

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Breishit
October 22, 2022 ** 27 Tishrei, 5783

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Breishit in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3137/jewish/Bereishit-in-a-Nutshell.htm

G-d creates the world in six days. On the first day He makes darkness and light. On the second day He forms the heavens, dividing the “upper waters” from the “lower waters.” On the third day He sets the boundaries of land and sea, and calls forth trees and greenery from the earth. On the fourth day He fixes the position of the sun, moon and stars as timekeepers and illuminators of the earth. Fish, birds and reptiles are created on the fifth day; land animals, and then the human being, on the sixth. G-d ceases work on the seventh day, and sanctifies it as a day of rest. G-d forms the human body from the dust of the earth, and blows into his nostrils a “living soul.” Originally Man is a single person, but deciding that “it is not good that man be alone,” G-d takes a “side” from the man, forms it into a woman, and marries them to each other.

Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden, and commanded not to eat from the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.” The serpent persuades Eve to violate the command, and she shares the forbidden fruit with her husband. Because of their sin, it is decreed that man will experience death, returning to the soil from which he was formed, and that all gain will come only through struggle and hardship. Man is banished from the Garden.

Eve gives birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain quarrels with Abel and murders him, and becomes a rootless wanderer. A third son, Seth, is born to Adam; Seth’s eighth-generation descendant, Noah, is the only righteous man in a corrupt world.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 42:5-21

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/573554/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The *haftarah* of this week's reading opens with a statement by "the Almighty G-d, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who laid out the earth and made grow from it." This echoes the Torah portion's recounting of the creation of the

world in six days.

G-d speaks to the prophet Isaiah, reminding him of his life's purpose and duty, namely that of arousing the Jewish people to return to being a light unto the nations, "To open blind eyes, to bring prisoners out of a dungeon; those who sit in darkness out of a prison."

The prophecy continues with a discussion regarding the Final Redemption, and the song that all of creation will sing to G-d on that day. G-d promises to punish all the nations that have persecuted Israel while they were exiled. The prophet also rebukes Israel for their errant ways, but assures them that they will return to the correct path and will be redeemed.

Food For Thought

The Art of Listening – Breishit by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bereishit/the-art-of-listening/>

What exactly was the first sin? What was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Is this kind of knowledge a bad thing, such that it had to be forbidden and was only acquired through sin? Isn't knowing the difference between good and evil essential to being human? Isn't it one of the highest forms of knowledge? Surely God would want humans to have it? Why then did He forbid the fruit that produced it?

In any case, did not Adam and Eve already have this knowledge before eating the fruit, precisely in virtue of being "in the image and likeness of God"? Surely this was implied in the very fact that they were commanded by God: Be fruitful and multiply. Have dominion over nature. Do not eat from the tree. For someone to understand a command, they must know it is good to obey and bad to disobey. So they already had, at least potentially, the knowledge of Good and Evil. What then changed when they ate the fruit? These questions go so deep that they threaten to make the entire narrative incomprehensible.

Maimonides understood this. That is why he turned to this episode at almost the very beginning of The Guide for the Perplexed (Book 1, Chapter 2). His answer though, is perplexing. Before eating the fruit, he says, the first humans knew the difference between truth and falsehood. What they acquired by eating the fruit was knowledge of "things generally accepted."^[1] But what does Maimonides mean by "things generally accepted"? It is generally accepted that murder is evil, and honesty good. Does Maimonides mean that morality is mere convention? Surely not. What he means is that after eating the fruit, the man and woman were embarrassed that they were naked, and that is a mere matter of social convention because not everyone is embarrassed by nudity. But how can we equate being embarrassed that you are naked with "knowledge of Good and Evil"? It does not seem to be that sort of thing at all. Conventions of dress have more to do with aesthetics than ethics.

It is all very unclear, or at least it was to me until I came across one of the more fascinating moments in the history of the Second World War.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, Americans knew they were about to enter a war against a nation, Japan, whose culture they did not understand. So they commissioned one of the great anthropologists of the twentieth century, Ruth Benedict, to explain the Japanese to them, which she did. After the war, she published her ideas in a book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.^[2] One of her central insights was the difference between shame cultures and guilt cultures. In shame cultures the highest value is honour. In guilt cultures it is righteousness. Shame is feeling bad that we have failed to live up to the expectations others have of us. Guilt is what we feel when we fail to live up to what our own conscience demands of us. Shame is other-directed. Guilt is inner-directed.

Philosophers, among them Bernard Williams, have pointed out that shame cultures are usually visual. Shame itself has to do with how you appear (or imagine you appear) in other peoples' eyes. The instinctive reaction to shame is to wish you were invisible, or somewhere else. Guilt, by contrast, is much more internal. You cannot escape it by becoming invisible or being elsewhere. Your conscience accompanies you wherever you go, regardless of whether you are seen by others. Guilt cultures are cultures of the ear, not the eye.

With this contrast in mind we can now understand the story of the first sin. It is all about appearances, shame, vision, and the eye. The serpent says to the woman: "God knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing Good and Evil." That is, in fact, what happens: "The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked." It was appearance of the tree that the Torah emphasises: "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and desirable to the eyes, and that the tree was attractive as a means to gain intelligence." The key emotion in the story is shame. Before eating the fruit the couple were "naked, but unashamed." After eating it they feel shame and seek to hide. Every element of the story – the fruit, the tree, the nakedness, the shame – has the visual element typical of a shame culture.

But in Judaism we believe that God is heard not seen. The first humans "heard God's Voice moving about in the garden with the wind of the day." Replying to God, the man says, "I heard Your Voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." Note the deliberate, even humorous, irony of what the couple did. They heard God's Voice in the garden, and they "hid themselves from God among the trees of the garden." But you can't hide from a voice. Hiding means trying not to be seen. It is an immediate, intuitive response to shame. But the Torah is the supreme example of a culture of guilt, not shame, and you cannot escape guilt by hiding. Guilt has nothing to do with appearances and everything to do with conscience, the voice of God in the human heart.

The sin of the first humans in the Garden of Eden was that they followed their eyes, not their ears. Their actions were determined by what they saw, the beauty of the tree, not by what they heard, namely the word of God commanding them not to eat from it. The result was that they did indeed acquire a knowledge of Good and Evil, but it was the wrong kind. They acquired an ethic of shame, not guilt; of appearances not conscience. That, I believe, is what Maimonides meant by his distinction between true-and-false and “things generally accepted.” A guilt ethic is about the inner voice that tells you, “This is right, that is wrong”, as clearly as “This is true, that is false”. But a shame ethic is about social convention. It is a matter of meeting or not meeting the expectations others have of you.

Shame cultures are essentially codes of social conformity. They belong to groups where socialisation takes the form of internalising the values of the group such that you feel shame – an acute form of embarrassment – when you break them, knowing that if people discover what you have done you will lose honour and ‘face’.

Judaism is precisely not that kind of morality, because Jews do not conform to what everyone else does. Abraham was willing, say the Sages, to be on one side while all the rest of the world was on the other. Haman says about Jews, “Their customs are different from those of all other people” (Esther 3:8). Jews have often been iconoclasts, challenging the idols of the age, the received wisdom, the “spirit of the age”, the politically correct.

If Jews had followed the majority, they would have disappeared long ago. In the biblical age they were the only monotheists in a pagan world. For most of the post-biblical age they lived in societies in which they and their faith were shared by only a tiny minority of the population. Judaism is a living protest against the herd instinct. Ours is the dissenting voice in the conversation of humankind. Hence the ethic of Judaism is not a matter of appearances, of honour and shame. It is a matter of hearing and heeding the voice of God in the depths of the soul.

The drama of Adam and Eve is not about apples or sex or original sin or “the Fall” – interpretations the non-Jewish West has given to it. It is about something deeper. It is about the kind of morality we are called on to live. Are we to be governed by what everyone else does, as if morality were like politics: the will of the majority? Will our emotional horizon be bounded by honour and shame, two profoundly social feelings? Is our key value appearance: how we seem to others? Or is it something else altogether, a willingness to heed the word and will of God? Adam and Eve in Eden faced the archetypal human choice between what their eyes saw (the tree and its fruit) and what their ears heard (God’s command). Because they chose the first, they felt shame, not guilt. That is one form of “knowledge of Good and Evil”, but from a Jewish perspective, it is the wrong form.

Judaism is a religion of listening, not seeing. That is not to say there are no visual elements in Judaism. There are, but they are not primary. Listening is the sacred

task. The most famous command in Judaism is Shema Yisrael, “Listen, Israel.” What made Abraham, Moses, and the prophets different from their contemporaries was that they heard the voice that to others was inaudible. In one of the great dramatic scenes of the Bible, God teaches Elijah that He is not in the whirlwind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the “still, small voice.”

It takes training, focus and the ability to create silence in the soul to learn how to listen, whether to God or to a fellow human being. Seeing shows us the beauty of the created world, but listening connects us to the soul of another, and sometimes to the soul of the Other, God as He speaks to us, calls to us, summoning us to our task in the world.

If I were asked how to find God, I would say, Learn to listen. Listen to the song of the universe in the call of birds, the rustle of trees, the crash and heave of the waves. Listen to the poetry of prayer, the music of the Psalms. Listen deeply to those you love and who love you. Listen to the words of God in the Torah and hear them speak to you. Listen to the debates of the Sages through the centuries as they tried to hear the texts’ intimations and inflections.

Don’t worry about how you or others look. The world of appearances is a false world of masks, disguises, and concealments. Listening is not easy. I confess I find it formidably hard. But listening alone bridges the abyss between soul and soul, self and other, I and the Divine.

Jewish spirituality is the art of listening.[3]

[1] Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, I:2. [2] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1946. [3] We will continue our theme of listening in Judaism later in this series, particularly in the essays for Bamidbar and Eikev.

[Being God's Partner Is A Big To Do by Rabbi Allan Berkowitz](https://truah.org/resources/allan-berkowitz-parshat-bereshit-moraltorah/)

<https://truah.org/resources/allan-berkowitz-parshat-bereshit-moraltorah/>

With the wonderful scent of warm challah wafting, who could blame us for missing the Hebrew grammatical problem that Friday night Kiddush presents? And yet, there it is: a beacon of puzzlement signaling for attention.

The opening chapters of Genesis reveal the daily accounting of flora, fauna, earthly, and heavenly creations. And then it is time for Shabbat. The Torah offers these familiar words, which our tradition has appropriated for Friday night Kiddush:

The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that had been undertaken: God rested on the seventh day from doing any of the work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy — **and ceased from all the work of creation that God created to do.**

That last verse, **Genesis 2:3**, is the problem at hand. Both in Hebrew — *asher bara Elohim la’asot* — and in English — “that God created to do” — the verse ends with the infinitive verb “to do.” The problem is that in both Hebrew and English we don’t typically end sentences with infinitives. While this might be cast aside as the

domain of grammar geeks, this is Torah we're talking about, and any anomaly is grounds for meaning-making by our commentators. In this case, the world depends upon it.

The 18th century Italian commentator Moshe Chaim Luzzato offers us this insight. In his introduction to the Kabbalah ([Kalach Pitchei Chokhmah 61:13](#)), Luzzato teaches:

It is therefore obvious that the original creation still needed to be completed. This is the meaning of '...that God created to do' (Genesis 2:3). God started in order that the work should be completed by humankind.

Moshe Chaim Luzzato is teaching us that God intentionally left creation unfinished and desires that humankind take up the task. We humans were not only created during that first week, we were inaugurated, elevated, and tasked to be God's partners in creation. God started the sentence — "that God created to do" — but we are meant to finish it.

By leaving the verse unfinished — "And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy; and ceased from all the work of creation that God created to do" — the Torah begs another question: To do what? How we answer *that* question is where we figure out what it means to be God's partner in creation.

Wherever there is imperfection in our world — people suffering, an ecosystem in distress, systemic injustice — there are unfinished spaces that call on us in our role as God's partners.

God created humankind: wonderfully complex humans who are sometimes given to anger, love, hurt, pain, and moral disregard. When we step into a space to soothe pain, honor love, work through anger, or shine a light on moral silence, we are God's partners in finishing the sentence.

Life can be daunting, cold, and lonely at times. If we lessen the burdens of someone who is lonely, we are God's partners in finishing the sentence.

If we see injustice and make it our business to fight to change it, we are God's partners in finishing the sentence.

If the earth itself cries out for cleansing, respectful use, not overuse; if the planet calls us to hear its cries and we answer that call, then we are God's partners in finishing the sentence.

Here we are at the very beginning of a new year. We are setting out to renew our relationships with others, the world, and ourselves. In this new year, each Friday night we will once again confront the unfinished verse of Kiddush with its unusual grammatical form. At that moment, perhaps our weekly ritual can include asking ourselves, "How did I finish the sentence this week? How was I God's partner in finishing creation?" If we do so, our recitation of *Kiddush* will not only sanctify our Shabbat, it will sanctify the partnership we have with God. And after all, that is what we were created to do.

(Rabbi Allan Berkowitz is the Chief Operating Officer of Faith In Action East Bay, a social justice nonprofit located in the San Francisco Bay Area that organizes faith communities to join together to pursue systemic change rooted in justice. Allan lives in San Jose, California.)

Relational Prayer: Renewing Our Understanding of Knowledge by Rabbi Elie Kaunfer

<https://www.hadar.org/torah-collection/recently-added>

From the beginning of the Torah, humans have a fraught relationship with knowledge. The essence of da'at—knowledge—in Adam's world is the tree of knowledge (עץ הדעת) of good and evil (Genesis 2:9). Adam is instructed to eat of all the trees, but not from the tree of knowledge (Genesis 2:17). When the snake speaks to the woman about the tree, he claims that once they eat of this tree, they will be like God, “knowing good and bad”—יודעי טוב ורע (Genesis 3:5). It is not clear what kind of knowledge is represented by this tree. It could mean moral knowledge, as in the difference between good and bad. Of course one has to ask: why would God want to prevent humans from moral knowledge?¹ Or it could mean sexual knowledge: the first thing Adam and his wife realize once they eat from the tree is that they are naked.² Perhaps it is knowledge of everything, where “good and bad” is a phrase that means: from good to bad, and everything in between.³

R. Yehudah suggests a different approach. In trying to figure out what the fruit of this tree was (none of the rabbis suggest it was an apple!), R. Yehudah teaches something novel:

Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 40a4

As it is taught (in a baraita): The tree that Adam the First ate from, [what was it?]....

R. Yehudah said: It was wheat, for a baby doesn't know how to call “Abba” and “Imma” until it tastes the taste of wheat.

In this conception, the tree of knowledge was actually very tall wheat. When babies eat wheat—that is, solid food—they are beginning to form the capacity for language. In the example R. Yehudah brings, this capacity for knowledge is used to develop formative relationships, here with one's parents. We use language not only to speak, but also to relate and connect. The words the baby says are not random: they are the names of the baby's parents. Knowing how to speak is the basis for relationship. Indeed, the first time Adam speaks (albeit before he eats from the fruit), he names Hava, the very first human relationship in the Torah's narrative.

Throughout this year of Divrei Torah, I will draw connections between our weekly parashah and some of the prayers in our tradition, shedding light on both as they are held in relation to each other. I have been teaching about prayer for years, and through this weekly Dvar Torah, I am excited to offer many more insights into the world of prayer, as seen through the weekly parashah. Let's see

how this week's parashah connects to one of the most fundamental request prayers in our liturgy.

Almost every line or phrase of our prayers are drawn from the Bible, and there is a long tradition of examining the connections between the two. As R. David Abudraham, writing in 14th century Spain, notes in the beginning of his book length commentary on prayer:

Sefer Rabbenu David Abudraham

You should know that the language of prayer is based on the language of Scripture. Therefore you will find written in this commentary on every word [of prayer] a verse like it or relating to its essence.⁵

Abudraham is saying something profound here: prayer and Torah are intimately linked. We often assume that prayer is us speaking to God, and Torah is God speaking to us. Prayer uses human language, and is invented by human authors. But the relationship is in fact more complex. Abudraham's claim argues for a different conception: our prayers use God's language to speak back to God. Our core prayers could have been written in the vernacular (see Mishnah Sotah 7:1), but instead they are constructed entirely in the Hebrew idiom of the Bible. Language is limiting and imperfect. How could we use it to communicate with God? The answer of the siddur is: we aren't using regular human language, but rather the holy God-infused language of the revealed Torah. In fact, we may need God's help to pray, and that is the focus of this week's connection between the parashah and the siddur.

The first request we make of God in the weekday Amidah is to grace us with knowledge. We begin this blessing with an account of God's ability to do this with humans, or more accurately, with Adam:

Weekday Amidah

You grace people [Adam] with knowledge

And teach humans [Enosh] discernment

Grace us from You

Knowledge, discernment, and intelligence

Blessed are You, YHVH, who graces knowledge.

What is the knowledge we are praying for in this blessing? There are many options, corresponding to the numerous synonyms for knowledge used in the blessing itself. However, I prefer to look at this through the lens of R. Yehudah's identification of knowledge: the capacity for words to form a relationship. In light of this association with דאָ and דען, perhaps we are asking God for the knowledge to speak in prayer, and through that speech, to be able to connect to God.

Why recall this scene of Adam and knowledge in this blessing? Perhaps this blessing is an opportunity to rewrite the relationship between God, people and knowledge. God certainly did not grace Adam with knowledge originally; Adam stole it. But in our blessing, we are trying to reformulate that fraught relationship.

We praise God for gracing Adam, and us, with da'at, even as we ask for da'at from God (מאתך). This blessing affords us an opportunity to envision a different connection to our acquiring of knowledge, and to use that knowledge to deepen relationships—with other humans and with God.

Shabbat Shalom. (*Rabbi Elie Kaunfer is President and CEO of the Hadar Institute*)

1 See Umberto Cassuto, *Perush al Sefer Bereishit* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996 [repr.]), p. 73 and Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 19. 2 For this approach, see Ibn Ezra to Genesis 2:17. But see Cassuto's objections, p. 73. 3 Sarna, *JPS Commentary to Genesis*, p. 19. 4 Cited also in Sanhedrin 70b. Rav Shmuel bar Yitzhak objects to wheat being the fruit of the tree, because wheat doesn't grow on trees! See *Genesis Rabbah* 15:7, p. 139. 5 *Sefer Rabbenu David* Abudraham, ed. Menahem Braun (Jerusalem: Or Ha-Sefer, 2001), p. 15.

Torah SparkNotes: Breishit by Bex Stern-Rosenblatt

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rZO2nKZfug5sRNsRn95TMSEumM50_5B2/view

The Torah tells a single story over and over again. Each time, the story starts with some sort of great potential tied to a few simple conditions, the main character makes a mistake, God punishes the main character, often with exile, and then God relents a little and the story starts over again. Each time the story is retold, it changes a little. Often we have different main characters. Sometimes we seem to have learned something. Sometimes things get worse with each retelling.

Our parashah contains this story told twice. We read the story of Eve and Adam first and then we read it again as the story of Cain and Abel. The stories follow the same plot outlined above. In the Garden of Eden story, Eve and Adam have the potential to live in a beautiful place with all the food they ever need and not to know death. They just need to follow God's condition of not eating from the tree of knowing good and bad. But they do. God rebukes them, giving them and their descendants punishments to endure that are less stark than the sure death God had initially seemed to promise. Adam and Eve are driven East out of their home, and the story starts again with Cain and Abel.

Likewise, Cain and Abel begin with great promise, to work the land and tend the sheep. They seem to have their livelihoods all set. But their interactions with God leave Cain confused; he does not follow God's advice about ruling over his desire, and kills Abel. God curses Cain, Cain protests, and God lightens his punishment, exiling him from his home, and the story starts again with his descendants.

The connections between these two episodes run deeper than just sharing the same story. Cain's infamous response to God reads "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Two words here carry the echoes of the Garden of Eden with them, "knowing" and "keeping." Supposedly, by eating from the tree of knowing good and evil, Eve and her descendants should have gained morality, should be aware of what constitutes correct action. Of course, even having eaten from the

tree, Eve and Adam still do not necessarily act morally. But they are presumably aware of what morality is. Cain, however, is claiming lack of this knowledge. After an entire creation story about how humanity gained knowledge like the divine has, Cain claims lack of knowledge. Moreover, he claims to lack knowledge about death. God asks where his brother is and the correct answer is dead. Cain replies that he does not know death. Cain denies the very punishment which his parents and all of humanity were given as a result of his parents' mistakes.

God had set Cain up to experience the ways in which his parents were tested. Adam was put in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it. Cain is a worker of the land. But he refuses to be a keeper, or guardian, as we read in his infamous question. God also uses the same words with which God cursed Eve to warn Cain. To Eve God says, "Your desire is towards your husband but he will rule over you." In response to Cain's disappointment about his rejected offering, God says cryptically that sin crouches at the opening and "its desire is towards you but you can rule over it." In response, Cain murders his brother. Rather than redeeming Eve from her punishment, Cain adds to her suffering, turning her from the mother of all living things to the mother also of all dead things. As for punishment, the earth was cursed because of Adam. But Cain is cursed even more than the earth. This story continues to be told. Our parashah, which starts with the infinite potential of creation, ends in Genesis 6 with the "sons of God" potentially raping people's daughters. It is enough to make you ready for the flood. But little by little, we'll figure it out. As we retell our story, we'll make progress. And no matter what, we'll have the opportunity to tell it again.

Yahrtzeits

Motti Benisty remembers his mother Rachel Benisty on Tues. Oct. 25 (Tishri 30).
Elaine Berkenwald remembers her father Israel Berkenwald on Wed. Oct. 26
(Cheshvan 1)

Coming Up At Kol Rina

Sup and Learn: Sunday 10/23, 7 pm

via Zoom (note later than usual time)

Ashkenazic to American: The Adaptation of American Sacred Jewish Music in the 21st Century.

A lively musical lecture and performance demonstrating how traditional Jewish music is taking on new forms to include bluegrass and other contemporary musical influences. Presented by Ariel Wyner, founder and creative director of "Kol Kahol," Boston's premier folk, Americana, and bluegrass band.

Register with this link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ashkenazic-to-american-the-adaptation-of-american-jewish-sacred-music-tickets-441037353597>

