

Parshat Bereishit 5779

In this week's parsha we see the first instance of man being confronted by Another, in this case G-d. Instantaneously, we see that the reaction is avoiding responsibility. The Lord G-d called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid". Then He asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" "The man said, "The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate". "And the LORD G-d said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman replied, "The serpent duped me, and I ate" (Bereishis 3:9-12)"

We see here that both Adam and Chava blame someone else and avoid their personal responsibility and part in the sin. The children are no better. We see this when Cain kills Hevel and responds with "am I my brother's keeper?" Rabbi Sacks explains that this is an instance of avoiding moral responsibility. Why should I, Cain, be concerned with the concerns of others?

In the next Torah portion we meet Noach. He lived in a wicked generation; yet, he only took responsibility for himself and saved himself and his own family from the flood. He took no communal responsibility. He didn't try and convince his generation to repent.

But then Avraham comes along in parshas Lech Lecha and connects and speaks to G-d. However, he also preaches to others and tries to convert them. He takes both personal and communal responsibility. The people do not listen to him and so he moves to the other side of the river to escape. You would think this would make him a recluse and focus only on his connection to G-d, but no, he starts looking after Lot and even pleads with G-d to save anyone righteous from 5 evil cities about to be destroyed. He knew what responsibility meant, both on a personal and communal level. We live in a world with others so we have to understand them. Other religions sometimes separate their highest most 'holy' people from others - Nuns, Monks. In Judaism it's different; Rabbis are integrated members of society and take on communal responsibilities.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe comments on the words "Where are you?" saying that this call was not directed only to Adam and Chava. It is repeated in every generation as G-d gave us freedom but with this freedom comes responsibility which was not adopted by Adam and Chava. We see in Sefer Shmuel a classic case of passing the blame which results in punishment. In chapt 15: 12-24 Shaul denies responsibility for not fully destroying Amalek. He

blames the people by saying they had Rachmanos on the animals. This results in him losing his kingship.

We learn In Avos 6:6 the phrase נושא בעול עם חברו *Lifting of a burden with one's friend* We see this throughout Tanach, where helping another means taking on responsibility for a greater purpose. For example, When Bnei Yisrael were fighting Amalek in Shemos, Moshe held up his hands and Bnei Yisrael were successful. When, Moshe became tired, Aharon and Chur helped hold his hands up, recognising that this was for the greater purpose of helping Klal Yisrael.

We also see Rus contradicting an integral part of her nature of Tznius in order to uncover Boaz's feet. She risked her life since she could have been killed, in order that Naomi could continue the name of her dead husband and sons. Boaz said that this kindness is greater than the first act of joining Naomi. She took responsibility in order to continue the family line which ultimately leads to David HaMelech being born.

Adam and Chava escape their opportunity to admit their faults and to accept responsibility. Yirmiyahu says in 2:35 הַנְּבִיִּי נִשְׁפָּט אוֹמְרָה עַל־אֶמְרָתִי לֹא חָטָאתִי: "Behold, I will bring you to judgment For saying, 'I have not sinned'". This idea is reiterated in the Bereishit Rabba 19:22 which explains that the word "וָאָכַל" ("and I ate") is written as if it were in the future tense, showing that Adams actual response to G-d was "I ate and I will continue eating." He boldly expressed his intention to continue disobeying G-d's command and to once again eat from the forbidden tree. According to this understanding, Adam felt no remorse for his action and openly planned to commit the sin yet again in the future. Rav Meir Aryeh Segal, in his Imrei Da'at, explains that the midrash is teaching us that failing to admit to our mistakes and avoiding responsibility for them is, to some extent, as if one is planning to repeat them. If we blame other people or other factors for our mistakes, then we are not truly committing to change. Therefore, if we dismiss our failure with an excuse, rather than accepting responsibility and acknowledging our guilt, we are guaranteed to repeat the failure in the future when we encounter a different challenge. Consequently, by blaming Chava for his mistake, Adam was technically, announcing his intent to repeat it.

This midrash teaches that we should avoid the natural tendency to find excuses for our mistakes and to cast the blame on others. When we stumble, we must recognize that we failed and use it to strengthen us for the future. We should aim to be like Avraham and Rus who took responsibility and acted for the sake of the community as well as themselves.