

Mussar HaTorah

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Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Bereishis

AND ADAM SAID, "THE WOMAN THAT YOU GAVE TO BE WITH ME – SHE GAVE TO ME FROM THE TREE AND I ATE." (BREISHIS 3:12)

THE S'FORNO (ibid.) clarifies Adam's statement: "She, whom You gave to be a help and benefit, gave to me from the tree, and was a stumbling block." Adam assigned his own guilt to his Creator, instead of responding with the repentance that was proper for him to do, as Dovid did, when he said to Nosson, "I have sinned" (Shmuel II 12:13). Adam HaRishon refused to accept responsibility for his sin, and instead blamed not only his wife, but even Hashem, for giving her to him. The S'forno tells us that Adam should have done *teshuva* instead of blaming Hashem, and contrasts Adam's reaction with that of King David, who accepted the blame for his sin, thereby starting the process of repentance.

Adam was the beneficiary, on that very first day of his existence, of an overwhelming deluge of *chesed* from Hashem: He was created from the ground, given a helpmate to be his partner, invited into the idyllic utopia of Gan Eden and given the greatest gift of all – the ability to choose between right and wrong, and to use this free will to fulfill Hashem's commandment and reach the highest levels of spiritual perfection. What did Adam do with this free will? He used it to sin and destroy the world, lowering its level from its original near-perfection to a very physical and degraded state. Hashem gently engages Adam in conversation so as not to shock him (see Rashi ibid:9). In the face of all this kindness, how could Adam HaRishon – who was so great that the angels wanted to sing praises to him even after the sin – cast the blame on his Creator after having received so much, and knowing full well that it was his mistake, having realized that he was bare of the one *mitzvah* with which he had been entrusted?

What did Adam do with this free will?

Almost as a reflex, we justify, rationalize and defend

Perhaps the most difficult challenge a human being can face is being able to make the statement, "I sinned and it's my fault." Almost as a reflex, we justify, rationalize and defend the propriety of any deed that we have done. Even when we are faced with the undeniable truth that our action was wrong, we try to salvage our pride by blaming it on someone else. Ironically, that someone else is often our spouse, good friend or other benefactor, people we are obligated to acknowledge and feel grateful for their help. As great as Adam was, he was not immune to this tendency and therefore shifted his blame even onto Hashem.

Interestingly, the example of Dovid HaMelech underscores this fact, for even though Dovid confessed his mistake, it was not a simple matter for him to achieve. Nosson, the prophet, had first told Dovid about an incident that paralleled his own situation, and Dovid immediately judged the perpetrator in that narrative to be deserving of the death penalty. Even at that point, after being told a story that matched his own actions, Dovid did not connect the verdict to the deed he had done himself. Only after Nosson told him, "You are that man!" did Dovid recognize his guilt. If Dovid HaMelech needed the extra push to see his mistake, how much more so do we need to step back and honestly examine our actions. And even if we do see our mistake, let us be aware from Adam HaRishon's example how easy it is to blame others for our own faults.

"You are that man!"

Let us use these Torah lessons to learn about our weaknesses, and rise above them, to acknowledge and take the blame for our mistakes. Humility and honesty will open the gates of self-improvement for us and allow us to use the gift of *teshuva* to bring ourselves ever closer to our Creator.