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## Parshat Bereishit: On Struggle and Productivity

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Imagine a world without famine and war, without stress and work. This is the Paradise—the Garden of Eden before Adam and Chava ate from the *eitz hada'at*, the tree of knowledge. Yet, although the Garden of Eden seems ideal, is it a state to which we strive to return?

As glorious as the Garden of Eden sounds, it was not a place of human productivity and creativity. Like everything created in the world thus far, this was God's special creation. First God fashions Adam, and then the Torah tells us that God created the Garden of Eden:

וַיִּצְמַח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה כָּל־עֵץ נֹחַמֵד לְמַרְאֶה וְטוֹב לְמֵאֲכֹל... וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגֶן־עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ

And Hashem God caused to sprout from the ground every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food...And God took Adam and placed him in Eden, to work it and guard it. (Bereishit 2:9,15)

When the Torah says Adam must work and guard the land, we understand that he performed physical labor, tilling the ground. Pirkei D'rebbi Eliezer (12) cannot fathom that Adam actually worked; "working and guarding," he explains must not mean physical labor, but rather that Adam guarded and protected the land through Torah study and good deeds. Adam was simply maintaining God's perfection. The Midrash in Kohelet Rabbah 9 explains that God showed Adam all of Gan Eden and told him: "See how beautiful my creation is; all of it is for you." God is the only creator in the Garden of Eden. Eden is not a place suitable for innovative human growth and not a place where Adam and Chava could create their own life.

There is one active task that Adam performs; he names all the animals:

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל הַבְּהֵמָה ...

And man named all the cattle. (2:20)

In doing so, he realizes that all animals are paired and he becomes acutely aware of his own loneliness and boredom. Through classifying and naming the animals, he was awakened to his own creative potential. He becomes a dreamer, yearning for more meaning in his life. And yet, his life is static, unchanging. So, he falls asleep. But, as Rav Soleveitchik writes in *Family Redeemed* Adam "wants to accomplish more and more (p. 10)."

Adam and Chava needed more than the Garden of Eden had to offer. Chizkuni notices that God created Adam outside of the Garden of Eden and then placed him there (Bereishit 2:7-8). He suggests that before being placed there, Adam saw the alternative to Gan Eden—"the thorn and thistles, of the outside world." Perhaps, what Adam saw was not a scary and daunting wilderness, but rather a place full of opportunity. Perhaps, his creative juices awakened in him a yearning to impact the world and to turn the thistles and thorns into roses.

Seen in this light, the punishment Adam received for his sin is fitting. Before they are banished from the garden, God says:

בְּעִצְבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ. וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר תִּצְמַיִח לָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה: בְּזַעַת אַפֶּיךָ תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם  
...with toil shall you eat of [the land] all the days of your life. And it will cause thorns and thistles to grow for you, and you shall eat the herbs of the field. With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread. (3:17-19)



For Adam and Chava there was no sense of struggle in the garden. Their own creativity was stifled. That is not to say that struggle is ideal either. But, as Viktor Frankl, a psychologist who survived the Holocaust writes in his postscript, *The Case for a Tragic Optimism*, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, struggle is inevitable. And in the face of struggle, "if one cannot change a situation that causes his suffering, he can still choose his attitude (p.172)."

It cannot be coincidental that right after Adam and Chava left the garden, Chava conceived. The continuation of peoplehood occurs outside of the garden. God alone is the creator of the world, however, once outside the Gan Eden, humanity can play an active role in perpetuating creation.

Paradise as first conceived by God was not ideal. Paradise must be re-defined as a place where we have to work to achieve our goals, where we have to struggle to find satisfaction, where we can truly feel a sense of accomplishment. Perhaps, one day we will merit returning to the paradise of Gan Eden, but when we do, we must take with us the lesson of Adam and Chava—that struggle, leads to productivity, which in turn creates meaning in our lives.



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