

Life is work

Genesis 2:5-6

Now no tree of the field was yet on the earth, neither did any herb of the field yet grow, because the Lord God had not brought rain upon the earth, and there was no human to work the soil. And a mist ascended from the earth and watered the entire surface of the ground. And the Lord God formed a human of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and the human became a living soul.

וְכָל־שִׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בְּאֶרֶץ וְכָל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח כִּי־לֹא הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם
אֵין לְעֹבֵד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה: וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן־הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: וַיִּצְרֹף יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם
עֹפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגֹפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

Why does the verse mention the absence of someone to work the soil? What does it add or explain?

What does it mean that the first life-giving water is not rain, but rather a mist used to create the human who is to do the work?

Rashi Genesis 2:5

BECAUSE GOD HAD NOT CAUSED IT TO RAIN — And what is the reason that God had not caused it to rain? BECAUSE THERE WAS NO MAN TO TILL THE GROUND, and there was, therefore, no one to recognize the good of rain. When Adam came, however, and he realized that it was necessary for the world, he prayed for it and it fell, so that trees and plant life sprang forth.

כי לא המטיר - ומה טעם לא המטיר, לפי שאדם אין לעבוד את האדמה ואין מכיר בטובתם של גשמים,
וכשבא אדם וידע שהם צורך לעולם התפלל עליהם וירדו, וצמחו האילנות והדשאים:

If it has *never* rained, how is the first human meant to recognize the good of rain – something which has not yet existed?

What does it mean to feel lack in creation, and not just in self?

FRAMING THOUGHT – Adam is made of water and earth

Stewardship – humanity’s first task

Genesis 2:15

Now the Lord God took the human, and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָהּ וּלְשֹׁמְרָהּ:

What does it mean to be a steward?

Does agency always come with responsibility?

Genesis 3:23

And the Lord God sent him out of the Garden of Eden, to till the soil, whence he had been taken.

וַיִּשְׁלַחַהּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִגַּן־עֵדֶן לְעַבְדֹת־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִשָּׁם:

Adam of the earth

Genesis 3:19

With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for you were taken therefrom, for dust you are, and to dust you will return."

בְּזַעַת אֶפְיֶיךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוֹבְבֶךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי־עֹפָר אַתָּה וְאֶל־עֹפָר תָּשׁוּב:

Maharal of Prague Tiferet Yisrael 3:2

It appears that Adam’s name teaches something about humanity’s essence, something in which it is unique among all creation. He was called Adam because he was taken from the dust of the earth (*adamah*). Now one might ask, is not everything from the ground (*adamah*)? Why should Adam be specially named for having been created from it? The answer is that the essence of Adam is the most closely related to the ground (*adamah*). The ground’s special nature is as a storehouse of potential, holding the power to actualize all the many things which come from it – plants, trees, and other things. It is all these things in potential. So too, it is the nature of humanity to be ‘in potential,’ acting to actualize its wholeness and perfection. That is why his name was fit to him – Adam *adamah* –

linking him to the ground that is unique in its capacity to bring forth fruits, growth and all things possible for it. So too humanity brings forth its potential to the actual.

ויראה ששמו מורה על דבר העצמי לו, שהוא מיוחד בו האדם מכל. וזה שהוא נקרא 'אדם' על שהוא עפר מן האדמה. ועתה יש לשאול, וכי כל שאר הנמצאים אינם מן האדמה, שיקרא האדם ביחוד בשם 'אדם' על שם שנברא מן האדמה. אבל ענין האדם מתיחס ביותר אל האדמה. וזה כי האדמה היא מיוחדת בזה שהיא בכח, ויש בה יציאה לפעל כל הדברים אשר יוצאים ממנה; צמחים, ואילנות, ושאר כל הדברים, והיא בכח לכל זה. וזהו ענין האדם שהוא בכח, ויוצא שלימותו אל הפעל. ולפיכך שמו ראוי* לו שיהיה משתתף עם האדמה, שהיא מיוחדת לצאת מן הכח אל הפעל בפירות וצמחים וכל אשר שייך אליה, וכן הוא האדם יוצא כחו אל הפעל.

How does one actualize potential? What skills, strengths, understanding is required?

No creature is born complete, but the Maharal sees humanity as the creature whose move from potential to actual is definitive of its nature. What human qualities can be actualized?

What is something within yourself you could bring from potential to actual but you are not? Why not?

A faithful servant

Genesis 15:2

And Abram said, "O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am going childless, and the steward of my household is Eliezer of Damascus?"

מֵה־תִּתֶּן־לִי וְאֵנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עִרְיָי וּבֶן־דַּמְשֶׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא דַּמְשֶׁק אֱלִיעֶזֶר:

Yoma 28b

Eliezer, servant of Abraham, was an Elder and sat in yeshiva, as it is stated: "And Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household, who ruled over all he had" (Genesis 24:2). Rabbi Elazar said: The verse means that he had mastery over the Torah of his master "He is Damascus [Dammesek] Eliezer" (Genesis 15:2). Rabbi Elazar said: The word Dammesek is a contraction of he who draws [doleh] and gives drink [mashke] to others from his master's Torah.

אֱלִיעֶזֶר עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם, זָקֵן וְיוֹשֵׁב בִּישִׁיבָה הִיא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל עֶבְדוֹ זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ הַמְשַׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ", אָמַר רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר: שְׁמוֹשֵׁל בְּתוֹרַת רַבּוֹ. "הוּא דַּמְשֶׁק אֱלִיעֶזֶר" — אָמַר רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר: שְׁדוּלָה וּמִשְׁקָה מִתּוֹרַתוֹ שֶׁל רַבּוֹ לְאַחֵרִים.

What qualities and capacity does one need to draw out, receive and give to others?

How does Eliezer's role as a 'faithful servant' in the material sense strengthen his role as faithful student of Abraham's Torah?

Manifestation or happenstance

Genesis 24:12

And he said, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please cause to happen to me today, and perform loving kindness with my master, Abraham.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם הַקְרָה־נָא לִפְנֵי הַיּוֹם וְעֲשֵׂה־חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם:

The word הקרה comes from the same source as mikre מקרה which means 'happenstance,' and often has a very negative connotation. As in the curses found at the end of the book of Leviticus, where it appears in multiple places. Like this instance:

Leviticus 26:21

And if you treat Me as happenstance, and you do not wish to listen to Me, I will add seven punishments corresponding to your sins:

וְאִם־תִּלְכוּ עִמִּי קָרִי וְלֹא תֹאבֹדוּ לִשְׁמֹעַ לִי וְיִסַּפְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מִכָּה שִׁבְעַת כַּחַטָּאתֵיכֶם:

How does a heroic stance on creation, one which is committed to the potential good, transform 'happenstance' into a higher expression of good?

It is worth noting that the appearance of Israel's archenemy Amalek, our shadow side, is also described as bound up with mikre/keri. As in this source:

Deuteronomy 25:17-18

You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear God.

זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְךָ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם: אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בְּדַרְךָ וַיִּזְנַב בְּךָ כָּל־הַנְּחַשְׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאֶתְּהָ עֵיפָ וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים:

What beliefs and behaviors underlie a relationship to the world build on 'happenstance'?

What beliefs and behaviors flow from that stance?

How might happenstance be the enemy of a heroic posture of pursuing the 'good'?

From servitude to service

Exodus 9:1

The Lord said to Moses, "Come to Pharaoh and speak to him, 'So said the Lord, God of the Hebrews, "Send out My people so that they may serve Me.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְדַבֵּרֵת אֵלָיו כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי:

Rambam Mishne Torah, Laws of Idolatry 1:3

...This concept proceeded and gathered strength among the descendants of Jacob and those who collected around them, until there became a nation within the world which knew God.

When the Jews extended their stay in Egypt, however, they learned from the [Egyptians'] deeds and began worshiping the stars as they did, with the exception of the tribe of Levi, who clung to the mitzvot of the patriarchs - the tribe of Levi never served false gods.

Within a short time, the fundamental principle that Abraham had planted would have been uprooted, and the descendants of Jacob would have returned to the errors of the world and their crookedness. Because of God's love for us, and to uphold the oath He made to Abraham, our patriarch, He brought forth Moses, our teacher, the master of all prophets, and sent him [to redeem the Jews]...

...וְהָיָה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וּמִתְגַּבֵּר בְּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב וּבְנִלְוִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְנִגְשִׁית בְּעוֹלָם אָמָה שֶׁהִיא יוֹדַעַת אֶת ה'. עַד שְׂאָרְכוּ

הַיָּמִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם וְחָזְרוּ לְלַמֵּד מִעֲשִׂיָהֶן וּלְעַבֵּד כּוֹכָבִים כְּמוֹתֵן חוּץ מִשְׁבֵּט לְוִי שֶׁעָמַד בְּמִצְוֹת אָבוֹת. וּמִעוֹלָם לֹא עָבַד שִׁבְט לְוִי עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים. וְכִמְעַט קָט הָיָה הָעֵקֶר שֶׁשָּׁתַל אַבְרָהָם נִעְקָר וְחוֹזְרִין בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב לְטָעוֹת הָעוֹלָם וְתַעֲיוּתוֹ. וּמֵאֲהֶבֶת ה' אוֹתָנוּ וּמִשְׁמֵרוֹ אֶת הַשְּׁבוּעָה לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ רַבֵּן שֶׁל כָּל הַנְּבִיאִים וְשִׁלְחוֹ...

Whom do you serve?

What sides of yourself are limited by the masters you serve and which are enhanced?

