

Shabbat Times

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London	17:26	18:27	Cambridge	17:19 18:28
Manchester	17:43	18:46	Leeds	17:20 18:29
Birmingham	17:28	18:33	Liverpool	17:29 18:39
Bristol	17:32	18:39	Jerusalem	17:16 18:29



Shabbat debate

Every week we will be writing weekly debates to discuss over Shabbat. The debates will then be continued on facebook, after Shabbat.

If Mans' punishment for eating from the tree of knowledge was hard work to produce food. Is it wrong of us to use technology to make producing food easier?

Coming up....

Ever wanted to be a Madrich on Machane? Now's your chance! Winter Machane Tafkid applications are now open. Visit our website (www.bauk.org) and fill out the online application for your chance to be a part of something incredible!

-Limmud is restarting across the country on Monday 7th November

SHABBAT



LASHEM

שבת לה'

פרשת בראשית

תנועת בני עקיבא

PARASHAT BEREISHIT

BNEI AKIVA UK

The most widely distributed weekly Torah periodical written by our youth in the United Kingdom.

Looking Inwards – Michael Rainsbury

We don't often describe it as such, but Bereshit is possibly the most depressing parasha in the Torah. As we finish reading the Torah on Simchat Torah and immediately start over again, our focus is on the excitement of potential and renewal, as symbolised by the creation of the world. Yet the parasha ends with God saying "I will wipe out humanity that I created...I have reconsidered making them" (Bereshit 6:7). How did we get here?

I would like to identify four key events from the parasha that led God to this shocking conclusion. The first was Adam and Chava's sin; the second was Kayin killing Hevel; the third was Lemech's sin (killing Kayin and subsequently, his son Tuval-Kayin, according to Rashi on Bereshit 4:23); the fourth was the moral depravity caused by the 'sons of God' taking wives from the 'daughters of man'. With each stage we see a moral decline, highlighted by the sinner/s stooping ever lower in their desire to take responsibility for the situation around them.

Adam and Chava were given a specific mitzvah from God, transgressed it, and hid rather than accepting their mistake. Kayin's sin is fundamentally worse, as he broke the most basic of moral rules by killing his brother and when faced by God asking him what happened, he dodged the question. The Midrash's description of Lemech killing Kayin by accident and then subsequent crushing of his son Tuval-Kayin smacks of a pathetic carelessness and disregard for human life. In all these incidents the characters demonstrated their inability to take any form of responsibility for their actions, leading to a situation in which the 'sons of God' did whatever they wanted (see Bereshit 6:1-7).

And yet the last line of the parasha offers some hope: "And Noah found favour in the eyes of God" (Bereshit 6:8). In Hebrew, the word for favour (יָחַד) is the word 'Noach' backwards. Noach also comes from the words 'menucha', which means rest and connotes being at ease. It seems that Noach found favour in God's eyes not because of an external action that he did - indeed at this stage the Torah had not recorded him doing anything - but because he looked inwards and realised that he could find favour in God's eyes. Noach's recognition of his own worth and that of God starts a process of humanity taking responsibility, which is ultimately personified by Avraham in the parshiot to come.

This week Shevet Avichai (Year 13) are coming together for Shabbat Hachshara, where we are presenting Bnei Akiva's year-long programmes in Israel. Hachshara means preparation, since the year in Israel is about preparing for one's future life. At the very essence of our educational approach to Hachshara is the need to recognise our responsibilities, to ourselves, our communities, to Israel and our entire people. Through learning Torah, character development and volunteering, Hachshara enables us to look inwards, to determine what commitments we need to make and how we will make them. It is an insurance policy against the neglecting of responsibility that we often encounter in the world today. It is an antidote against the world of Parashat Bereshit, but the kickstarter for a world as expressed throughout the rest of the Torah.

Micheal Rainsbury is the head of British desk at world Bnei Akiva



The Meaning of Life

What is life? What does it mean to be alive? Are these the same or different questions? Philosophers and psychologists, linguists and scientists alike have struggled to come to a concrete definition of this seminal concept. Some have even suggested that the term should actually remain undefined.

Oxford dictionary defines life as: "The condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and continual change preceding death". Is this, however, an accurate definition? We know that some inorganic matter can grow and evolve, such as crystal. Most people probably wouldn't consider crystal – or fire for that matter, which not only grows but also moves, consumes and breathes – as being alive, even though they fit the criteria.

Equally, there are people who are completely capable of performing myriad physical tasks, but are detached psychologically and emotionally; there are even people who even unfortunately who strive not to be able to perform these tasks. We would generally categorize those who don't want to be living as being alive, but is this life?

So if life isn't defined necessarily by the ability to perform certain physiological processes, what is it? In order to understand life, let us contemplate death.

In our *parasha* we read the account of Creation, and the beginning of human life. But we also read of the beginning of death (Bereishit 2:16-17):

“And Hashem, God, commanded the man, saying: ‘Of every tree of the garden you shall eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for on the day that you eat thereof you shalt surely die.’”

What is the implication of these words? Did death exist prior to the sin of the forbidden fruit? Had Adam and Chava not eaten of the forbidden fruit, would we have lived forever? The explanation cannot be that death precluded the sin, only man was warned that they would die immediately upon eating the fruit, because we see this was not the case and they did not die “on the day” they ate from the fruit. Why was death introduced only after sin? How could it be that we would live forever?

Ramban addresses these questions and explains:

“The spirit gives life continuously, and the Divine Will that was ever-present at the time of creation continues to will it into being forever ...”

Regarding the question of how physical matter can live forever, Ramban comments:

“Physical life doesn't imply lacking, for creation is constantly progressing. Thus, believers understand that the world is in a state of constant renewal by the Divine Will, and thus existence would continue [eternally] according to that Will ...”

Life is when the physical world is in harmony with the spiritual. To be alive is to be tuned-in with the source of our existence, the ultimate life-source. Creation is purpose, to be alive is to fulfil be in a state of perpetually fulfilling this purpose. Death is the interruption of this fulfilment. Thus, the Gemara says (Berachot 18b) that “sinners are considered dead in their lifetime”. This is because sin is the interruption of the constant renewal of life, the harmony between physical and spiritual. Life is the staunch declaration that we have a purpose and strive to fulfil it. Death is the violation of this purpose.

We sense we are most alive when we become aware of the life we are living. It is not enough to be alive, but to really enjoy life we must be conscious of our purpose understanding of it, and motivated towards it.

Enjoyment doesn't come from physical pleasure. It comes from the fulfilment attributed to that pleasure. We don't enjoy food eaten mindlessly, no matter how delicious it is; we enjoy it when we are aware of it, and conscious of it somehow fulfilling us existentially.

The Torah opens by teaching about life and death. It teaches us the greatness of life and of our ability to eternally be in a state of renewal and fulfilment. But most importantly it encourages us to enjoy the lives we live, and directs us that this is accomplished by appreciating the purpose in all things.

The Week that Was..

- We wish a special Shabbat Shalom to all those Chaveirim in Shevet Avichai enjoying their last Shevet Shabbaton and learning all about their Hachshara options in Borehamwood and Elstree Shul this week!
- Over Succot we held some fantastic Succah Crawls across the country
- We enjoyed an exciting, Ruach-filled Simchat Torah in the Manchester Bayit and around the community. Thank you to all the Bogrim who came and helped to make such an amazing Chag!



Sviva Spotlight

Dvar Torah and Update from one of our Svivot

Harry Salter- Rosh of Edgware

Edgware Bnei Akiva takes place every week at Edgware United for years 2-10. As well as sviva every Shabbat, Edgware BA also has Family Friday night coming up and Motzei Shabbat activities.

Throughout the first Aliyah of Parashat Bereshit the words "And G-d saw it was good". Even though this phrase refers to the physical nature of the world, this theme certainly does not continue through the Parasha.

After we are given the description of the world, we're told the famous story of Adam and Eve eating an apple from the tree of knowledge and then being banished from the Garden of Eden. The good news returns as we're told about the birth of Cain and Abel. However, in Perek 4, Possuk 8, we're told "Cain spoke with his brother Abel. And it happened when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him". Rashi explains that Cain entered the conversation with words of quarrel and contention in order to kill his brother. The following Passuk is the one which presents some questions.

The Passuk reads that "Hashem said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother?" The obvious problem with this question is that G-d is omniscient so why would he be asking Cain where Abel is? He obviously knows the Abel has been killed by his brother! The Sforno explains that this question offers a subtle opening given to Cain, to confess his wrong and repent. Yet, Cain responds "I do not know, Am I my brother's keeper?". Rashi says that Cain became like one who steals, as if he could fool G-d.

The Sforno furthers his comments saying that this episode highlights that G-d oversees, supervises and knows the actions of every human being. We may think that we can get away with our actions, like Cain, but G-d knows our every step and every right and wrong doings. Nonetheless, we still have the opportunity to repent for our actions. Except for the Rishon, the rest of this week's Sedra is littered with man's wrongdoing: Adam and Eve eating from the tree, Cain killing his brother and at the end of the Parasha, humanity going against the will of G-d. I believe that the reason these stories are in Parashat Bereshit, the first Parasha of the year, is to highlight that G-d is perfect, whereas man has the ability to do wrong.