

a Jewish cemetery. So, father and son traveled to their hometown in search of these "remains." After spending days combing the city and neighboring communities, they were ready to return to Siberia. Eventually, Moshe Friedman moved to America, married and became a successful businessman. One of his daughters married a wonderful young man of Syrian descent. Life was good. As he was getting on in years, his children suggested that perhaps now was the time to take a trip to visit the Holy Land. He agreed and went in the company of his Syrian son-in-law, who had special access to the *Sephardic gedolim*, especially *Chacham* Ovadiah Yosef, *zl*.

They made the journey which was very inspiring, but uneventful, until they visited *Horav* Ovadiah. No sooner had they walked into the *gadol's* study, than *Rav* Ovadiah looked up from his *sefer*, looked at Moshe Friedman and asked, "Why do I detect the scent of *Gan Eden* on your clothing?" At first Moshe demurred from answering, until he finally said, "I have a number of children who are learning full-time that I am supporting."

"That is not it," *Rav* Ovadiah countered. "Many people support their children, allowing them to devote themselves full-time to Torah study, yet they do not carry the scent of *Gan Eden* with them. You did something very special that warranted this gift. What is it?" Sensing that Moshe was reluctant to speak in public, *Rav* Ovadiah cleared the room, leaving only himself, Moshe Friedman and his interpreter.

Once everyone left the room, Moshe related to *Rav* Ovadiah an incident which had taken place on their last day in Poland. Father and son had separated for a few hours prior to leaving on the harrowing return trip to Siberia. The winter would soon arrive, and it would not be pretty. Moshe was alone walking the street when a Pole came over to the fifteen year old and asked, "Are you the one who is purchasing human soap?" When Moshe confirmed that, indeed, he was, the man said, "I have a full box of such soap which I am willing to sell." The man named a price. Sadly, Moshe did not have that much money with him. His father carried the money.

"My father went away," Moshe began, "and I'm not certain when he will return. Please trust me with the soap; I will buy it and somehow reimburse you at a later date," Moshe said.

"No," demanded the Pole. "I want my money now! I am not waiting for you to return - if you even will!" He was about to leave, when Moshe struck upon an idea. "Look," he said, "I am wearing warm wool pants to protect me this winter in Siberia. You are wearing a light pair of cotton pants. They might protect you during the Polish summer, but winter? If you will sell me the bars of soap, I will trade you my wool pants for your cotton ones."

A pair of warm pants was a commodity which one did not quickly pass up. The deal was made. The soap

was buried, and Moshe Friedman froze that winter. When *Rav* Ovadiah heard the story he said, "This is why your clothes carry the scent of *Gan Eden*. The *neshamos*, souls, of all the Jews whose remains you buried were all *kadoshim*, martyrs, who were murdered *al Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify Hashem's Name. They are all in *Gan Eden*, and these *neshamos* have been accompanying you throughout your life."

When Adam was banished, he was told that remaining in *Gan Eden* was no longer an option. Based upon a person's good deeds, Torah study and *mitzvah* performance, however, he can bring a little bit of *Gan Eden* down to earth.

Va'ani Tefillah

Rofei cholei amo Yisrael. Who heals the sick of His nation, Yisrael.

The *Yearos Devash* teaches that, upon reciting the *brachah*, blessing, of healing, we are to also have in mind the Torah sages whose strength has been sapped due to their total dedication to Torah study. Prior to the *cheit ha'eigel*, sin of the Golden Calf, Torah students were muscular and powerful, but, following the sin, their strength waned. This (explains the *Yearos Devash*) is the reason that Moshe *Rabbeinu's* arms became weary, to the point that he was no longer able to carry the *Luchos*, Tablets.

Torah is our life-source, and our Torah sages are the conduit by which it is maintained. As the champions of the true tradition transmitted to us via *Torah She'Baal Peh*, the Oral Law, we are deeply indebted to them. Without them, our very existence is threatened. Furthermore, when we collectively pray for the continued health of our Torah sages, we elevate the banner of Torah scholarship. The end result is that people want to study Torah diligently, so that they, too, become scholars.

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Parashas Bereishis

תשע"ח

פרשת בראשית

בראשית ברא אלקים

In the beginning of G-d's creating. (1:1)

Elokim is the Name of Hashem which denotes the attribute of *Middas Ha'Din*, Strict Justice. *Rashi* quotes the *Midrash* that posits that: *Bitchilah*, at first, *alah b'machshavto*, it entered "His mind" to create the world with *Din*, Justice; *Ra'ah*, He saw, that *ein ha'alam miskayeim*, the world under strict judgment cannot survive; He added *Rachamim*, the Attribute of Mercy, to temper the *Din*. Justice is the ideal state of the world, with man being treated as he deserves. If he acts inappropriately – he is punished. If he is virtuous – he receives reward. It is tit-for-tat, according to one's deeds. However, as we probably all know, man is not perfect and he certainly is unable to survive under such harsh scrutiny. Without compassion from upon High we do not stand a chance. Hashem knew this; thus, He added a dose of mercy.

We derive from here that *Din* and *Rachamim* are in partnership with one another, working in tandem, so that man may survive. Thus, in 2:4: *B'yom asos Hashem Elokim es eretz v'shomayim*, "In the day that Hashem (Mercy) *Elokim* (Justice) made earth and heaven," Mercy preceded Justice, in order for us to make it. *Horav Leib Heyman, zl*, explains that, with Mercy as the tool for tempering Strict Justice, we are able to understand somewhat and come to grips with some of the more "challenging" events throughout history.

First and foremost, the Holocaust stands alone as the most dreadful, cataclysmic destruction to strike our People. Whoever survived; whoever lived through that dark period in time; whoever has studied it in history, reading about it, getting to know it through various forms of media, is immediately confronted with the question: How could such a tragedy happen? There is no clear historic parallel to the insidious evil, the brutality, the torture, the death followed by cremation to which we as a nation were subjected. Undoubtedly, many Jews reneged their faith as a result of the overwhelming questions that gnawed at them, while others became stronger, more deeply committed. We have no right to stand in judgment, when we cannot even begin to fathom what these people endured. The purpose of this thesis is to learn, to see, to acknowledge and to appreciate how *Middas Din* and *Middas Rachamim* work together to maintain Hashem's world.

When our people were slaves in Egypt, Moshe *Rabbeinu* "complained": *Lamah ha'reisosa la'am ha'zeh?* "Why have You done evil to this people?" *U'mei'az baasi*

I'Pharaoh, "From the time I went to *Pharaoh*." (*Shemos* 5:22) Moshe said to Hashem that the enslavement worsened for the Jews from the time that he appeared before *Pharaoh*. Later, as they all stood at the banks of the Red Sea following the drowning of the Egyptians, Moshe sang, *Az Yashir*, a song to Hashem commencing with the word, *az*; the same word with which he had complained, he now sang praise.

This is the secret: patience. Wait it out. Moshe now understood why the Jewish nation had to undergo the crucible of Egypt. The revelation to which they had been privy at the Red Sea could never have occurred had they not lived through the Egyptian slavery. In accordance with a powerful dynamic evinced throughout history, redemption is the consequence of suffering. Moshe now saw the relationship between the exile and the redemption with clarity. The ambiguities that had earlier plagued him had dissipated; the smoke had cleared. He saw the connection. Without the exile, there would have been no *Krias Yam Suf*, Splitting of the Red Sea.

As mentioned earlier, a full partnership exists between *Rachamim* and *Din* in this world. Whatever portion one removes from the "kitty," the other must likewise remove a portion. Each action that one performs warrants a parallel action from the other. Thus, when *Din* has its day in court, when the Attribute of Strict Justice sees to it that man's actions are scrutinized and disciplined, then Mercy must have an equal share consoling, comforting, soothing and manifesting the love that has never left.

In the well-known *pasuk* in *Sefer Iyov* (8:7), *V'hayah reishischa mitzaar v'acharischa yisgeh me'od*, "Then, though your beginning was insignificant, your end will flourish exceedingly", *Mitzaar* is translated as: little/of no consequence/insignificant. The *Midrash Yalkut Shemoni* translates *mitzaar* as being derived from *tzaar*, pain/trouble. Thus, the *pasuk* is teaching: One who suffers in the beginning will eventually have it good at the end. Mercy has to have its portion.

Let us return to the *Shoah*. No one questions that those were very dark years for our people. The days were dark because the average person had great difficulty seeing Hashem. He was so overwrought with pain and troubles that his mind was too clouded, his heart too heavy and his eyes too myopic to see Hashem's Presence orchestrating events. Every survivor has a book of miracles which he could publish. We did not understand then. Three years later, however, when the nations of the world, who normally lose no love for the Jews, assembled and declared that *Eretz Yisrael* should be returned to the Jewish People –

they still did not understand! Nothing “just happens”! The *Middas HaDin* played itself out. Now, it was *Rachamim’s* turn. The Jewish People had suffered immeasurably. *Eretz Yisrael* has always belonged to us. It is ours forever. It is our eternal gift from Hashem. We could go on with this theme with regard to all aspects in life, but I want to impress upon the reader that Hashem allows for a sort of *shutfos*, partnership, in the running of the world. At times, we think that all we see is *Din*. Well, *gam zeh yaavor*, this, too, will pass. *Rachamim* will have its turn, unless we give up hope, and when *Rachamim* surfaces, we will not be there. Let us not lose sight of this important principle.

ולא יחבשונו

And they were not ashamed. (2:25)

Prior to eating of the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Chavah had no idea concerning the significance of *tznius*, moral modesty/privacy. Thus, they were not embarrassed by their lack of clothing, since, as *Rashi* explains, the concept of *tznius* allows a person to distinguish between good and bad. In other words, *tznius* is the barometer and medium by which one determines whether his actions are good or bad. By maintaining a *tznius* demeanor in thought, action and dress, one diminishes the opportunity for, and possibility of, improper temptation that can lead to sinful behavior. Guarding against a breakdown in *tznius* is similar to asking oneself: Is my conduct appropriate, or am I bending the rules?

Therefore, there will be those who gravitate to subjective extremes, both to the right and to the left. Some will posit that “everything goes,” because I do not “feel” that it is wrong/bad/inappropriate. We are living in modern times, and everyone dresses this way. These misguided people seem to forget that *we/Klal Yisrael* are not “everyone.” Only we have been given the mandate of *Kedoshim tiheyu*, “Be holy” (*Vayikra* 19:2).

There are also those on the right who go to the other extreme, which demands that one dress in garments that are so concealing, that they cause the individual (in today’s open-minded culture) who “happens” to gravitate to a “progressive” environment, to mistakenly think that he is evil, he is dangerous, he is shameful. Therefore, as in all areas of service, the *derech ha’memutza*, golden mean/ middle path, *tznius* should be no different. There are parameters which follow Torah law – and there are self-conceived parameters that have been adjusted to conform with today’s hedonistic standards of living. I guess in such an instance, the golden mean will be far from the middle.

Having said this, we return to our opening statement: *Tznius* is the means by which one determines the appropriateness of his actions. How does one know the true motivations for his own actions? One could think that easing off a bit in his/her religious activities makes him/her more accessible, thus allowing him/her to better reach out to a brother/sister, when, in fact, he/she simply wants to ease up and slack off because the religious demands interfere with his/her social life, etc.

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, posits that one must familiarize himself with the guises of the *yetzer*

hora. The evil inclination never presents itself as evil. On the contrary, the *yetzer hora* appears as a *mitzvah*, a *tzaddik*, righteous person, a friend. One must be able to discern whether the recent surge of energy is motivated by the *yetzer tov*, good inclination, or the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hora* encourages one to perform a *mitzvah* if it is at the expense of another, more inspiring *mitzvah*. *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, was wont to say, “The *yetzer hora* does not mind if one recites *Tehillim* all day, as long as he does not sit down to study Torah in-depth.”

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, teaches that *tznius* is not only about how one dresses; rather, it is about how one lives. What are the terms of an individual’s lifestyle: Inconspicuous or flaunting? Private, elegant or loud, attention-grabbing? If the actions that one performs publicly would be carried on in a like manner in private, then one can be certain that he has fulfilled his obligation.

Let us face it: Why would anyone dress in a manner that is eye-catching, calling attention to him/herself as if he/she were not a person, but an object? Does he/she have no pride or satisfaction in presenting him/herself in a nice, neat, modest fashion? Human beings all have feelings of insecurity. We want to be noticed, recognized, acknowledged and appreciated. When we denigrate ourselves immodestly, the way we act might gain attention, but we, as people, as individuals are not noticed. One who lacks a sense of inner dignity will invariably do anything to gain attention. This is exhibitionism, not modesty. Such a person should capture our feelings of compassion, because he/she is crying out in the most crude and insecure manner.

There is no dearth of stories which bespeak the overriding importance of *tznius* in dress and demeanor. Obviously, one who dresses provocatively not only indicates a serious lack of self-esteem, but he is also guilty of inducing profligate behavior. Sadly, it has become a way of life that has crept, one way or another, into all areas, environments and lifestyles. The following story, related by *Rebbetzin Kanievsky, A.H.*, has a powerful message. (I might add that such stories have great inspirational value, but, unfortunately, the individuals who probably need them most tend to impugn and belittle them for fear of being positively influenced.)

A few years ago, a terrorist packed his car with 100 kilos of explosives and parked it near a supporting pillar at the Cine mall in Haifa. It did not explode. Had his intentions achieved fruition, the tragedy would have been cataclysmic. Not only would it have destroyed the pillar, but it would have also caused a conflagration when the other cars in the lot would have ignited. This is one of the most popular malls in the area, and it was full at the time. We cannot even begin to contemplate the extent of the tragedy had that bomb gone off. An alert passerby noticed smoke coming from the car and summoned the police, who brought in the bomb squad and diffused the bomb. Everyone – even Ehud Olmert, then Prime Minister – recognized that they were spared by Hashem. This was clearly a miracle.

Now, for the rest of the story. Several weeks prior to this occurrence, a teenage girl in Haifa who had been complaining of stomach pains went to the doctor,

and, after a battery of tests, was diagnosed with a malignant tumor that had metastasized. The doctors gave the grim verdict: There was nothing that they could do other than give her pain meds to make her comfortable. She had mere weeks to live.

The girl did not give up; her parents did not give up. They might not have been observant Jews, but hope is a value that is inherently Jewish. They pleaded with the doctors to try something – anything – at least to make an effort at saving their daughter’s life. The doctors finally agreed and scheduled surgery for the next day. Feeling that their chances for success were very low, they assigned a young, inexperienced surgeon, with the feeling that it would be good practice for him, since there was nothing to lose; the surgeon really could not go wrong.

They say that there are no atheists in a foxhole. The night before the surgery, the non-observant girl began to plead with Hashem. She said, “*HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, I am not perfect, and I probably do not deserve any favors from You. In ancient times, when we had a *Bais Hamikdash*, a sinner would confess and offer a *korban* and achieve penance. Today, we have no *Bais Hamikdash*, no *korbanos*, no *Kohanim*, but I still want to bring a *korban*.”

At that moment, she walked to her closet, removed all of her immodest clothing and carried it out to her yard. She made a pile and struck a match, creating a large pyre of burning clothing. She cried out, “Hashem, this is my *korban*!”

The next day, the girl went to the hospital in her nightgown and robe. She had no other clothing. Her entire wardrobe had been elevated to *korban* status. She had the surgery, and, lo and behold, the tumor had not metastasized. It was totally contained – and benign. She had just been the fortunate recipient of a miracle. When she shared the story behind the miracle with her friends, they, too, wanted to reap the benefits of dressing modestly. The next day, they all came together, brought out their immodest attire and made a bonfire!

The girls were now left with nothing presentable to wear. No problem – that is what malls are for. They all went together to celebrate their newly-accepted modesty – by shopping for new clothes. When that terrorist bomb was set to go off, those girls were at the mall, shopping for new, modest clothing!

Miracles occur because people adhere to the laws of *tznius*. Why? What do miracles have to do with *tznius*? Perhaps the miracle is Hashem’s overt response to the Jew or Jewess who is secure enough to live covertly, in a modest fashion, without calling attention to him/herself.

וישלחוהו' אלקים מן עין לעבד את האדמה אשר לקח משם
So Hashem G-d banished him from *Gan Eden* to work
the soil from which he was taken. (3:23)

The sin of *Adam HaRishon* had immediate and long-lasting repercussions. It was now impossible for Hashem to allow him to remain a guest in *Gan Eden*. Eating from the fruit of the *Eitz HaDaas* had changed him from a creation whose entire focus was spirituality – who had no inclination for anything but good – to a man who

could now discriminate between good and bad. He was on a higher spiritual plane than animals, but was no longer on a level on par with angels. Man had now become unique among the terrestrial creatures, just as Hashem is unique among the celestial ones, for now man is able to discern between good and evil. While it is wonderful to be able to discriminate, nonetheless, the awareness that evil exists heightens one’s sensual desires, enhancing the need for gratification. If man were to maintain the capacity to elude death, to live forever, his days quite possibly (if he is weak) may be spent pursuing his physical passions, thereby abandoning the opportunity for intellectual and spiritual growth. Good deeds would unfortunately follow out the door, and the purpose of man achieving spiritual perspective and bliss would never be realized. Thus, Adam had to be banished from *Gan Eden*, because he might eat of the *Eitz HaChaim*, Tree of Life, thus enabling him to live forever.

All of the above are good reasons for *Adam’s* banishment, but let us for a moment reflect on *Adam’s* punishment – from his perspective. Anyone who has ever achieved an exalted position, a milestone position, climbed the ladder of success – only to have everything yanked out from under him and be left on the bottom of the ladder – understands. What must have gone through *Adam HaRishon’s* mind when he was told, “Goodbye?” We have no way of fathoming the meaning of expulsion from *Gan Eden*. One thing is for certain: to be ensconced in Heaven, only to be dismissed due to one unpardonable infraction must have carried with it an overwhelming sense of guilt, a feeling that could be devastating. While some might focus on past achievements, the mere fact that one had been so elevated, and then (in contrast) was so demoted, can be quite disheartening.

Obviously, *Adam HaRishon*, Primordial Man, the apex of Hashem’s handiwork, was no ordinary creation. He was able to “shake himself off” (so to speak) and start anew. While this might be the reason, I recently came across an inspiring story that might illuminate our enigma. It certainly allows for a unique insight into the concept of *Gan Eden*.

Gedalei Yisrael, our Torah giants, possess not only an uncanny knowledge of all aspects of Torah erudition, they are blessed with a unique insight into people and occurrences, via a “sixth sense”: *Ruach HaKodesh*, Divine Inspiration, whereby their insight penetrates far beyond and deeper than what the average eye can see. They are privy to visions on a level far-separated from what we are able to perceive. The following story is classic and demonstrates this awesome perspective.

Mr. Moshe Friedman (not his real name) was born in Poland in 1930. Hashem’s Divine Hand guided him and his family, allowing them to survive the war through a series of miracles that brought them to Siberia. While Siberia has far from an inviting climate – plus the natives are less than friendly – they were at least away from the killing fields of Poland and Germany. Following the war, Moshe’s father heard that the accursed Nazis had made soap out of the remains of their Jewish victims. He decided to return to Poland to find and buy as many of these bars of soap as possible and have them buried in