

# בראשית

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## THE SEAS: THE FINAL FRONTIER

Initially, when contemplating the creation of man, Hashem stated:

נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו וירדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובהמה ובכל הארץ

Let us make man in Our image after Our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the heaven, and over the cattle, and over all the earth (*Bereishis* 1:26).

In Hashem's design of creation, man was to rule over every facet of *Olom Hazeh*, to reign supreme. Later, however, when Adam names all the animals in his search for a help-meet, the Torah tells us a different story:

ויקרא האדם שמות לכל הבהמה ולעוף השמים ולכל חית השדה

And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field (*Bereishis* 2:20).

There is no mention of the "fish of the sea." Man was given dominion over *Olom Hazeh*, but only up to a point; he had no control over the frontier of the sea. This omission is glaring.

The *Gemara* (*Bechoros* 8•) indicates that there is an inhabitant of the sea which is the equivalent of man, suggesting that there might have actually been a help-meet for Adam in the seas. It is called the “*dolfin*.” Rashi, *Tosafos*, and the *Shitah Mekubetzes* (*ibid.*) all state that this creature can bear offspring from man. The Abarbanel, however, seems to disagree (*Bereishis* 2:19). He asks: why did Adam *Harishon* not name the inhabitants of the sea? He suggests that only animals which were considered potential mates for Adam were assigned names by Adam. Since the sea held no potential mates for man, Adam was not charged with naming them. According to most opinions, however, the discrepancy remains. Why was Adam originally created with complete dominion over the sea, only to lose that dominion a short while later?

The discrepancy can be resolved as follows: The two descriptions of man reflect two different sides of Adam, and ultimately of mankind. When Hashem first contemplated the creation of Adam, he was to be an ideal, glorious specimen of a human being, in a state approaching that of an angel, and this is a goal toward which all of mankind must strive. In this perfect state, Adam would have dominion over all of creation, and with his intellectual perfection he would have a clear understanding of all facets of *Olam Haze*. In this state it would be impossible to sin. After Adam’s creation, Hashem recognized that in order for man to achieve anything of significance in this world, he must be somewhat imperfect so that *bechirah* — free will — could be implemented. *Bechirah* can only work when the potential for doubt exists. One might technically possess the option of sinning, but if the negative consequences of any wrong action are too obvious then possession of free will will make no real difference. Therefore, before the *Kerias Hasheimos* — the Naming of the Animals — Adam’s perfection had to be diminished so that he would be governed by the system of *bechirah*. As soon as this reduced state was achieved, Adam sinned. However, had Adam not been initially created in a near-perfect state, humanity would not have this ideal of near-perfection toward which to strive.<sup>1</sup>

The demotion suffered by Adam *Harishon* so that he could accommodate *bechirah* presents a very puzzling dilemma. Hashem created the world with the principle of *ma’alin bekodesh* — that we ascend in holiness and do not descend. Every facet of creation was designed with the intention that its level of holiness increase, not diminish (Maharal, *Gur Aryeh*, *Vayikra* 2:13). When man sins, he thereby decreases the overall holiness of the world; unless he repents, he is punished, for he has transgressed Hashem’s laws of creation. It is very difficult to comprehend why Hashem would deliberately diminish the level of holiness, in effect contravening His own laws of creation.

The Maharal (*ibid.*) explains that a diminished individual strives to restore himself to his former stature with such energy that he often surpasses his previous prominence. If the individual had not descended into a lesser position, he would never have had the impetus to reach for the very limits of his capability.

ירידה שהיא לצורך עלייה לא נחשבת לירידה

A demotion which is required for the purpose of elevation is no demotion at all.

This principle can be applied to the diminished status of Adam *Harishon*. Man’s purpose is to regain the near-perfect state of Adam at the time of creation. Had Adam not been demoted, mankind would not have the challenge of reclaiming Adam’s original state. In his quest to

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 256-259.

succeed, man has the potential to strive for and possibly surpass the exalted rank of Adam *Harishon* at creation. Adam's demotion, which was necessary for the purpose of elevation, was in fact no demotion at all.

Rabbi Meir (*Sanhedrin* 100•) confirms this idea with the *pasuk*:

ואולך אתכם קוממיות

...and (Hashem) made you walk upright (*Vayikra* 26:13).

The diminished stature of Adam *Harishon* was one hundred cubits (Maharsha, *Chagigah* 12•). In promising to make *Klal Yisrael* "upright," Hashem is challenging us to achieve at least twice the stature of the diminished Adam. According to Rabbi Meir, the plural sense of "*kommimius*" — "upright" — indicates double Adam's stature.

The angels had no power over the inhabitants of *Olom Hazeih* — only Adam *Harishon* was charged with naming the animals. The significance of designating names was of everlasting import, for the name Adam gave each of these beings determined its eternal form — *Tzurah* (Maharal, *Gur Aryeh Bereishis* 2:19; *Tiferes Yisrael* 33). By naming each animal, Adam was assigning the exact role each animal would play in *Olom Hazeih*. Adam was to be a near-angel, with a bountiful *neshamah* capable of controlling all aspects of *Olom Hazeih*. However the reduced Adam was not capable of conquering all frontiers; he did not dominate the seas.

The concept that the fish of the sea are independent and have no ruler, is echoed by Chabakkuk:

ותעשה אדם כדגי הים כרמש לא מושל בו

And you make man as the fish of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? (*Chabakkuk* 1:14).

At first the seas covered the entire globe. Then Hashem commanded:

יקוו המים מתחת השמים... ותראה היבשה

Let all the waters be gathered together... and let the dry land appear (*Bereishis* 1:9).

The *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* (5) explains that Hashem had to force the waters to relinquish their control of the earth, thereby making it habitable for man. This is also evident from the blessing we make each morning:

ברוך...רוקע הארץ על המים

Blessed...is He Who spreads out the earth over the waters (*Berachos* 60:).

Reduced man was not capable of conquering earth's first, and most formidable, natural nemesis: the seas (see *Sfas Emes*, *Vayikra* 658). The Maharal (*Chidushei Aggados*, *Zevachim* 113•) states that the earth and the sea were created fundamentally independent of each other. Hence, water has always played a vital role in subduing errant man. The ocean rose and flooded a third of the world in the sinful generation of Enosh (Rashi, *Bereishis* 6:4). The waters flooded the Earth in Noach's generation (*Bereishis* 7:6), but the *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 108•) points out that those destroyed did not include the fish in the sea. In Mitzraim the newborn Jewish males were cast into the sea (*Shemos* 1:22). The first two plagues of Mitzraim involved the Nile river (*Shemos* 7:17). After the exodus from Mitzraim, the obstacle which stood between *Klal Yisrael*

and freedom was the sea, requiring Divine intervention (*Shemos* 14:16). The *Mei Marririm* (*Bamidbar* 5:19); *Mei Merivah* (*Shemos* 17:7, *Bamidbar* 20:13); Moshe's command to *Klal Yisrael* about crossing the Yardein (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 33:51); the splitting of the Yardein in the days of Yehoshua (*Yehoshua* 3:8); Gidon (*Shoftim* 7:4); Shemuel (I 7:6); Yonah (1:3); Titus (*Gittin* 56:); and Pinchas ben Yair (*Chulin* 7•) are all examples. It is obvious that the seas serve to remind man of his shortcomings; he is expected to constantly strive to regain the near-perfect level of Adam *Harishon* before total dominion was taken from him.

The sea also symbolically refers to the nations of the world (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 9). Just as man has no dominion over the seas, so *Klal Yisrael* will not dominate the nations in *Olam Hazei*. *Klal Yisrael's* ultimate domination over the seas is symbolized by the eating of the *Levyasan* fish at the festive meal after the coming of *Mashiach*. The *Levyasan*, whose habitat is the deepest part of the sea, is destined to be captured and slaughtered by Yonah *Hanavi* for consumption by the righteous Jews at the great banquet of the ultimate salvation (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 10). At the final redemption, *Klal Yisrael* will finally dominate the nations.

The selection of Yonah as the ultimate hunter of *Levyasan* can be understood in the context presented by the *Zohar* (*Shemos* 38:9). According to the *Zohar*, the story of Yonah at sea portrays the trials and tribulations of "everyman" in confronting worldly temptations. Yonah overcame his shortcomings by doing *teshuvah*. His expulsion from the belly of the fish is representative of *techias hameisim*. As the Biblical depiction of "everyman," Yonah was chosen to slaughter the *Levyasan*, the awesome inhabitant of the ultimate nemesis of man. In light of the sea's important role in *Olam Hazei* one can understand why the seas are used to describe the parameters of *Mashiach's* dominion:

ומשלו מים עד ים ומנהר עד אפסי ארץ

And his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth (*Zechariah* 9:10).

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