

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel Tov to Yosef Hettleman on his aufruf this morning and his upcoming marriage to Shaindel Bider. Mazel Tov to his parents, Mark and Ilana Hettleman, and to his grandmother, Dorothy Hettleman. Mazel tov and welcome to all the family and friends who are here to share in the simcha. May Yosef and Ilana be *zoche* to build a *bayis ne-eman b'Yisrael!*

I want to thank the drasha sponsors, Zvi and Tzilah Raczkowski, who are sponsoring in memory of Zvi's father, Norman Raczkowski, z'l, whose yahrtzeit is the 30th of Tishrei. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*, and may they be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

I also want to thank all of you for making this Yom Tov season at Shomrei Emunah so inspiring and uplifting. The *tefillos* on the Yamim Noraim were so beautiful and sincere, and the very lively dancing on Simchas Torah was a true expression of *kavod* and *simchas haTorah* and a manifestation of all the passion and intensity of the past month. May we build on this energizing momentum in the year ahead as we look forward to a year of continued *bracha* in our own lives and for the shul. I would also like to sincerely thank everyone who contributed to purchase *Chassan Torah* for me on Simchas Torah. It was an honor to represent you as we finished reading the Torah and began the next exciting cycle of Torah. May we celebrate many more years of spiritual growth together, in good health and happiness.

Despite all the resolutions and commitments we have made over the past month and a half, we know that our *teshuva* is still not complete.”

Why? What is the barrier in front of us, preventing us from full *teshuva*?

I believe the greatest challenge in achieving complete *teshuva* is fully accepting responsibility. We do *teshuva* only when we feel responsible for our actions. But there is so much blame we place elsewhere—on other people and on our circumstances; there is so much in our lives that we do not take responsibility for...

The human tendency to avoid moral responsibility for misdeeds is as old as man himself. When Adam is confronted about his sin of eating from the *eitz ha-daas tov va-ra*, he shifts the blame to Chava.

בראשית פרק ג: (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה עִמָּי הִיא נָתְנָה-לִּי מִן-הָעֵץ וָאֲכַל:

The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me from the tree, and I ate.

When Chava is confronted, she too shifts the blame--to the snake.

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים לְאִשָּׁה מִה־נָּתַתְּ מֵהָאִשָּׁה הַנְּתַתְּ הַשִּׂיָּאֲנִי וָאֲכַל:

And God said to the woman, “What is this you have done!” The woman replied, “The snake duped me, and I ate.”

In some ways, even worse than the sin of eating from the *eitz ha-daas*, was the fact that, even when accused by Hashem, Adam and Chava did not own up to their culpability.

The Roman philosopher **Seneca** is credited with the saying “*Errare humanum est,*” meaning to err is human. Mistakes are part of the human condition. We were created with a *yetzer hara*.

קהלת פרק ז פסוק כ: (כ) כִּי אָדָם אֵין צַדִּיק בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה-טוֹב וְלֹא יִחַטָּא:

Shlomo HaMelech taught in **Koheles** that there is nobody exempt from sin.

However, to deny culpability, to place the blame on someone else for our mistakes, as if one had no choice, as if one is powerless over his own decisions, that is not human—it is in fact a denial of one's distinct sense of humanity.

In today's *kriah*, the Torah teaches that human beings were created in the image of God.

בראשית פרק א: (כו) וַיֵּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ

The **Seforno** writes that man is like God in his ability to make decisions; to choose his way in life; to control his own destiny.

ספורנו בראשית פרק א פסוק כו: כדמותנו. . ובקצת ידמה האדם לקל יתברך, הפועל בבחירה.

The **Rambam** writes that one of the worst mistakes a human being can make is attributing his life choices to fate—blaming others for his decisions. Man has the ability to choose his own path in life, and must take responsibility for his life choices.

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ה הלכה ב

אל יעבור במחשבתך דבר זה שאומרים טפשי אומה"ע ורוב גולמי בני ישראל שהקב"ה גוזר על האדם מתחלת ברייתו להיות צדיק או רשע, אין הדבר כן אלא כל אדם ראוי לו להיות צדיק כמשה רבינו או רשע כירבעם או חכם או א סכל או רחמן או אכזרי או כילי או שוע וכן שאר כל הדעות, ואין לו מי שיכפהו ולא גוזר עליו ולא מי שמושכו לאחד משני הדרכים אלא הוא מעצמו ומדעתו נוטה לאי זו דרך שירצה, הוא שירמיהו אמר מפי עליון לא תצא הרעות והטוב, כלומר אין הבורא גוזר על האדם להיות טוב ולא להיות רע, וכיון שכן הוא נמצא זה החוטא הוא הפסיד את עצמו, ולפיכך ראוי לו לבכות ולקונן על חטאיו ועל מה שעשה לנפשו וגמלה רעה, הוא שכתוב אחריו מה יתאונו אדם חי וגו', וחזר ואמר הואיל ורשותנו בידינו ומדעתנו עשינו כל הרעות ראוי לנו לחזור בתשובה ולעזוב רשענו שהרשות עתה בידינו הוא שכתוב אחריו נחפשה דרכינו ונחקרה ונשובה וגו'.

*Permit not your thought to dwell upon that which ridiculous fools of other peoples and a majority of foolish individuals among the children of Israel say, that the Holy One, blessed is He decrees at the very embryonic state of every man whether he should be just or wicked. The matter is not so. Every man is capable of being as just as Moshe our Master or as wicked as Yerovam, wise or senseless, merciful or human, miser or philanthropist, and so in all other tendencies. There is none to either force things upon him or to decree things against him; either to pull him one way or draw him another way, but he alone, of his own free will, with the consent of his mind, bends to any path he may desire to follow. It is concerning this that Jeremiah said: "Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not the evil and the good" ([Lam. 3. 38](#)), which is as if saying, the Creator decrees not that man should be either good or bad. Now, this being so, the consequence hereof is that the sinner alone brought harm upon himself. It is, therefore, meet that he should lament and shed tears because he sinned, and because of what he did to his soul and rewarded it with evil. Even this is the meaning of the succeeding Verse: "Wherefore doth a living man complain, or a strong man? Because of his sins" (*Ibid.*) Again, he continues, in the succeeding Verse seeing that it all is in our power, and we did all the evil of our own free will and accord, it is, indeed meet for us to turn in repentance and abandon our wickedness, for our free will is in our hands now as well as at the time we committed the sins saying: "Let us search and try our ways, and return to the Lord" (*Ibid.*—40).*

The Rambam calls this a fundamental principle of Torah and mitzvos—that God does not force our hand in life.

הלכה ג

ודבר זה עיקר גדול הוא והוא עמוד התורה והמצוה שנאמר ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים, וכתוב ראה אנכי נותן לפניכם היום, כלומר שהרשות בידיכם וכל שיחפוץ האדם לעשות ממעשה בני האדם עושה בין טובים בין רעים, ומפני זה הענין נאמר מי יתן והיה לבכם זה להם, כלומר שאין הבורא כופה בני האדם ולא גוזר עליהן לעשות טובה או רעה אלא הכל מסור להם.

*And, this matter is a great and component part, the very pillar of the Torah and its precepts, even as it is said: "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil" ([Deut. 30.15](#)), and it is, moreover, written: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and curse" (*Ibid.* 11.26). This is as if saying, the power is in your hand, and whatever human activity man may be inclined to carry on he has a free will to elect either good or evil. And, because of this very subject it is said: "Oh, who would grant that they had such a heart as this, to fear Me, and to keep all my commandments at all times" (*Ibid.* 5.26). This is as if saying, that the Creator forces not the sons of man, and makes no decrees against them that they should do good or evil, but that it all is in their own keeping*

According to **Rav Yitzchak Hutner**, one of the greatest threats to the survival of humanity is the denial of free choice—the perpetuation of the myth that man is just a pawn of his circumstances. This is a falsehood that frees man from any responsibility.

אגרות פחד יצחק אגרת מב ט"ו תמוז תשכ"ד

וכמו כן, יש בכחה של תרומתו לכוון את הלב כלפי המרכזיות של צורת אדם. לדעתנו, זה הוא כעיקר העיקרים בתקופתנו. כי אבי אבות הטומאה של תקופתנו הוא הזלזול בצורת אדם. ולא עוד אלא שיש בזה סוד עמוק. והנני בזה למסור את הענין ברמיזא. הנה עומק יחודה של צורת אדם, הוא בכח הבחירה הטבוע בצורה זו.

How does the freedom of the human will express itself? A human being does not assert his freedom merely by saying "yes" to all that is presented to him. We live in a society which is far from perfect. We are each born with a set of intuitions, instincts, and drives. If we merely nod our heads in agreement to all those external forces which seem so powerful, then we are being passive and devoid of personality. When we have the courage to say no to that which we understand is morally wrong or ethically vapid, that is when we express our free will.

That was the greatness of *Avraham halvri*. According to Chazal in **Pesikta Rabbasi**, he was given that name because he was not afraid to stand on the “other side,” for what he believed to be right.

פסיקתא רבתי פסקא לג: מהו העברי, שכל העולם כולו לעבר אחד והוא היה לעבר אחד

The late Rabbi Aaron Levine, hy'd, the renowned "**Reisha Rav**," who was killed by the Nazis (yemach shemam vezichram) in 1941, had a novel interpretation of the the famous pasuk from *Koheles*, ומותר האדם מן הבהמה אין. This is usually understood as a negative sentiment, meaning that the preeminence of man over beast is nothing. However, the Reisha Rav prefers to give that Pasuk an upbeat interpretation. He says: "and the preeminence of man over beast is — *ayin*." What is it that gives man his distinction? What is it that makes man different from the animal world, superior to the rest of the natural world? An animal has no choice — no freedom — and therefore must say "yes" to his drives, to the world in which he lives. In contrast, man can say "*ayin*," which literally means "no." He has capacity to face this world and announce that he will not submit to it, that he will accept the challenge and respond "*ayin*," when necessary.

Hashem asked Adam and Chava why they disobeyed Him, but He did not ask the nachash why he did what he did. This is because animals are products of their circumstances and instincts, and they don't have free will.

It is only man, created in the image of God, who has control, and who can say "no" to that which is unseemly *and* below his dignity. And when he says "no" to all that is wrong, immoral, unethical, and ungodly, he is expressing free will and being Godly.

Albert Einstein wrote "*He who joyfully marches to music, rank and file, has already earned my contempt. He has been given a large brain by mistake, since for him the spinal cord would surely suffice.*" Unfortunately, Adam and Chava did not say no when faced with the temptation of the eitz ha-daas. And they compounded the sin by pretending that it was out of their control.

When Adam and Chava sinned, God called out “Where are you?”

הכתב והקבלה בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק ג פסוק ט: איכה. המבקש לדעת מקום המבוקש יאמר איפה הוא, איפה הם רועים, איפה שמואל ודוד, איפה לקטת היום, אבל השואל איה הוא אינו כ"א מתמ' שלא מצאו במקומו הרגיל (ווא איזט ער געבליבען?) כמו רואיו יאמרו אי, איה הסדיך הראשונים, איה שרה אשתך כלומר מדוע איננה פה עמך, וכן כאן איכה? פי' מדוע נחבאת ואינך במקומך הרגיל (ווא ביסט דוא הינגעקאממען?) לכן לא תסמוך לו פעולה לאמר אי היית, איה הלכת, כאשר יאמר איפה היית בייסדי ארץ, איפה לקטת, אבל הוא מוכשר לכנוים אי איה איכה ולא כן איפה (רל"ש), ואמרו (סנהדרין) איכה לאן נטה לבך, וכפירוש הגר"א, איכה התבונן בעצמך איך נפלת ממעלתך, אי' מדרגתך?.

The sefer **Hakesav Ve-hakabala** writes that there are different words in *lashon ha-kodesh* for “where.” The Hebrew word “*eifo*” is a question and means where are you? “*Aye*” or “*ayeka*” is a

rhetorical question and means why are you not in the place you are supposed to be? The question to Adam and Chava was a rhetorical question: Why are you not asserting your control over your lives and destiny—your humanity—your *tzelem Elokim*; your ability to say no to morally wrong choices.

Hashem was giving *mussar*—telling them that what they did was beneath them. They were in a sense “out of their place” when they sinned. But instead of owning up to their sins—they moved further “out of their place” as human beings by attempting to shift the blame.

When **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski** was once asked about the mission of a Jew, he quoted the pasuk in *Tehillim*

תהלים פרק קמה פסוק יב: (יב) להודיעו לְבָנֵי הָאָדָם גְבוּרַתְּוֹ וְכְבוֹד הַדָּר מִלְכוּתוֹ:
“*lehodia livnei ha'adam gevurosav*” — and he gave it a Chassidic twist. People need to know their strengths, he said; they have to be confident in **themselves**.

He continued “*Even when I was a boy and I would be mischievous, my father never screamed at me, he remembered. “Instead, he’d call me over and say, ‘This is not like you.’ Those few words served as a guide all my life: ‘You are too good for such an act. You are a Jew. You have a G-dly soul. You are a soldier in Hashem’s army. Such behavior is not becoming for a person with good middos like you.’ That’s the right approach in chinuch. Separate the person from the deed that he did or the words that he said. When you show this kind of trust in a child, you can expect good results.*”

It is the question of “*ayeka*.” Have you forgotten who you are, and your ability to make moral choices, to choose good over evil?

Unfortunately, we all have lapses. As **Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi**, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, noted, this call of “*ayeka*” was not directed only to the first humans. It echoes in every generation. The lesson of Adam and Chava is that our tradition looks upon us not as robots or puppets, but as free moral agents who know the difference between right and wrong and who have the capacity to choose between them.

Of course, our biological inheritance, our childhood experiences, and our environmental conditioning exercise a vital influence over us. These factors are real and powerful, but the human will, *בחירה הפשית*, is no less powerful. God created us in His image. Human beings are not only shaped by our environment, we also shape our environment. We are not only the creatures of circumstance, we are also the creators of our circumstances.

As the **Rambam** teaches,

...ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים, וכתביב ראה אנכי נותן לפניכם היום, כלומר שהרשות בידכם וכל שיחפוץ האדם לעשות ממעשה בני האדם עושה בין טובים בין רעים,

one of the fundamental *pesukim* in the Torah is when God affirms that man was given the ability and responsibility to choose right from wrong.

That is the answer to *ayeka*-- As long as a person is actively choosing...he is in his place. And it is only when we believe that there is a right and wrong, that we have the power to make proper choices and we can truly live meaningful lives.

May we learn to take responsibility for our choices and our lives, and may Hashem restore humanity to its rightful place...with a return to Yerushalayim and the *Beis Hamikdahs..bimhera viyamenu...amen*.