

This Week in Torah *Bereshit*

Genesis 2: 10—“A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches.”

Adam had a job to do. In the Garden of Eden, he was supposed to tend to it. From this comes the notion that we as Adam's heirs are to be *Shomrei Ha'adamah*, protectors of the land. Yet, according to the rabbis, this job was a complete caretaker's responsibility. According to the RaDaK [Rabbi David Kimhi of southern France who lived in the 12th/13th century], Adam was not in charge of watering the garden. The 12th century Spanish sage Ibn Ezra noted while there was one river which flowed in such a way that it watered the entire garden, this river then branched in 4 directions to offer this gift to the rest of the world.

This means that verse of Torah may not only be viewed literally as a *pashat* or simple explanation. It might be seen as part of an allegory to express God's imminent presence to water the souls of humanity. Humankind can only do so much to sustain life, the truest life force belongs to God!

Enter the world of the mystics and the Kabbalists. There are 10 spheres of spiritual realms in which we can experience the divine *middot*/attributes. The top five are: *keter*/crown, *chochmah*/wisdom, *binah*/understanding, *Din*/law, *chesed*/kindness. The mystics understand *keter* is the most elusive like the Garden itself; we know it exists but only a few can experience its radiance. But there are 4 other tributaries from this palmary to give a taste or a realm of the Divine. We can be sustained by the “water” from these tributaries but the head-tire can only be encountered by the most pious who have spent years preparing to access it thru prayer/meditation, study and righteous living.

According to a Midrash, once Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, God placed sword wielding angels at its entrance to prohibit their return. This is yet another beautiful allegory to show us how difficult, if not an impossibility, to return. This implies the truest challenge to one's ability to completely knowing God!

In Stephen Hawkins' Brief History of the World, Hawkins makes the observation that there will always be a gap between absolute knowledge and human attainment. But he notes that there is an inverse proportional relationship [$X=k/y$, for the physicists among us] to what we know and what we don't know. That gap is the place of awe and amazement; it intensifies as the gap grows smaller!

Here is my desired take-away for you based on this:

May your spiritual growth continue as you paddle up stream to find the source of your faith.

May you explore the spiritual tributaries and be refreshed by what you drink in.

May you be aware of your strengths and weaknesses as you explore; realizing the sense of awe should outweigh the frustrations of the difficulties you face in order to move ahead.

May you be blessed like Adam to know it means to tend the metaphoric garden of this earthly realm.