



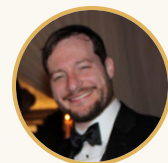
PARSHAS BEREISHIS

פרשת בראשית



Gematria on the Parshah: Let Us Make Man

BY REB MOSHE HERSKOVITS



There is a famous question in Parshat Bereishit. When Hashem creates man, He says, נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם (Let us make man in our likeness and image). Who is the "us" that Hashem is speaking of? And why does the Torah describe the creation of man in the plural?

ALL OF YISRAEL IS ONE SOUL

The Arizal explains that נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם alludes to the unity of Am Yisrael. He teaches that the soul of every person was contained within Adam and Chava. This is why we inherited the consequences of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge. Our souls were contained within them when they sinned.

The Arizal is emphasizing a profound perspective: Yisrael is one being.

Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg embodied this. He was once asked how it is possible to love someone who harmed him.

Rebbe Shmelke explained, "If you accidentally hurt yourself with your hand, would you beat your hand because of that? Of course not, because your hand is part of you. All Jews are one. To hurt your fellow is ultimately to harm yourself."

When we look at another Jew, we should not see a stranger. We should see an extension of ourselves.

This is hinted to by the word נַעֲשֶׂה. The Zohar points out that the other place where נַעֲשֶׂה appears in the Torah is at Har Sinai, when Am Yisrael

said, נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע (we will do and we will listen). Rashi teaches that at that moment Am Yisrael was unified, like one person with one heart.

What brought them to that unity? Torah. The Zohar says Hashem, Yisrael and the Torah are one. When Am Yisrael truly internalizes the Torah, we become one being. This is the true vision Hashem had for man. A Jew is not meant to live as an "I," but as a "we."

The gematria of נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמוּתֵנוּ (Let us make man in our likeness and image) is 1214, the same as תּוֹרָה + בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Torah and the Children of Israel). This reveals who the "us" refers to: Bnei Yisrael and the Torah.

A Jew is not meant to live as an "I," but as a "we."

THE IMAGE OF GOD

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that in Kabbalah there are many different worlds, and "Let us make man in our image" refers to man being a reflection of the upper and lower worlds. What Am Yisrael does affects these worlds. The Zohar therefore calls Am Yisrael the heart of the world.

The gematria of צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים (image of God) is 246, the same as מְדַבֵּר (speaker). Onkelos connects the image of God with the ability to speak. Just as Hashem created the world through speech, our words of Torah and tefillah are the source of blessing for the entire world.

This gives us a new understanding of why man is described in the plural. We are created as individuals, but every Jew affects the whole.

On Simchat Torah, we expressed this by dancing in a circle. There is no beginning or end to a circle, and everyone is connected as one. When one person brings joy into the circle, everyone feels it. When one person is struggling, everyone is affected.

STORY: INFLUENCING ONE PERSON

The Lubavitcher Rebbe once asked Rabbi Gutnick to promote the laws of family purity in Sydney, Australia. He organized a special class and put up flyers throughout the city. When the night came, only one woman showed up.

Rabbi Gutnick was upset. He had prepared so much and felt like he failed the Rebbe. Surprisingly, the Rebbe told him, "You were successful." The Rebbe then asked him: "How many mothers did it take to give birth to Moshe Rabbeinu?"

The Rebbe explained that Rabbi Gutnick didn't realize that the one class he gave to that one woman had totally changed the Jewish people forever. What looked like one mother sitting in a class would become generations of descendants who would influence the entire nation of Am Yisrael.

LESSON FOR US

Let us take the circle of Simchat Torah with us throughout the year. Remember that Am Yisrael is one being, and we shouldn't underestimate how far the light we shine can travel.

The Silence That Saved Humanity!

BY RABBI AVROHOM JACKS



G-d used words to create the universe. He said, "Let there be light," and light poured into the darkness. Ten utterances brought everything into existence.

Ten generations later, G-d saw that the world He created had become corrupt, so He decided to destroy it with a flood. However, after that decision was made, no words were spoken. He did not announce His intentions. G-d only broke His "silence" after He had chosen Noah as the way to save humanity.

Why does G-d speak the world into being at the beginning of our Parsha, yet keep His verdict to destroy it undeclared at the end?

The answer is that a thought is like wet clay. It can still bend and take on new shapes. Speech, on the other hand, is like a kiln. Once an idea is voiced, it hardens into reality, and undoing it becomes far more difficult. G-d wanted light to last forever, so He spoke it. The verdict on humanity was kept soft until there was a plan to save it.

We too possess the G-dly power of speech. We can wield the same tool that built the cosmos. Every time we talk about another person, we build something inside them. That's why a careless remark about someone's weakness, even if they won't hear it, can energetically "fire" that weakness into place.

The good news is that the kiln works both ways. When you praise someone out loud, you "fire" their strength into place. One sentence of encouragement can stay with a person for forty years.

So follow G-d's playbook. Before a harsh word about anyone leaves your mouth, find their Noah. Find the part of them that can float through the flood. Until you find it, let the criticism stay soft in your thoughts. Praise, on the other hand, can go straight into the fire.

When you praise someone out loud, you "fire" their strength into place.

This works on the way you talk to yourself too. Every "I always mess this up" goes into the kiln. So does every "I've got this." That's why we must be careful with what we say.

G-d spoke into the darkness, and light poured in. Someone you love may be sitting in the dark right now, so open your mouth and let there be light.

The Moment We Started Hiding

BY REB ADAM KLASNER



One of the first questions Hashem ever asks a human being is only one word:

"Ayeka?" Where are you?

Adam had eaten from the tree, realized he was naked, became afraid, and hid. Of course Hashem knew exactly where Adam was. He wasn't asking for Adam's location. He was asking something much deeper: Adam, where did you go?

I think that question has followed every human being ever since.

Because we all hide.

We hide when we're ashamed. We hide when we're afraid someone will see something in us that we don't want them to see. We hide behind anger, humor, success, religion, work, our phones, being busy, being right. Sometimes we become so good at hiding that we don't even realize we're doing it anymore.

You can be sitting at the dinner table with your family and be hiding. You can sleep next to your wife every night and be hiding. You can have hundreds of people who know you and still feel like nobody actually knows you.

And what is fascinating is what happens next in the story.

Hashem asks Adam what happened, and Adam immediately points to Chava. Chava points to the snake. Within a few pesukim, humanity goes from vulnerability to shame, and from shame to blame.

That pattern hasn't changed much.

When something hurts inside of us, it's much easier to find the person responsible than to feel what's actually happening. My wife doesn't understand me. My kids don't respect me. My parents messed me up. My business is stressing me out. This person triggered me.

Sometimes those things may even be true. People hurt us. People disappoint us. People absolutely need to take responsibility for what they do.

But blame can also become one more place to hide.

Because as long as the entire problem is outside of me, I never have to ask what is happening inside of me.

Maybe that's why Ayeka comes before everything else.

Hashem doesn't begin by saying, "Adam, how could you do this?"

He asks, "Where are you?"

Where are you in your marriage?

Where are you with your children?

Where are you in your relationship with Hashem?

Where are you underneath the anger, the defensiveness, the accomplishments and the version of yourself you've learned to show everybody else?

Before you become better, let yourself be seen.

Bereishis means beginning. We usually think a new beginning means creating something new, but maybe the deepest new beginning is when we stop hiding.

When you can finally say, "This is where I am. This is what I'm afraid of. This is where I'm hurting. This is what I want. This is what I've been pretending doesn't bother me."

Not because you've fixed it yet.

Because you're finally willing to be found.

We spend so much of our lives trying to become better versions of ourselves. Maybe Hashem is asking for something before that.

Before you become better, let yourself be seen.

The Torah begins with the creation of the entire universe, but very quickly the story becomes one human being hiding from Hashem.

And Hashem goes looking for him.

Maybe that's one of the first things the Torah wants us to know about ourselves and about Hashem.

Even when you hide, He still comes looking.

And perhaps the beginning of every real relationship, with Hashem, with another person, and even with yourself, starts with having the courage to answer one question:

Ayeka? Where are you?

איפה | Where Are You?

BY REB YACOV ABOUDI



A few days ago, I was holding an etrog.

This week I open the Torah, and according to one opinion in Chazal, Adam and Chava may have been holding one too.

The Torah never tells us that the Eitz HaDa'at was an apple. Bereishit Rabbah (15:7) brings the opinion that it was an etrog. The Midrash connects Chava's description of the tree to the unique quality of the etrog, טעם עצו ופריו שונה, its tree and fruit share a taste. Chazal use this same quality when identifying the עץ הדר we hold on Sukkot (Sukkah 35a).

I can't get past that image.

For seven days I held an etrog and stood before Hashem. Then I put it down, danced with the Torah, rolled everything back to the beginning, and suddenly I am reading about Adam and Chava standing with, according to this opinion, that same fruit.

Maybe the fruit isn't the point. Maybe the story is about what happens to a relationship.

Before the sin:

וַיְהִיו שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יָתְבַשְׁשׁוּ

"Adam and his wife were both naked, and they were not ashamed." (Bereishit 2:25)

Nothing to cover. Nothing to pretend. Nothing to hide.

Then they eat, and their first reaction is to cover themselves.

Kabbalah speaks about הַסְתָּר, concealment. Hashem has not gone anywhere. The light is still there. What changes is our ability and desire to experience it.

That feels very human to me. We make a mistake. We are embarrassed. We know we aren't where we should be. Instead of moving closer, sometimes our first instinct is to hide.

That is exactly what Adam and Chava do.

וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹקִים

"Adam and his wife hid from Hashem Elokim." (Bereishit 3:8)

Of course, you cannot hide from Hashem.

But Hashem plays along.

איפה

Where are you?

Rashi asks the obvious question. Hashem knew exactly where Adam was. Why ask?

יִדְעָה הִיא הֵיכָן הוּא, אֲלֵא לִכְנֹס עִמּוֹ בְּדַבָּרִים

Hashem wanted לִכְנֹס עִמּוֹ בְּדַבָּרִים, to begin a conversation with him.

I love those words.

Adam is hiding, and Hashem is looking for a way to get him talking again. He doesn't rip away the branches. He doesn't begin with an accusation.

He simply calls.

Where are you?

Adam may feel far away, but Hashem hasn't gone anywhere.

And something else has changed.

Only a few pesukim earlier Adam looks at Chava and says:

אֵת הַפֶּעַם עָצָם מִעֲצָמִי וּבִשָּׁר מִבְּשָׁרִי

"This one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." (Bereishit 2:23)

You are part of me.

Now he says:

הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה עִמָּדִי הוּא נָתַתָּה לִי מִרְהָצִין וְאָכַל

"The woman You gave to be with me gave me from the tree, and I ate." (Bereishit 3:12)

A few pesukim ago: You are part of me.

Now: She did it.

Rashi points out that Adam doesn't only blame Chava. He says, "the woman You gave me."

כָּאן כְּפֶר בְּטוֹבָה

"Here he showed ingratitude."

In one sentence, both relationships have changed. He pushes away Chava, and he pushes away Hashem.

That speaks to me.

My connection to Hashem helps me connect in a real way to the people around me.

When I feel grounded in that relationship, I can listen better. I can be more patient. I can let someone else be imperfect without immediately needing to defend myself or find someone to blame.

And Hashem doesn't give up on Adam.

Later, Hashem Himself makes clothing for Adam and Chava:

וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱלֹקִים לָאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כִּתְנוֹת עוֹר וַיַּלְבִּשֵׁם

"Hashem Elokim made clothing for Adam and his wife, and He dressed them." (Bereishit 3:21)

Adam covers himself because he wants to hide. Hashem covers him because He still cares for him.

The relationship isn't over.

The fruit didn't need to change. We did.

And that brings me back to the etrog.

A few days ago, I was holding what may have been the same kind of fruit. But this time I wasn't hiding with it.

I was standing before Hashem holding it openly.

The fruit associated with Adam hiding from Hashem becomes the fruit a Jew takes in his hand to perform a mitzvah before Hashem.

The fruit didn't need to change.

We did.

The Kabbalists describe the Sukkah as אֹר מְקִיף, a surrounding light. For seven days we allow ourselves to be surrounded by Hashem. The Pri Etz Chaim describes the progression into Shemini Atzeret as that connection moving inward.

Then we read Bereishit.

The Sukkah is gone. The etrog is put away. The dancing has stopped.

What do I take with me?

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (38b) hears something deeper in Hashem's question to Adam:

אֵן נָטָה לִבִּי

Where has your heart turned?

Hashem wasn't asking Adam where he was standing. He was asking where his heart had gone.

And perhaps that is why אֶרֶב still speaks so loudly.

The Alter Rebbe taught that אֶרֶב wasn't only a question Hashem asked Adam. It is a question Hashem asks each of us:

Where are you?

For weeks, the calendar kept pulling our hearts back toward Hashem. Rosh Hashanah. Yom Kippur. Sukkot. Shemini Atzeret.

And now the year really begins.

There is work. There are bills. There are emails. There are children who need us. There are pressures that didn't disappear because it was Yom Tov.

It is easy to hold the etrog when the calendar tells me to hold it.

The real question is what happens after I put it down.

I can't stay in the Sukkah all year, and I can't carry the etrog all year. But I can carry the connection with me.

So before life gets busy again, perhaps each of us can choose one small thing to bring into the year. One real change that keeps our heart turned toward Hashem, and allows that connection to show in the way we connect to the people around us.

Hashem asked Adam:

אֶרֶב

Where are you?

As I step into this new year, what can I carry with me to keep my heart turned toward Hashem, so that He never needs to ask me אֶרֶב?

The Art of Decay

BY RABBI NACHUM AARON KUTNOWSKI



In the early 1990s, the UK tax authority took McVitie's to tribunal over their Jaffa Cakes. The question: were they biscuits – taxable when chocolate-covered – or cakes, which are not? McVitie's won. One of their defining arguments was that cakes harden when stale, while biscuits go soft. A stale Jaffa Cake hardens. Therefore: cake.

How something behaves once it ages, severed from its source, reveals something about its underlying nature.

As we packed away the Sukkah and transitioned from the heights of Tishrei, I noticed my son place the Esrogim of this year beside those of

last year – and my mind was drawn to the contrast between two of the Arba Minim and what they become after the holiday ends.

The Aravah was the star of Hoshana Rabba – bundled together and beaten against the floor. But it is the definition of fragility. Severed from its source, it shrivels almost immediately, often not surviving the holiday itself. The Aravah is named Arvei Nachal – the willows of the brook – because it grows exclusively beside flowing water. Cut it off, and it's gone within days.

The Esrog is an entirely different story. Unlike almost any other fruit, it does not rot or disintegrate. Instead, it dries out and hardens over time, becoming wood-like in texture. Fruit and tree converge into a single substance.

To understand what this contrast is teaching us, we need to look at this week's Parsha, Parshas Bereishis. When Hashem commanded the earth to produce fruit trees, the intention was that the tree itself would taste like its fruit – source and yield were meant to be one. But the earth produced trees that bore fruit without sharing its taste. Rashi notes that this was the earth's own sin, for which it was later held accountable (Rashi on Bereishis 1:11).

The Sifsei Chachamim adds that there was one exception: the Esrog tree, whose wood and fruit shared the same taste. This uniqueness is what contributed to Adam stumbling into sin (Sifsei Chachamim on Bereishis 1:11, Divrei Dovid).

In its afterlife, the Esrog quietly restores that original reality. As it dries and hardens, fruit and tree become indistinguishable once more – a whisper of the world before the sin, where source and output were one.

The Esrog does not merely endure after the holiday – it becomes more itself.

The Aravah delivers the opposite message. Beautiful, essential, and completely dependent on its connection to flowing water – the moment it is severed, it cannot survive.

As we step out of the Sukkah and back into the world, the Aravah offers a warning – severed from its source, it cannot survive. But the Esrog offers something better: a vision of what is possible when the connection holds. Over time, fruit and tree become indistinguishable, source and yield converge into one. The Esrog does not merely endure after the holiday – it becomes more itself.

That is the aspiration we carry out of Tishrei. Not just to survive the year intact, but to grow so deeply connected to our Source that, over time, there is no longer any distance between what we draw from and what we give.

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REFLECTIVE
QUESTION

As I step into this new year, what can I carry with me to keep my heart turned toward Hashem, so that He never needs to ask me אֶרֶב?