

Parsha Ponders

Bereishis | October 15, 2020 | 27 Tishrei 5781

The greatest chessed¹

ויעש יקוק אלקים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבשם

Hashem, G-d, made special clothes² for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them³

Chazal note⁴ that the Torah begins with an act of *chessed*, loving kindness. The example given is that Hashem clothed the naked Adam and Eve⁵. After sinning by eating from the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve felt ashamed that they were unclothed⁶. As an act of kindness, Hashem formed for them clothing, to remove their shame. This choice of example is very surprising. This is the first act of *chessed* in the Torah? Hashem literally created the entire universe. He created Mankind. Why isn't that considered the first *chessed* of the Torah?

Furthermore, why did Hashem create the universe? The common understanding⁷ is because Hashem is *koolo chessed*. He is the embodiment (so to speak) of loving kindness. As such, He wanted to bestow good onto others. Hashem created everyone and everything to give. If so, our question is compounded. Creating the universe was the very embodiment of *chessed*! Why did *Chazal* skip this basic, yet all-encompassing act, and choose the relatively minor one?

We see from here a tremendous idea. There's no comparison between *chessed* before their sin, and the *chessed* after their sin. Why did Adam and Eve need clothing? Upon transgressing Hashem's decree against eating from the Tree of Knowledge, they felt a newfound sense of shame. They were embarrassed they were unclothed. To help assuage these feelings, Hashem gave them clothes. But they had just gone against His command! Nevertheless, Hashem is completely giving. The *chessed* He showed them, even after their affront, shows an even greater dimension of His giving, than the creation of the entire universe.

This is *Chazal's* intent when they say⁸ that the first two of Hashem's attributes of mercy are Hashem before the sin, and Hashem after the sin. Meaning, as we said, Hashem is completely merciful and giving before a person sins. That's what happened with the creation of the entire universe. The even greater act of mercy is that after a person sins, they've forfeited their right to enjoy this universe. Nevertheless, Hashem continues to give to them, even after they've sinned. It would then be truly appropriate to emphasize that the first act of *chessed* in the Torah, even greater than creating the universe, was Hashem clothing those who went against His will.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Toras Avraham s.v. והלכת בדרכיו, by Rav Avraham Grodzinski *hk"d*, *mashgiach* of Slabodka yeshiva until his murder by the Nazis

² Targum Onkelos *ad. loc.*

³ Genesis 3:21

⁴ Sotah 14a; Midrash Tanchuma *Vayera* § 1

⁵ Sotah *loc. cit.*; Cf. Midrash Tanchuma *loc. cit.*, which says Hashem adorned Eve like a bride for Adam

⁶ Cf. Rashi to Genesis 3:7, quoting Bereishis Rabbah 19:6

⁷ Ramchal in Derech Hashem 1:2, Da'as Tevunos § 18, and Klalei Pischei Chochmah VeDaas § 1. Cf. Maharal's Be'er HaGolah 4:6 (Machon Yerushalayim ed., see fn. 555), who rejects this approach and gives a different explanation

⁸ Rosh Hashana 17b