

Vayikra 5780

BS"D The book of Vayikra parashat Vayikra 5780

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Paradise Lost

Life in a modern Gan Eden. High-end restaurants, sport arenas, ski trips to Bulgaria, shiny new cars, upgraded hotels, glatt kosher of course. Pesach in Thailand, no gebrochts, and nothing less than matza shmurah the whole holiday, going to the mall to get rid of excess money, a trip to Israel to say "hello and goodbye" to the Kotel, financial plans with total expectations that they will be fulfilled, weddings to impress. PARADISE LOST.

Tehillim (Psalms) 92:6-7:

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How great are Your works, Lord, how profound Your thoughts!

The ignoramus cannot know, and the fool cannot understand,

King David, the Psalmist, proclaims the ultimate greatness of HaShem; and to prove his point he adds that not even an ignoramus or a fool can fathom it. Indeed! – An ignoramus and a fool cannot understand even the most basic ideas, much less the infinite greatness of the Creator!

But David is putting forth an important message. He was referring to the greatest human minds, who leave their microscopes and math equations in order to apply themselves to unraveling the secrets of the Creator. They quickly realize that they are ignorant and fools in the shadow of the omniscient, ultimate Creator. Or as stated by Alexander Pope in his 1711 poem An Essay on Criticism, "For fools rush in where angels (wise men) fear to tread".

So, despite the pitfalls that King David stated in Tehillim regarding men who would seek to understand the profundity of HaShem, I hesitantly put forward my feelings on what mankind did to bring about this calamitous pandemic.

What do we have to work with now:

1. Covid-19 is a pandemic reaching the far corners of our world.
2. The eyes of the world are upon the research labs to bring a solution. However, Covid-19 is baffling the greatest scientific minds in thousands of laboratories the world over.

The first place to seek direction is the Torah; based on the words of King Shlomo who states in Kohelet: "And there is nothing new under the sun".

The first universal catastrophe occurred within the first 3 hours in the lives of Adam and Chava, who were given humaneness at 3 in the afternoon – and were expelled from Gan Eden by 6!

In Bereishiet 3:22 HaShem asserts the reason for the expulsion, which surprisingly was not a punishment for eating from the prohibited Tree of Knowledge:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים וְעַתָּה הֵאֱמָנוּת לְכָל דָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם וְעַתָּה יָדָעוּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר לְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים (ויקרא
וְעַתָּה יָדָעוּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר לְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים וְעַתָּה יָדָעוּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר לְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים

And HaShem E-lokim said, "Man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life and eat and live forever".

HaShem did not prohibit Adam from eating from the Tree of Life, but only from the Tree of Knowledge. Yet the reason for the expulsion was the probability that one day man would attempt to intrude on the private intimate realm that characterized the creator: the secret of life itself, the Tree of Life. The reason is that man could never draw close to the Tree of Life without highly developed knowledge, which was contained in the Tree of Knowledge. So, it was sufficient for HaShem to prohibit eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

We are living in a time where man's scientific knowledge has brought us to the point of intruding on HaShem's private fiefdom of the Tree of Life, and indeed in ways which might be considered perverted and unnatural, such as:

1. In vitro fertilization.
2. Gestational surrogates, where the embryo is placed in the uterus of a gestational surrogate creating a halachic question as to who the mother is – the egg donor or the surrogate who carries the baby until birth. If the surrogate mother is a gentile, the child will have to undergo giyur (conversion) besafek (because of the halachic doubt).
3. Sperm donations from one male to several women, creating a possible situation where brothers and sisters marry without knowing that they have a common father.
4. Sperm banks where fertilization can be done even after the death of the donor.
5. Doctors who mix the sperm of various donors.

6. Then there is the other side: artificial life support.
7. Genetic engineering: which is the direct manipulation of an organism's genes using biotechnology to change the genetic makeup of cells, including the transfer of genes within and across species boundaries to produce improved or novel organisms.

And the list goes on.

All of these are intrusions on HaShem's monopoly on bringing forth life and taking it away at His chosen time.

It would be naive or worse – foolish, to suggest that any or all of the above are the reasons for Covid-19, since HaShem is at the same time the ultimate oneness. But His directives regarding human beings are infuriatingly complex.

How long will it last, and how many will yet die? Who knows? However, as concealed as the present is, we, of God's chosen people, know that it is directed for our ultimate good and welfare.

In the interim, let every Jewish man and woman make their personal accounting of failures and successes, and draw conclusions which will bring HaShem closer to their thought and actions...

Shabbat Shalom,

Chodesh Nissan Nifla

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