

Parshat Bereshit 5781

Orientation-Where is Gan Eden?

The Torah gives us some clues but doesn't reveal its location. From the Pesukim we learn that there are a few places referred to as, Eden, "וַיֵּטֶע ה' אֱלֹקִים גֵּן בְּעֵדֵן מִקְדָּם" "*Hashem, G-d, planted a garden eastward, in Eden*"(2:8). The word מקדם translates, "eastward". I would like to look at this root of מ.ד.ק in Hebrew as it appears 4 times in our Parsha, first in the placing of the garden, second in describing river Hiddekel(2:14), another when G-d "*placed at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubs and the flame of the whirling sword*"(3:24) and last, in "*the land of Nod, east of Eden*"(4:16), the place Cain went to after killing Abel.

Before the compass was invented, the world was oriented eastwards (the word orientation came from orient=east), and the sun was the main way man used to find directions. East was the old north, the front of every map. The words קדם=east and קדימה=forwards come from the same root in Hebrew. When Avraham and Lot split, they stand facing east and talk about north and south as left & right when deciding to divide the Promised Land, but Lot looks the wrong way, lifts up his eyes to Sodom (that is like "*the garden of Hashem*") and leaves Canaan. By going eastwards, Lot shows he is making his own path and after that G-d promises the land to Avraham's descendants.

It seems there is a movement away from G-d directed eastwards. The first to do so are Adam and Cain. Then 20 generations later, the sons of Avraham's concubines are sent away "קִדְמָה אֶל אֶרֶץ קְדָם" (25:6) and Avraham's rejected (extended) family - Moab, Amon & Edom establish a place near the land of Israel but from the east. The third big wave eastwards were the rejected firstlings of the tribes, Reuben (Gad) & Menashe.

We can see that the further one is from G-d the further east he is. Why does the east represent going away from G-d? In brief, the sun is there. The sun represents the idea of Avoda Zara, worshiping other powers other than Hashem. The sun, being the most powerful physical thing that was known to mankind, which brings life and sets the time and direction, was very tempting as a G-d. The entrance to the Holy Temple was at the east but the Kodesh Hakodashim was at the west and the sun is bowing towards Hashem every day.

East is the front side, קדם, the horizon, very far, shining very brightly, the west is old, close to earth, the twilight zone. Hashem's presence in our world is davka at the west (ב"ב כה), where the sun sets and comes closer to us to an intensity that we can even look at it. East is the beginning, Ein-Sof, the place where the divine light appears. In our

world Shechina is in the west because it is the end, and last and has in it completion. The place where the sun sets, that is where everything comes together.

In Ezekiel 8 there is a very disturbing vision. The prophet, who was placed in Babylon, was taken to Jerusalem several years before the Churban. He gets a private tour of the different abominations happening in the Mikdash and the last was the most terrible one:

"And He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east."

"וַיָּבֵא אֹתִי אֶל חֹצֵר בַּיִת ה' הַפְּנִימִית וְהִנֵּה פֶתַח הַיֵּכָל ה' בֵּין הָאוֹלָם וּבֵין הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בְּעֵשְׂרִים וְחַמְשָׁה אִישׁ (יחזקאל ח', ט"ז) "אֲחֲרֵיהֶם אֶל הַיֵּכָל ה' וּפְנֵיהֶם קִדְמָה וְהֵמָּה מִשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּתִם קִדְמָה לְשִׁמְשׁ

I don't know how this scene could have been described more dramatically than by the Tanach. Opposite the Heichal, the holiest place in the mikdash, under the sky, are 25 people bowing... to the sun! With their backsides facing the Heichal! It is hard to grasp that. After that happens, G-d begins destroying His city, and talks about the exile and "מקדש מעט". Ezekiel's last sight of Jerusalem is The Presence of Hashem ascending Jerusalem and going east of the city (11:23).

Am Israel didn't merit to be in Eretz Israel and pray towards the west. Most of the Jews in exile have been davening towards Mizrach, eastwards, to Hashem (unlike in Ezekiel), doing a Tikun for their sins. With time, Am Israel is returning back to our land and praying to see the Shechina to return to the place it was before the Galut.

While writing this Dvar Torah I found we are not the only people who think we need to do a Tikun for turning the wrong way, this beautiful Mishnah (about שמחת בית השואבה) describes what they used to say in Bayis Sheni:

סוכה פרק ה, משנה ד

ועמדו שני כהנים בשער העליון שיווד מעזרת ישראל לעזרת נשים ושני חצוצרות בידיהן... היו תוקעין והולכין עד שמגיעין לשער היוצא מזרח הגיעו לשער היוצא ממזרח הפכו פניהן למערב ואמרו אבותינו שהיו במקום הזה אחוריהם אל היכל ה' ופניהם קדמה והמה משתחוים קדמה לשמש ואנו ליה עינינו ר' יהודה אומר היו שובין ואומרין אנו ליה וליה עינינו: (סוכה פרק ה, משנה ד