

Women in Sefer Shemot: Learning to Live with Uncertainty Then and Today

Adam 1 and Adam 2

1. Rav. J.B.Soloveitchik: The Lonely Man of Faith

Adam the second is, like Adam the first, also intrigued by the cosmos. Intellectual curiosity drives them both to confront courageously the mysterium magnum of Being. However, while the cosmos provokes Adam the first to quest for power and control, thus making him ask the functional "how"-question, Adam the second responds to the call of the cosmos by engaging in a different kind of cognitive gesture. He does not ask a single functional question. Instead his inquiry is of a metaphysical nature and a threefold one. He wants to know: "Why is it?" "What is it?" "Who is it?" (.....) In order to answer this triple question, Adam the second does not apply the functional method invented by Adam the first. He does not create a world of his own. Instead, he wants to understand the living, "given" world into which he has been cast. Therefore, he does not mathematize phenomena or conceptualize things. He encounters the universe in all its colorfulness, splendor, and grandeur, and studies it with the naïveté, awe and admiration of the child who seeks the unusual and wonderful in every ordinary thing and event. While Adam the first is dynamic and creative, transforming sense data into thought constructs, Adam the second is receptive and beholds the world in its original dimensions. He looks for the image of God not in the mathematical formulator the natural relational law but in every beam of light, in every bud and blossom, in the morning breeze and the stillness of a starlit evening. In a word, Adam the second explores not the scientific abstract universe but the irresistibly fascinating qualitative world where he establishes an intimate relation with God(.....) Cathartic redemptiveness, in contrast with dignity, cannot be attained through man's acquisition of control of his environment, but through man's exercise of control over himself. A redeemed life is ipso facto a disciplined life. While a dignified existence is attained by majestic man who courageously surges forward and confronts mute nature — a lower form of being — in a mood of defiance, redemption is achieved when humble man makes movement of recoil, and lets himself be confronted and defeated by a Higher and Truer Being. God summoned Adam the first to advance steadily, Adam the second to retreat. Adam the first He told to exercise mastery and to "fill the earth and subdue it," Adam the second, to serve.

Leaving Eden:

2. Bereshit 3:

א והנחש, הִיה עָרוֹם, מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה, אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' אֱלֹקִים; וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה, אַף כִּי-אָמַר אֱלֹקִים, לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הַגֶּן. ב וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה, אֶל-הַנָּחֶשׁ: מִפְּרִי עֵץ-הַגֶּן, נֹאכַל. ג וּמִפְּרִי הָעֵץ, אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ-הַגֶּן--אָמַר אֱלֹקִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ, וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ: פֶּן-תָּמֹתוּן. ד וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחֶשׁ, אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה: לֹא-מוֹת, תָּמֹתוּן. ה כִּי, יֵדַע אֱלֹקִים, כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכַלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ, וְנִפְקַחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם; וְהִייתֶם, כְּאֱלֹקִים, יֹדְעִי, טוֹב וָרָע. ו וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֹאכַל וְכִי תֹאווּ-הוּא לְעֵינַיִם, וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהִשְׁכִּיל, וְנִתְקַח מִפְּרִיּוֹ, וַתֹּאכַל; וַתֵּתֵן גַּם-לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ, וַיֹּאכַל. ז וַתִּפְקַחְנָה, עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם, וַיֵּדְעוּ, כִּי עִרְמָם הֵם; וַיִּתְּפוּ-עָלֶיהָ תְּאֵנָה, וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגֹרֹת. ח וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת-קוֹל ה' אֱלֹקִים, מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּגֶן-לְרוֹם הַיּוֹם; וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ, מִפְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹקִים, בְּתוֹךְ, עֵץ הַגֶּן. ט וַיִּקְרָא ה' אֱלֹקִים, אֶל-הָאָדָם; וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ, אַיֶּכָּה. י וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶת-קוֹלִי שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּגֶן; וַאֲרָא כִּי-עִירָם אֲנִי, וָאֲחַבָּא. יא וַיֹּאמֶר--מִי הִגִּיד לְךָ, כִּי עִירָם אַתָּה; הַמֵּן-הָעֵץ, אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵבַלְתִּי אֲכַל-מִמֶּנּוּ--אֲכַלְתָּ. יב וַיֹּאמֶר, הָאָדָם: הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה עִמָּדִי, הוּא נְתָנָה-לִי מִן-הָעֵץ וָאֲכַל. יג וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים לְאִשָּׁה, מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂית; וַתֹּאמֶר, הָאִשָּׁה, הַנָּחֶשׁ הִשְׁיֵאנִי, וָאֲכַל. יד וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶל-הַנָּחֶשׁ, כִּי עָשִׂית זֹאת, אַרְוּר אַתָּה מִכָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה, וּמִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה; עַל-גַּחֲוֹךְ תֵּלֵךְ, וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ. טו וַאֲיִבָּה אִשִּׁית, בִּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה, וּבֵין זָרְעֶךָ, וּבֵין זָרְעָהּ: הוּא יִשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ, וְאַתָּה תִּשׁוּפֶנּוּ עִקָּב. טז אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר, הֲרַבָּה אֲרָבָה עֵצְבוֹנְךָ וְהֲרַבְּנָ--בְּעֵצֶב, תִּלְדִּי בָנִים; וְאֶל-אִישׁךָ, תִּשְׁוֹקְתֶךָ, וְהוּא, יִמְשַׁלְּבֶךָ. יז וְלָאָדָם אָמַר, כִּי-שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ, וַתֹּאכַל מִן-הָעֵץ, אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ--אַרְוּרָה הָאָדָמָה, בְּעֵבֹרְךָ, בְּעֵצְבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה, כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ. יח וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר, תַּצְמִיחַ לְךָ; וְאֲכַלְתָּ, אֶת-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה. יט בְּזַעַת אֲפִיךָ, תֹאכַל לֶחֶם, עַד שׁוֹבְךָ אֶל-הָאָדָמָה, כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ: כִּי-עָפָר אַתָּה, וְאֶל-עָפָר תִּשׁוּב. כ וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ, חַוָּה: כִּי הוּא הִיְתָה, אִם-כָּל-חַי. כא וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱלֹקִים לָאָדָם וְלְאִשְׁתּוֹ, כְּתִנּוֹת עוֹר--וַיִּלְבָּשֶׂם.

God instead of enlarging the boundaries, sends us outside the boundaries. He creates a new paradigm of reality that not only opens our eyes to differentiation, diversity and disparity, but also to the fact that part of living as human beings is to

live with an element of uncertainty. He send us outside of Eden, and commands us to work the land, to plant seeds, to endure the pain of childbirth and rearing. In His mandate to man, He makes space for knowledge, but also for uncertainty. God creates the scientist but also the philosopher. He shows us a world that needs definitions but also a world that defies

Kayin and Hevel: A Lesson in living with the unanswered

3. Bereshit 4:1-17

ד, א וְהָאָדָם, יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ; וַתֵּהָרֵ, וַתֵּלֶד אֶת-קַיִן, וַתֹּאמֶר, קִנִּיתִי אִישׁ אֶת-ה'. ד, ב וַתִּסְּף לְלֶדֶת, אֶת-אָחִיו אֶת-הָבֶל; וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל, רֹעֵה צֹאן, וְקַיִן, הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה. ד, ג וַיְהִי, מִקֵּץ יָמִים; וַיֵּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה, מִנְחָה-- לֵה'. ד, ד וְהָבֶל הֵבִיא גַם-הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ, וּמִחִלְבָּהּ; וַיִּשַׁע ה', אֶל-הָבֶל וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ. ד, ה וְאֶל-קַיִן וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ, לֹא שָׁעָה; וַיִּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד, וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו. ד, ו וַיֹּאמֶר ה', אֶל-קַיִן: לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ, וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָּנֶיךָ. ד, ז הֲלוֹא אִם-תֵּיטִיב, שְׂאת, וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב, לִפְתֹּחַ חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ; וְאֵלֶיךָ, תִּשְׁוֶקְתוּ, וְאַתָּה, תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ. ד, ח וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן, אֶל-הָבֶל אָחִיו; וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה, וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ. ד, ט וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קַיִן, אֵי הָבֶל אָחִיךָ; וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי, הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי. ד, י וַיֹּאמֶר, מָה עָשִׂיתָ; קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ, צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן-הָאֲדָמָה. ד, יא וְעַתָּה, אָרוּר אַתָּה, מִן-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת-פִּיהָ, לִקְחֹת אֶת-דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ מִיָּדְךָ. ד, יב כִּי תֵעַבֵד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה, לֹא-תִסְּף תֵּת-כֹּחָהּ לָךְ; נָע וָנָד, תִּהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ. ד, יג וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן, אֶל-ה': גְּדוֹל עֲוֹנִי, מִנְּשֹׂא. ד, יד הֲנִי גֵרֶשֶׁת אֶתִּי הַיּוֹם, מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה, וּמִפְּנֵיךָ, אֶסָּתֵר; וְהָיִיתִי נֶע וָנָד, בָּאָרֶץ, וְהָיָה כָל-מֹצְאִי, יַהַרְגֵנִי. ד, טו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ ה', לָכֵן כָּל-הַרְגֵי קַיִן, שְׁבַעֲתַיִם, יָקָם; וַיִּשֶׂם ה' לְקַיִן אוֹת, לְבִלְתִּי הַפּוֹת-אֹתוֹ כָּל-מֹצְאוֹ

Rav solov once again presents two paradigms – majestic man and humble man

4. Rav Soloveitchik: Majesty and Humility p25-72

As a rule, in times of joy and elation, one finds God's footsteps in the majesty and grandeur of the cosmos, in its vastness and its stupendous dynamics. When man is drunk with life, when he feels that living is a dignified affair, then man beholds God in infinity. In moments of ecstasy God addresses Himself to man through the twinkling stars and the roar of the endlessly distant heavens.

Suffering or distress, in contradistinction to pain, is not a sensation, but an experience, a spiritual reality known only to humans (the animal does not suffer). This spiritual reality is encountered by man whenever he stands to lose either his sense of existential security (as in the case of an incurable disease or his existential dignity (as in the case of public humiliation). Whenever a merciless reality clashes with the human existential awareness, man suffers and finds himself in distress.....

However with the arrival of the dark night of the soul, in moments of agony and black despair, when living becomes ugly and absurd, plainly nauseating when man loses his sense of beauty and majesty, God addresses him, not from the infinity but from the infinitesimal, not from the vast stretches of the universe but from a single spot in the darkness which surrounds suffering man from within the black despair itself.

The Women of the Exodus

5. Shemot Raba 1:

דרש רבי עקיבא בשכר נשים צדקניות שהיו באותו הדור נגאלו ישראל ממצרים

Rav Akiva explains 'In reward for the righteous woman of that generation, Israel was redeemed from Egypt'

From what we have learnt why did the women save am yisrael from Egypt?

6. Shemot 38

ח וַיַּעַשׂ, אֶת הַכִּיּוֹר נְחֹשֶׁת, וְאֶת, פָּנּוֹ נְחֹשֶׁת--בְּמִרְאֹת, הַצְּבָאוֹת, אֲשֶׁר צָבְאוּ, פָּתַח אֵלֶּה מוֹעֵד.

7 And he put the staves into the rings on the sides of the altar, wherewith to bear it; he made it hollow with planks. 8 And he made the laver of brass, and the base thereof of brass, of the mirrors of the serving women that did service at the door of the tent of meeting.

רש"י 7.

במראת הצובאת - בנות ישראל היו בידן מראות שרואות בהן כשהן מתקשטות ואף אותן לא עכבו מלהביא לנדבת המשכן והיה מואס משה בהן מפני שעשויים ליצר הרע "אל הקב"ה קבל כי אלו חביבין עלי מן הכל שעל ידיהם העמידו הנשים צבאות רבות במצרים

8. from the mirrors of the women who had set up the legions. Heb. בְּמִרְאֹת הַצְּבָאוֹת. Israelite women owned mirrors, which they would look into when they adorned themselves. Even these

[mirrors] they did not hold back from bringing as a contribution toward the Mishkan, but Moses rejected them because they were made for temptation [i.e., to inspire lustful thoughts]. The Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, "Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything because through them the women set up many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt

8. Midrash Tanchuma 9

אלה פקודי המשכן וגו', אתה מוצא, בשעה שהיו ישראל בעבודת פרך במצרים, גזר עליהם פרעה שלא יהיו ישינים בבתיהן, שלא יהיו משמשין מטותיהן. אמר רבי שמעון בר חלפתא, מה היו בנות ישראל עושות. יורדות לשאוב מים מן היאור, והקדוש ברוך הוא היה מזמין להם דגים קטנים בתוך כדיהן, והן מוכרות ומבשלות מהן ולוקחות מהן יין והולכות לשדה ומאכילות את בעליהן שם, שנאמר, בכל עבודה בשדה (שמו' א יד). משהיו אוכלין ושותין, נוטלות המראות ומביטות בהן עם בעליהן, זאת אומרת אני נאה ממך, וזה אומר אני נאה ממך, ומתוך כך היו מרגילין עצמן לידי תאוה ופרין ורבין, והקדוש ברוך הוא פוקדן לאלתר..... כיון שאמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה לעשות את המשכן, עמדו כל ישראל ונתנדבו, מי שהביא כסף ומי שהביא זהב או נחשת ואבני שוהם ואבני מלואים, הביאו בזריזות הכל. אמרו הנשים, מה יש לנו ליתן בנדבת המשכן. עמדו והביאו את המראות והלכו להן אצל משה. כשראה משה אותן המראות, זעף בהן. אמר להם לישראל, טולו מקלות ושברו שוקיהן של אלו. המראות למה הן צריכין. אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה, משה, על אלו אתה מבזה. המראות האלו הן העמידו כל הצבאות הללו במצרים. טול מהן ועשה מהן כיוור נחשת וכנו לכהנים, שממנו יהיו מתקדשין הכהנים, שנאמר, ויעש את הכיוור נחשת ואת כנו נחשת במראות הצבאות אשר צבאו (שמי' לח ח), באותן המראות שהעמידו את כל הצבאות האלה.

'These are the records of the Tabernacle: You find that when Israel were in harsh labour in Egypt, pharaoh decreed against them that they should not sleep at nor have relations with their wives. Said Rabbi Shimeon bar Chalafta, What did the daughters of Israel do? They would go down to draw water from the river and God would prepare for them little fish in their buckets, and they would sell some of them, and cook some of them, and buy wine with the proceeds, and go to the field and feed their husbands, as it is said, "In all the labour in the field" (1:14). And when they had eaten and drunk, the woman would take the mirrors and look into them with their husbands, and she would say, "I am more comely than you" and he would say "I am more comely than you." And as a result, they would accustom themselves to desire, and they were fruitful and multiplied, and God took note of them immediately.(.....)

When God told Moses to make the Tabernacle, the whole people stood up and offered whatever they had – silver gold, copper etc. everyone eagerly offered their treasures. The women said, "What have we to offer as a gift to the Tabernacle?" So they brought the mirrors to Moses. When he saw those mirrors, he was furious with them. He said to the Israelites, "Take sticks and break their thighs! What do they need mirrors for?" Then God said to Moses, "Moses, these you despise! *These mirrors raised up all those hosts in Egypt!* Take them, and make of them a copper ewer with a copper stand for the Priests to sanctify themselves – as it is said 'and he made the ewer of copper and its stand of copper, of the mirrors of those who created hosts....'"(38:8)

9. Avivah Zornberg: The Particulars of Rapture P65

The power of the midrash lies in its affirmation of a transformative vision that anticipates a future beauty and thus reconstructs the past. This is the 'secret' of the women, as they place the 'inner sphere', the intimate arena of their love-relations with their husbands in the mirror of their desire. In doing this, they defy the *gezera*: instead of that which must be, there are multiple possibilities, jubilant, polymorphous, anticipatory.

10. Gemara Makot 25b

Another time the sages were coming to Jerusalem together, when they reached Mount Scopus they rent their garments. When they got to the Temple Mount and saw a fox emerged from the Holy of Holies they began to weep, but Rabbi Akiva laughed. Why, they asked him, are you laughing? He replied, why are you weeping? They: The place of which scripture says "The common man that draweth nigh shall be put to death" (Num1:51) is now become the haunt of the foxes. Should we not weep? He said to them

; For that very reason I am laughing. For it is written "And I call reliable witnesses Uriah the Priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah" (Isa 8:2). Now what connection is there between Uriah and Zechariah? Did not Uriah live during the time of the First Temple and Zechariah during the Second? Still scripture links the later prophecy of Zechariah with the earlier prophecy of Uriah. In the earlier prophecy in the days of Uriah it is written "Because of you, Zion should be ploughed as a field,

Jerusalem should become heaps of ruin, and the Temple Mount a shrine in the woods” (Mich 3:11), and in Zechariah, it is written, “Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: there shall yet old men and woman sit in the broad places of Jerusalem” (Zec8:4) So as long as Uriah's dire prophecy had not yet had its fulfilment, I feared that Zechariah's prophecy would not be fulfilled; now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, it is quite certain that Zechariah's prophecy also is to be fulfilled. They said to him: Akiva, you have comforted us, Akiva you have comforted us!

11. R. Jonathan Sacks: Radical then Radical now p55

With this we arrive at the starting point of Jewish Faith, radical then radical now, perhaps still not fully understood. Faith is born not in the answer but in the question, not in the harmony but in the dissonance. If God created the world, then He created man. Why then does he allow man to destroy the world? How are we to reconcile the order of nature with the disorder of society? Can God have made the world only to abandon it?...Judaism begins not in wonder that the world is, but in protest that the world is not as it ought to be. It is in that cry, that sacred discontent, that Abraham's journey begins. AT the heart of reality in the contradiction between order and chaos, the order of creation and the chaos we create. There is no resolution to this conflict at the level of thought. It can only be resolved at the level of action, only by making the world other than it is.

12. Edith Eger, The Choice

Today, more than seventy years have passed. What happened can never be forgotten and can never be changed. But over time I learned that I can choose how to respond to the past. I can be miserable, or I can be hopeful—I can be depressed, or I can be happy. We always have that choice, that opportunity for control. I'm here, this is now, I have learned to tell myself, over and over, until the panicky feeling begins to ease.....

Our painful experiences aren't a liability—they're a gift. They give us perspective and meaning, an opportunity to find our unique purpose and our strength.....We can't choose to vanish the dark, but we can choose to kindle the light.