

RCA Chomer Lidrush – Parshas Bereshis 5788

1) The Path to the Eitz HaChaim

A guest contribution from our Chaver Rabbi [Judah Dardik](#). Read his original piece [here](#).

When Adam and Chavah are sent out of Gan Eden, a keruv with a "lahat hacherev hamis'hapeches" guards the path to the Eitz HaChaim (Bereishis 3:24). Why keep us from the Eitz HaChaim, when we call the Torah itself "Eitz chaim hi"?

The answer may start with the sin itself. The nachash suggests to Chavah that Hashem's command is not for her good. Hashem, kiv'yachol, is holding out on her and looking out for Himself, so she had better look out for herself. She eats, Adam eats, and when they are caught, Adam blames Chavah and Chavah blames the nachash.

That is the lie the nachash brought into the world: life is "dog eat dog," we are not on the same team, and everyone must protect himself at someone else's expense. Once the lie takes hold, people blame one another, and it only gets worse. One generation later, Kayin feels threatened and kills Hevel. "You do what you have to do to get by" ends in fratricide.

The Radak (Bereishis 3:24), citing the Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 21:9), interprets "mis'hapeches" as describing a guardian that changes form: "sometimes men, sometimes women, sometimes winds, sometimes malachim." Malachim often come in ordinary forms. If we take the Radak further, and seeing the Eitz HaChaim as the Torah, we can suggest an answer to our original question. What blocks the path? The people who seem to threaten us with fiery swords: a spouse, a coworker, an in-law, a boss. They are the shape-shifting malachim at the gate. Our avodah is to stop seeing them as threats, to see through the nachash's lie, and to find our way back to the Eitz HaChaim.

2) **Tov is What Works**

[R. Yehuda Herzl Henkin, in his Chibah Yeseira](#), argues that the word "tov" in our parshah implies a certain judgment, but it is not a moral one. When Yisro watches Moshe judging alone from morning until evening and says "lo tov hadavar hazeh asher atah oseh" (Shemos 18:17), he is not faulting Moshe's character; Moshe's intent was pure and his aim praiseworthy. Yisro faults the method, which is why he finishes, "navol tibol, gam atah gam ha'am hazeh asher imach." You will not last this way. So too when David taunts Avner, "lo tov hadavar hazeh asher asisa" (Shmuel I 26:16), he means that Avner failed at his post, "al asher lo sh'martem al adoneichem." **Tov is what works**, what functions, what succeeds.

"Vayar Elokim ki tov" means creation came out right, which R. Henkin sharpens with the observation of scientists today that if the laws of nature had differed in the slightest measure, neither the world nor living things could have formed at all. And when the whole is surveyed together it is "tov me'od," because the whole is more than the sum of its parts. R. Henkin calls that the essence of ecology: every part of the creation is bound to the others, so one who ruins a single region or wipes out a single species damages not only the local tov but the global tov me'od.

Read that way, "lo tov heyos ha'adam levado" (2:18) stops being a statement about loneliness. R. Henkin points to the order of the pesukim in perek beis: Hashem forms the man, places him in the garden, commands him about the tree, and only then builds the woman. Why only then? Because before the man was set before his first and only challenge, no situation could be called "lo tov." Once the command is issued, Hashem is saying that **leaving the man to stand against it alone will not work**. The solitary man will not overcome his yetzer, his curiosity and his appetites. And the Torah's point is not merely that a wife is no guarantee against sin, which is obvious enough here, since Chava is precisely the one who brought him down. The point is the reverse: alone, he had no chance whatsoever. With a wife it may turn out good and it may not, but without one the absence of good was a certainty.

3) The Garden of Eating

R. Nathan Lopes Cardozo, [in Judaism on Trial](#), takes from the Yerushalmi in Kiddushin that a man will be called to account for the permitted pleasures of this world he did not enjoy in exactly the way he is called to account for what the Torah forbade him. He tells the story of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, who, as an old man, announced he was traveling to Switzerland, to the astonishment of a community that had never known him to take a vacation. He answered that he feared standing before the Heavenly Court and being asked, "Shimshon Rephael, did you see My beautiful mountains in Switzerland?" and having nothing to say.

From there R. Cardozo turns to Adam and Chava, citing the Meshech Chochma on our pasuk: "achol tochel" is a doubled verb, and it does not mean you may eat, but you **must** eat. The first word Hashem speaks to man about his conduct in the garden is a positive command to eat, to benefit, to take pleasure from every tree.

Adam and Chava heard it as a permission, and so they began their religious lives believing that the first step of serving God is a prohibition. R. Cardozo's line is that a man who does not know how to enjoy the world God gave him will end up transgressing, and that this is the warning built into the pesukim: fail to take the pleasure you were commanded to take, and you will go looking for the one you were

told to leave alone. The Torah's opening instruction to mankind was not "don't." It was eat, and enjoy.

4) Eating Fish on Shabbos (Shiur Outline)

[A full shiur outline on fish on Shabbos is attached](#), built for Shabbos Bereishis off four sources: R. Moshe Meir Weiss, *Passionate Judaism*; R. Asher Meir's Meaning in Mitzvot column; R. Ari Enkin on Torah Musings; and a Chabad.org entry.

The spine is the one Shabbos Bereishis supplies for free, namely that the Shabbos menu runs in the order of the creation, fish from day five before meat from day six, because Shabbos is zecher l'maaseh Bereishis. From there it moves through the threefold berachah of days five, six, and seven coming together on the plate, the halachic status of fish as oneg rather than chiyuv, and then the heart of it: why the one creature that needs no shechitah is the one we open the Shabbos meal with. It closes where the parsha closes the circle, with the taninim hagedolim of day five and the livyasan waiting for the seudah l'asid lavo.