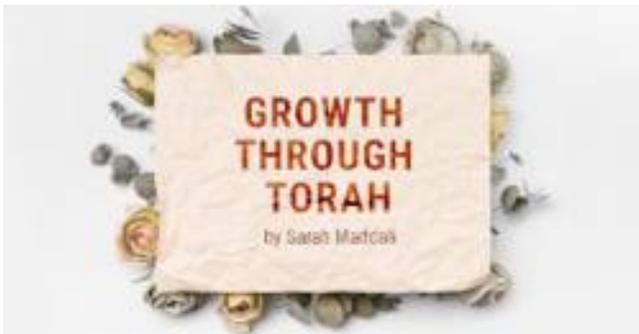


In this Issue

- **Growth through Torah** by Sarah Maddali
- **Shraga’s Weekly** by Rabbi Shraga Simmons
- **Torah for Your Table** by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis
- **Rabbi Avraham Twerski's Insights on the Torah** by Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski



Feeling God’s Love

In this week’s Torah portion God places Adam in the garden of Eden and tells him he can eat from every tree except for the Tree of Good and Evil. The serpent comes to Eve and deceives her into eating from the tree, which she also gives to Adam. God gave Adam and Eve one commandment, to refrain from eating the fruit of this tree, which they did not follow.

Upon eating from the tree of knowledge Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness and made aprons. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized that they were naked; and they sewed together a fig leaf and made themselves aprons.” (3:7) Later in Genesis (3:21) the verse says that “...God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them.”

Why would God make them clothes if they already made themselves aprons? Furthermore, they brought about their own shame. They were embarrassed as a natural consequence of sinning against God and eating from the tree. As such, why does God clothe them?

Lesson:

This is an unbelievable example of God’s abundant love, compassion, and forgiveness that He bestows on all of us all the time. Adam and Eve made an apron due to their embarrassment of realizing that they needed clothes which was a direct result of their sinning and eating from the tree. Often times we have an attitude of “you made your bed, you can lie in it.” If someone makes a mistake, they have to bear the consequences.

However, God in His abundant mercy does not relate to us in this way.

Even after Adam and Eve made aprons, God went above and beyond, making them beautiful clothes and clothing them Himself to show them that no matter what they do, He will always provide for them, help them, and love them.

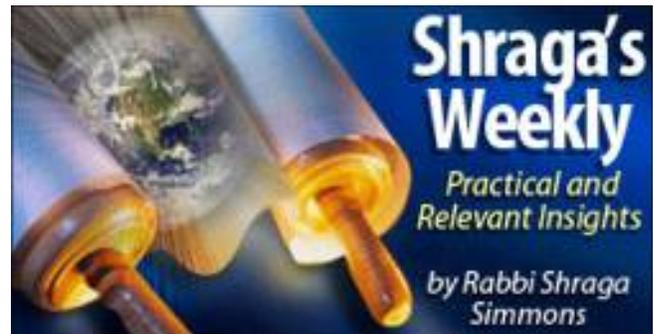
God provides for us, is right where we are, holding us close and showering us with love and compassion at any given time, in every situation.

God loves us more than we can imagine, more than our hearts have the capacity to love. As such, even when we are at fault, even when we are the ones who messed up, even when we went against God and turned away from what we know to be good, God still holds us close and cleans up after our messes to put us back on the right track.

God's love for us is not dependent upon us or our actions, just like a parent loves a child no less for a mistake that they made. God's love for us is dependent on one thing and one thing only: the fact that God is a loving God who loves us unconditionally and more than our hearts have the capacity to love. When we can cling close to this, feel God's love for us,

no matter where we are or what we did, we are on the right path to moving forward and correcting anything, just like Adam and Eve.

Exercise: Think of a time where you messed up. Feel in your heart that God has already forgiven you for it. Now forgive yourself.



Getting Back to Eden

All the wild shrubs did not yet exist on the earth, and all the wild plants had not yet sprouted. This was because God had not brought rain on the earth, and there was no man to work the ground... God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden – **to work it and to protect it.** (Genesis 2:5,7,15)

The Garden of Eden is the idealized state of mankind. God specifically did not bring rain upon the earth until man was in

existence, because cultivating the world is the sole propriety of human beings: to work it and to protect it.

So what does it mean to "work the Garden?"

Imagine daily life for Adam and Eve. What "work" tasks did they perform?

Our answer is found in the Midrash: (Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer 12; Rabbeinu Bachya)

In the Garden of Eden, the ground brought forth ready-made pastry. If you planted a tree, it produced fruit on the first day. Children were conceived and born on the same day - born with the ability to walk and talk. Year-round, the climate was mild and spring-like.

So what "work" was involved in the Garden? Perhaps you will say: to prune the vines, plow the fields, and pile up the stalks. But did not the trees grow of their own accord? Perhaps you will say: There was other work to be done, such as watering the Garden. But did not a river flow through and water the Garden?

What then is the meaning of "to work and protect it"? To develop it by doing positive

mitzvahs, and to protect it by avoiding negative mitzvahs."

Positive mitzvahs are God's way of directing our thoughts and actions toward building the world and humanity. Conversely, negative mitzvahs prevent us from destroying the world.

In the words of Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch:

The phrase "to work and protect" denote all of man's moral conduct, his conscientious endeavor to do that which is expected of him, and refrain from doing that which is forbidden. For it is by virtue of man's moral conduct that nature itself receives the conditions necessary for its very survival.

As humanity goes, so goes the world. On the upside, we can infuse humanity with the values of kindness, discipline, joy and compassion.

On the downside, violence, disease and terror reflect a dysfunctional spiritual state of mankind and permeates all life. Indeed, in the days of Noah, corruption of humans naturally led to corruption of entire animal kingdom; they too were destroyed in the flood.

How did Adam & Eve fair in their important responsibility? The Torah reports:

God said to Adam: "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree (which I specifically said, 'Don't eat from it'), the ground will therefore be cursed because of you. You will derive food from it with anguish all the days of your life... By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread. Finally, you will return to the ground, for it was from [the ground] that you were taken. You are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:17, 19)

Adam and Eve eat from the fruit and are banished from the Garden. God tells Adam that as a consequence of his actions, a curse will befall humanity: *By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread.* While they were in the Garden, Adam and Eve had every need provided - the instantaneous fruit and ready-made pastries. Now the Torah is telling us that to go out and make a living is a curse!

Western society has a very non-Torah view of "career." Somehow we think that career is the essence of our existence, as if when

all is said and done and we get to heaven, we will be able to boast that we made it to Corporate Vice-President. Though in handing out one's eternal reward, I'm not sure God will be so impressed.

Making a living is a curse, yet today people are voluntarily running after it! Consider the following scenario:

Let's say that I offer you an annual salary of \$80,000 to quit your job and work on an assembly line screwing in a single piece. What do you say? Too boring? Okay, so I'll pay you \$120,000 a year!

Now imagine you take the job. It's not the most satisfying work, but the money is good, so you make the best of it and enjoy your weekends. After a few months, you are shocked to discover that at the other end of the conveyor belt, someone is assigned to un-screw your piece!

You complain to the management that this is an absurd use of your time. So they agree to utilize the assembly line to manufacture automobiles. Satisfied, you go back to your place at the conveyor belt. But in a short time, you come to find

out that the new cars are only being used to bring more parts to the factory. It's an absurd cycle!

You complain again, and the management agrees to give the cars to employees, to enable them to come to work easier to make more parts. This still sounds absurd, so you complain again. This time, they agree to give the cars to employees of oil companies, so they can to get to work, in order to produce gasoline so we can drive our cars to work to produce the automobiles.

This is the cycle of modern economic production. We're no longer "people," we're "consumers." Of course there's nothing wrong with free market economics. But there has to ultimately be a point to all this - beyond just "production and consumption."

Are we living to eat, or eating to live?!

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, they were immortal. They were to live forever. When they were banished, the inevitability of death fell upon every human being. *You are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

Returning to the Garden, therefore, means discovering the source of our immortality. We all yearn for immortality - yet how do we achieve that? To set the world record for the 100-meter dash? To build the tallest skyscraper in Manhattan?

Of course not.

Increasingly, the rich and famous are finding new pleasure in public pursuits, because their motives have changed. "I've learned that when my work is ego-driven, it makes me lonely," says Dr. Dean Ornish. "When I approach it in a spirit of service, I'm much happier."

We must apply this to our own lives. Otherwise we are chasing a curse and we will never get back to the Garden.

Deep down in our soul, we all want to get back to the Garden. The first step is to realize that unnecessary over-involvement with materialism is a curse. Our purpose in life is to nurture our world, *to work it and to protect it.*

To get started, imagine this: Someone has nominated you for the Nobel Peace Prize for service to mankind. The award carries a prize of \$10 million dollars. You are to present yourself to the awards committee and report what you plan to do with the

money if you win. What will you tell them?

The Talmud asks: Why was Adam created alone (as opposed to Adam and Eve created simultaneously)? To teach that every person is obligated to say, "For my sake alone the world was created."

It's our world. That is both a great privilege and an enormous responsibility.

The Garden of Eden is not as much a place as it is a reality. It's an environment free of pain, disease, argument, jealousy. In Jewish terms, that is the definition of the Messianic era, a time when all of humanity will be restored to the original state of the Garden of Eden. May it come speedily in our days.



The Power of Words

In *Parashas Bereishis*, we learn many important lessons, but none more powerful and enduring than the significance and

holiness of words and speech. The Torah teaches us that God created the world through ten utterances: through Divine speech. With each holy command, our universe was formed. Hashem implanted this gift of speech within man. Of all earth's creatures, only humans are endowed with the ability to verbally communicate intelligently. We must be ever mindful that, even as God created through "words," on our own level, we too create through words.

Time and again, the Torah cautions us to be very careful with that which escapes our lips, for, as King Solomon tells us, "Death and life are in the tongue."¹ Before speaking, stop for a moment and consider how your words impact on others. What sort of environment and relationships do you create with your speech? Do you speak to your family and friends with love and respect? Do you think about what you're saying before you say it and the effect that it will have on those with whom you communicate? How careful are you with that which escapes from your lips?

There are more commandments in the Torah in regard to speech than to any other mitzvah: seventeen negative and fourteen positive mitzvos. It is through speech that

we signaled our commitment to our Covenant at Sinai when we proclaimed, “*Na’aseh V’nishma* — We shall do it and we shall study it.”² It is through speech — prayer — that we speak to God on a daily basis, bringing a positive spiritual influence into the mundane. Yet speech can have terribly negative effects as well: It was through speech that Hitler committed the most unspeakable evil ever to be perpetrated upon mankind. He himself never lifted a weapon; he used his lethal tongue to incite the world to hatred and slaughter. Indeed, “Death and life are in the tongue.”

Think before you speak and ask yourself, “Will my words generate light or darkness, love or hatred, blessing or curse?” The choice is yours to make. Use your Divine gift of speech carefully and wisely, in the service of the Almighty.

The Holy Tongue — Every Word Is Definitive

God invites Adam to identify each and every creature and give them *names* that reflect their essence.³ Adam had incredible insight and was able to perceive the function of everything that God brought before him. Thus, when he assigned names to the various animals, he revealed their

true natures. For example, when he called the dog “*kelev*,” the letters of which also spell “*k’lev*,” which means “like a heart,” he taught us that the dog can be a loyal friend.

Adam’s own name indicates his mission, for if a man is to fulfill his mission, if he is to realize his potential, then first and foremost he must recognize his strengths and weaknesses. And so Adam called himself “Adam” — meaning that God fashioned him from “*adamah*,” the earth. This designation is rather puzzling, for it is previously written that man was created in the image of God — that God breathed life into him,⁴ and that the breath of God became the soul of man. So why didn’t Hashem call him “*Neshamah* (soul),” rather than “*Adam* (earth)”?

Adam, with his amazing insight, understood from this that, no matter how spiritual a man may be, he is nevertheless grounded in the physical and material world, and precisely because of that he is vulnerable. Temptations surround him and, in a moment, he can forfeit his spirituality. The slightest wind can blow him away; therefore, he must be forever vigilant and protect the Divine spark with which God endowed him. Moreover, precisely

because his soul is the breath of God, he must be careful not to sully it and be ever mindful that he is also “*Adam*” — made of earth and vulnerable. Also, the word *Adam* is constituted of the letters of the Hebrew word *m’od*, meaning *very* or *obsessive*, teaching us that if man is not vigilant, he can very easily become *obsessive* about his material needs and become addicted to them.

We see this teaching reinforced in our Yom Kippur services as well. Yom Kippur is our holiest day, on which we refrain from eating and drinking and from everything that is physical and material. Yet, at the afternoon service, *Minchah*, as the day draws to its close, the Torah reading deals with the laws of sexual morality. Once again we are reminded that our physical world is fraught with danger — there are so many allurements to which we may fall prey; therefore, we must be constantly alert and safeguard our *neshamos* (souls) by living moral Torah lives.

Unfortunately, in our world, very little attention is given to our spiritual well-being. Most of our activities revolve around the physical and the material. Our *neshamos* have become emaciated. The best way to revive and sustain our souls is to enhance our spirituality through prayer,

Torah study, and the performance of mitzvos.

The Creation of Woman

In contrast to Adam, of whom it is written, “*Vayetzer Hashem es h’adam afar min ha’adamah ... — And God fashioned man from the dust of the earth ...*,”⁵ when it comes to the creation of the female, the word “*vayiven*,”⁶ which literally means “to build,” is used. The word “*vayiven*” shares the same root as the word “*binah* (understanding).” *Binah* goes beyond wisdom. Rather, it is an intuitive ability to see beyond — to construct, to build — teaching us that Hashem endowed the female with an added dimension of wisdom and charged her with the most sacred of all responsibilities — caring for children, building future generations. Our Sages were sensitive to this blessing of *binah* which God granted to the female, and they felt privileged to consult with their wives.

For example, Rabbi Elazar Ben Azariah consulted with his wife before he accepted the invitation to become head of the Sanhedrin, and Rabbi Akiva acted upon the recommendation of his wife, Rachel, who saw his potential to become a Rabbi in Israel and studied Torah with intensity

for many long years. Thus, it is not by coincidence that, at the giving of the Torah, God instructed Moses, “*Ko somar l’beis Yaakov* — Thus shall you speak to the house of Jacob”⁷ Our Sages explain that “*Beis Yaakov*” refers to the women. It is the women who were to be charged first, for it is they who possess the ability to inspire future generations and insure commitment. As it has been said, “Educate a woman and you educate a family — a nation Educate a man and you educate an individual.”

Accepting Responsibility

It is common knowledge that the very first sin of which man was guilty was partaking of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Upon closer scrutiny however, we discover that the history of mankind might have turned out differently had man had the courage *to accept responsibility for his transgression*. Having committed this first sin, Adam attempts to hide from God, whereupon the Almighty calls out, “*Ayekah* — Where are you?”⁸

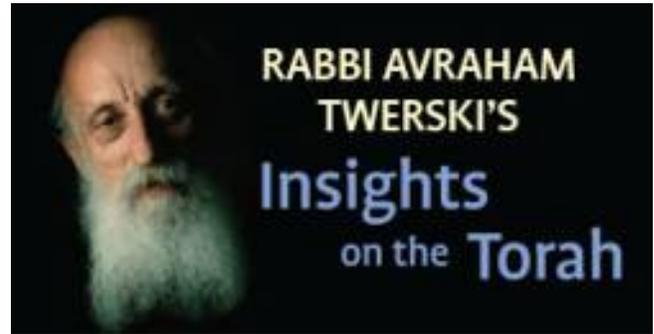
But can man hide from God? Does man really believe that God is unaware of his whereabouts? With the question “*Ayekah* — Where are you?” God was challenging Adam to accept accountability for his

sinful deed. “*Ayekah*” has a double meaning. It also means “*Eichah* — how,” implying, “How did you do this? Examine your life. How did you depart so quickly from the path that I commanded you?” But instead of looking within himself, addressing the wrong, learning from his mistakes and accepting responsibility, Adam sought a scapegoat, and, showing a lack of *hakaras hatov* (gratitude; acknowledgment of the good), declared, “The woman that You gave me — *she* gave me of the tree and I ate.”⁹ Eve followed suit. She, too, looked for a scapegoat and claimed that the serpent had enticed her. Our Sages tell us that it was this unwillingness to accept accountability and thus redress the wrong they had done that sealed their fate and caused their banishment from the Garden of Eden.

Let us examine our own lives. Is it possible that when we rebel against God, we, too, try to hide from Him? Is it possible that we, too, scapegoat and hold others responsible for our shortcomings — blaming our homes, our friends, our schools, our workplace, our environment? If we wish to grow spiritually, we must demonstrate our integrity by saying, “I am accountable.”

God is our loving Father Who is willing to forgive us, but in order for Him to do so, we must have the courage to say, “Forgive me, I was wrong.” Indeed, that is the focal point of our Yom Kippur service, when we confess and “come clean” before God without “ifs,” “ands,” or “buts.” When we pray, we must honestly mean the words we say, repent fully in our hearts, humble ourselves before God, and accept the responsibility for our actions. Only then can we be forgiven.

1. See Proverbs 18:21: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue....”
2. Exodus 24:7
3. Genesis 2:19-20
4. Ibid. 2:7
5. Ibid. 2:7
6. Ibid. 2:22
7. Exodus 19:3
8. Genesis 3:9
9. Ibid. 3:12



Seal of God is Truth

In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth... God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it He abstained from all His work which God created to make

These two verses encompass all of Creation. The opening three words end in the letters *taf, aleph, mem*, which spell *emet* – truth, and the closing three words end in *aleph, mem, taf*, which again spell *emet*. Rabbi Simchah Bunim of P'shis'che cites the Talmudic statement, “The seal of God is *emet*”, and comments, “It is customary for an author to place his name in the opening of his book. God placed His Name *emet* – truth, in the opening chapter of the Torah. *Emet* thus envelops all of creation, a testimony to God as the Creator.”

Divrei Shaul notes that all traits can be a matter of degree. There can be greater beauty and lesser beauty, greater wisdom and lesser wisdom, greater strength and lesser strength, etc. Only one trait cannot be more or less: truth. There is no such thing as greater truth and lesser truth. Something is either true or it is not true.

God is identified with truth. Just as truth can never be altered, because altered truth is no longer truth, there can be no change in God. (*Malachi,2:6*).

The Talmud says that *emet* is broad-based, consisting of the first letter of the alphabet, *aleph*, the middle letter, *mem*, and the last letter, *taf* (*Shabbos 55a*). Truth therefore, has stability and durability. Falsehood, on the other hand, is the Hebrew *sheker*, consisting of three letters near the end of the alphabet. *Sheker* is top-heavy and cannot endure.

To the extent that a person lives with truth is the extent one identifies with God. Any falsehood distances a person from God.

**Get more great
parsha content:
[aish.com/weekly-
torah-portion](http://aish.com/weekly-torah-portion)**