

Parshas Bereishis 5764

After *טא עץ הדעת* the Torah tells us that *אדם* gave *חוה* a name. Until then she had just been *האשה* – the woman; but now he called her *חוה*, because, he said, she was *אם כל חי*.

Obvious question: Remember that *חוה* had just been responsible for the *טא עץ הדעת*; *אדם* himself had said *ואוכל לי ואתה תמות*. She gave him the forbidden fruit, the eating of which was the great calamity of *אדם*'s life; indeed, the great calamity of all time. If not for that *טא עץ הדעת* he would have lived forever in *גן עדן*; there would have been no death, no suffering. An eternity in paradise, lost – because she gave him that fruit, and he ate it.

And now – *now*, in the aftermath of that terrible event, *אדם* chooses to give *חוה* a new name, a personal name, and he calls her *חוה* – meaning *אם כל חי*. A very beautiful name (perhaps I'm partial because my own daughter is *חוה*) – but why now? Why at this juncture?

And isn't this rather a surprising name for this moment? After all, if anything I would have thought that now, in his bitterness of spirit, he would give her a different kind of name altogether – something more like *מיתה*, perhaps; or maybe *מכשפה*. Something with a little anger in it.

Instead he gives her a name that is all beauty, and appreciation, and hope. *חוה* – *אם כל חי*, the mother of humanity.

There is another question that we can ask, as well. *חוה* is so called because she is *אם כל חי*. But, after all, as much as she was the mother of all men, *אדם* was their father. So why didn't *אדם* give himself a name that would reflect his role as the father of the world? Why does *חוה* get all the credit?

Let's take the first question, first. Why is it specifically now, after the *טא עץ הדעת* that *אדם* decides to give her the name *חוה*?

I would like to suggest an answer – and a lesson. *חוה* had done something terrible, and there was certainly reason for *אדם* to feel anger, and bitterness, and recrimination. But *אדם* knew that he was going to have to build a life with *חוה*, raise a family with her, populate a world with her.

And he knew that if he began now, in this critical moment, in the aftermath of disaster, with anger, then forever after that would be the theme of their relationship. If he began now with recrimination, then there would be no end to it, and their life would be poisoned.

And so he gave her a name – a new name that focused – not on her having brought death into the world – but, rather, on all the life that she bring into the

world, on the fact that she would be **אם כל חי**, the mother of all mankind. So that from that day forward whenever he called her, whenever he spoke of her, it was with that name, as **חווה**.

What about our second question: Why is **חווה** called **אם כל חי**, while **אדם** is not called **אב כל חי**?

This question is asked by the **אור החיים**, and he offers a stunning answer. After the **חטא עץ הדעת**, **חווה** was told by the **רבש"ע**: **בועצב תלדי בנים**. From now on childbirth would be accompanied by pain. And it would be **חווה** and her daughters who would bear that pain. It would be they who would have to face pain in order to bring life into the world.

For the men it would be much easier. They would sit in the waiting room and hand out cigars. Or coach the breathing. But the **מסירת נפש** would be **חווה's**.

We have a rule that the credit for a **מצוה** goes to the person who makes the greatest sacrifice for it. Rashi tells us this in **פרשת נשא**. And therefore since it would be **חווה** who make the greater sacrifice to bring life into the world, it was she who would be **אם כל חי**. And not **אדם**.

We can put these two ideas together. **אדם** had a choice. He could have focused on the fact that **חווה** was responsible for causing the **קללות** to come about. It was because of her – because of him, too, but she had begun, and she had cajoled – because of her that she and **אדם** and their descendants would have to live with the **קללות** that **הקב"ה** had pronounced. But instead, and remarkably, he focused – not on the fact that **חווה** had caused the **קללות**, but rather on the heroism that she would show in bearing the **קללות**, the courage that she and her daughters would show in bringing life into the world.

And because **אדם** made that choice – because he chose not to wallow in recrimination, because he chose to focus on the positive – he and **חווה** would be able to build a life, and a world.

There is a very clear lesson for us. Whenever people live and work together, there are always going to be conflicts and frictions. In shul, at work, at home. There are always going to be opportunities for blame and recrimination. There are always going to be mistakes, and failures, and wrongs. There are always going to be old scores waiting to be settled, old hurts, old wounds waiting to be reopened, reservoirs of old and fetid resentment. And they can poison our lives.

But we have a choice. There is always a choice. We can choose our perspective. We can choose – as **אדם הראשון** chose – to look at the good, the admirable, the likeable, in our friends and neighbors, in our spouses, in our parents, in our children – rather than at those failings and mistakes from which no one is immune. We can choose – as **אדם** chose – to focus on the promise of the future,

rather than on the mistakes of the past. We can focus on the positive. We can choose to focus on those things that will allow us to move forward, rather than chain ourselves to memories that corrode our lives.

Let us take good note today. Let us remember, whenever we are about to recall a past injury or a past grievance. Whenever we feel bitterness welling up over some past wrong. Let us remember that no one ever was so entitled to a grievance – so entitled to anger and resentment – as was אדם הראשון, whose wife offered him the fruit that cost him – that cost them – an eternity in גן עדן, and brought death and suffering into what might have been a perfect world.

And yet he rose above that. He focused not on the death that חווה had caused, but on the life that she would bring forth. He looked at her, who had cost him eternal life, and he called her the mother of all life. He chose the future over the past. He chose to see the good rather than the bad. He chose the words which would move life forward, rather than those which would hold it back.

Let us be as wise in our own lives.

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a name
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