected in the extent of the descent suffered by Adam and all his descendants as a result of his sin. Therefore the yetzer hora, which enclothed itself in the serpent, contended with Adam with all its power, and compelled him to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

# TO WHOM DID G-D SPEAK?

When G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He told Moshe: “Say the following to the House of Yaakov.” As our Sages explain, He had Moshe tell the women about receiving the Torah first. Why? Our Sages explain that G-d wanted to prevent a recurrence of what had happened with the Tree of Knowledge, when Adam, and not Chavah, was the one who heard the command from G-d.

This had made the sin possible. The creation of Chavah was G-d’s handiwork, as it is written: “And G-d built the rib....” Nevertheless, since Chavah had not heard the com- mand from G-d Himself, she erred by increasing the scope of G-d’s prohibition, stating that it involved not touching the tree as well as not partaking of it. It was her addition which led to the Sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

Had Chavah heard the command not to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge from G-d directly, she would not have been fooled by the serpent, and would have kept Adam from sinning, despite all the challenges presented by the yetzer hora, as reflected in our Sages’ statement regarding the giving of the Torah.

## BUILDING A SANCTUARY IN MICROCOSM

The very name Torah relates to the word horoah, meaning “instruction.”As mentioned above, the stories related in Parshas Bereishis provide us with instruction for our behavior throughout the year. Similarly, the concept explained above provides us with a directive regarding the conduct of a Jewish home.

Every Jewish home is “a sanctuary in microcosm,”of which G-d says: “I will dwell within.”The conduct of the home is dependent on its mistress, referred to in our Torah tradition as “the mainstay of the home.”She should there- fore be encouraged to add energy and satisfaction to her Jew- ish practices. This encouragement should be given with the understanding that “[The Torah’s] ways are pleasant ways, and all its paths are peace,”rather than by means of auto- cratic directives.

This approach will protect her entire household, her hus- band included, from stumbling blocks. For as stated above, had Chavah heard the command from G-d Himself, not only would she not have created a complication by sinning herself, she would also have prevented Adam from being influenced by the overtures of the serpent.

Thus the foundation of every person’s Torah activity must begin within his own household. As the Rebbe Rashab once said: Just as putting on tefillin every day is a Scriptural com- mandment incumbent upon every Jew, regardless of whether he is a renowned Torah scholar or a simple person, so too there is an obligation for every Jew to spend half an hour every day thinking about the education of his children. He must do everything within his power — and indeed, even things which are beyond his power — to insure that his chil- dren follow the path in which he guides them.

Efforts to increase the Torah involvement of Jewish women will also have a beneficial effect on Jewish men. For this will help ensure that a wife’s thoughts, words and deeds will not run contrary to those of her husband, but rather that she will assist and complement him in all things, contribut- ing binah, understanding, to the household. As our Sages comment: “A greater dimension of binah was given to women than to men.”

A wife active in Torah will affect her entire household, making it a fit place for the Divine Presence to rest. This is reflected in the wedding blessing: “Grant abundant joy to [these] loving companions, as You bestowed upon Your cre- ated being[s] in the Garden of Eden as before.” Why is the term mikedem, “as before,” included in the blessing? Everyone knows that the story of Adam and Eve took place many years ago. The blessing, however, refers to the time “before” — the time before the Sin.

We are therefore wishing that every new marriage will be like the bond between Adam and Chavah before the Sin, when each assisted the other. This will allow a household to be conducted in a manner fit to host G-d’s Presence. And then there will be joy, as “You bestowed upon Your created being[s] in the Garden of Eden as before.”

# NOACH

## ETERNALLY RELEVANT TRUTHS: AFTER THE FLOOD

As is customary at such gatherings,1 our starting point is the weekly Torah reading. For the Torah and its directives are eternal,2 applicable at all times and in all places.

The fact that we study a different portion every week indi- cates that each reading contains lessons applicable to the events which take place during that week.3

The conclusion of this week’s Torah reading relates that the people who lived shortly after the Flood built a city and a tower, “lest we be dispersed throughout the earth.”4 G-d was displeased with their conduct, and thwarted their efforts.

On the surface, it is difficult to understand why the Torah relates this story. What can we learn from it? And yet, the fact that the Torah tells us this story — and does so in detail, while mentioning many laws with only a brief allusion — indicates that this episode contains a deep lesson for our ancestors, for ourselves, and for our descendants.