

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Bereshit
October 10, 2015

פרשת בראשית
כ"ז בתשרי תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 1:1-6:8

In this *parasha*, we read about *ma'aseh bereshit* (The Act of Creation); Adam and Chava's sin of eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad and their subsequent expulsion from *Gan Eden* (The Garden of Eden); Kayin's murder of his brother, Hevel; and the genealogy of Adam and Chava's descendants, culminating in the birth of Noach.

Towards the end of the *parasha*, in chapter 6, verses 5 and 6, Hashem revisits the creation of the human being. “וַיִּרְא ה', כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ, וְכָל-יִצְרַר מִחֻשְׁבֹּת. “ – לבו, רק רע כל-היום. וַיִּנְחַם ה', כִּי-עָשָׂה אֶת-הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ; וַיִּתְעַצֵּב, אֶל-לְבוֹ. “Hashem saw that the wickedness of the human being was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And Hashem “*nachem*”ed that He had made the human being on the earth, and it grieved Him in His heart.”

Note the lack of translation of the word “*nachem*.” It defies a single translation, as that would remove the nuances of the Hebrew term. According to the *Even Shoshan Biblical Dictionary*, the word *nachem* actually has three meanings: to regret or rue; to accept comfort and be comforted; and to avenge or assuage one's anger through vengeance.

Therefore, this one word suggests that Hashem regretted the creation of the human being; Hashem was comforted, ostensibly by the angels, the Hosts of

Heaven, on the poor behavior of the Divine creations; and Hashem was ready to take vengeance on the human race for its bad behavior.

All three of these sentiments occurred concurrently and were followed closely by the Flood. Of course, Hashem, according to the Torah, cannot “regret” something, as God is a Perfect Being. And Hashem has no “heart”, as God is not a person. But according to Ibn Ezra [12th Century Spain] and others, the Torah anthropomorphizes God so that we can understand the Divine feelings and actions within human terms.

What is totally real in these verses is that emotions do not happen in isolation; they can take on multiple dimensions (including some in tension with each other), and we often conflate emotions with one another. The Torah demonstrates this by the multiple meanings contained in the word *nachem*. The lesson for us is that, when we are feeling something – especially something negative – it is important for us to sort through the different emotions we might be feeling in order to respond appropriately to the actuality of the separate emotions.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Was Hashem right or wrong in destroying all of humanity, except for Noach and his family, through a flood? Why do you think this?
- Note that the word “heart” in the verses cited above appears both in relation to the human being and in relation to Hashem. Why do you think that the Torah uses the parallel word in both cases?
- What other examples can you think of in the Torah in which Hashem is anthropomorphized? Does this help you better understand what the Torah is trying to say?