BS"D

**Parshas Breishis**

*The Maharal explains the earth's "refusal" to produce edible trees.*

**Why the Earth Didn't Listen**

*By Rabbi Chaim Zev Citron*

There is a Midrash quoted in part by Rashi that has perplexed me for many years. The Midrash (Breishis Rabba 5:9) comments: “Three individuals were judged, yet four were punished. Adam, Chava, and the serpent were judged, and the earth was also punished along with them. As the Torah says, ‘Cursed is the earth because of you.’ (Breishis 3:17) And why was the earth punished? Because it disobeyed G-d's commandment. G-d told it to produce trees that were edible, just as the fruit is edible. But the earth disobeyed. It produced edible fruit, but inedible trees."

How can the earth disobey G-d? Is the earth an intelligent entity? Does it have free will? Was everything on earth not created as G-d wanted it?

The Maharal has an excellent interpretation of this Midrash. There are also insights in Chassidus that complement the Maharal's answer. But first, I'd like to quote a passage from another Midrash that will shed insight into the above-mentioned Midrash. The Midrash (8:4) says, "When G-d contemplated creating Adam, He saw both wicked and righteous people descending from him. G-d said, "If I create man, wicked people will descend from him. If I don't create man, how will righteous people come forth?" So G-d ignored the wicked and joined the attribute of compassion to the attribute of judgment.

The Midrash continues with another version: G-d consulted with the angels about the creation of man. He told the angels about the righteous people who would descend from Adam. But He didn't tell them about the wicked descendants. Had He done so, the attribute of justice would have protested against man's creation.

The Midrash says a great debate raged about whether man should be created or not. Some angels did not want man created while others did. The attribute of kindness wanted man created because people are often kind. "Truth," on the other hand, did not want man created for man is full of lies. "Charity" wanted man created for men are often charitable. "Peace" said no, for men are always fighting.

So the Holy One, who did want to create man, threw "truth" to the ground. The angels said to G-d, "How can You despise truth, which is Your seal? Let truth rise up as Scripture says, (Psalms: 85:12) ‘Truth springs up from the earth.’"

Let's get back to the Maharal who explains the earth's "refusal" to produce edible trees. The Maharal says that the earth is part of the physical world. By definition, every physical being is incomplete. It's not that the earth did not want to fulfill G-d's plan, *it simply could not because of its natural limitations.* Rashi explains that the earth was cursed because Adam, who was made from earth, sinned. It’s interesting to note that Adam’s sin was separating the fruit from the Tree (of Knowledge) just as the earth made a separation between the tree and the fruit.

I would like to suggest an elaboration on the Maharal based on Chassidic teachings. If G-d were to reveal Himself to us, we would cease to exist as separate entities. In order for us to have a self-identity as a separate entity, G-d must conceal Himself from us. Thus, by definition, G-d's creation is a concealment of G-d's all-pervasive reality. He creates us as a "something" out of "nothing." It is our task through coming to know G-d's reality to realize that we are not, in fact, separate from G-d. We must nullify ourselves, that is, our desires and sense of separateness, and become a total vessel to G-d and His will. Thus, our task is to turn our "something" back into "nothing."

According to this point of view, *teshuva* (returning to G-d) is necessary even for the biggest Tzaddik. Teshuva doesn't mean a return from sin, it means returning to the reality of G-d's all-pervasiveness. It is not a sin to be separate. After all, we were created that way. But out *teshuva* is to overcome the limitation imposed upon us and to nullify ourselves to G-d.

This is perhaps the imperfection that the Maharal says is inherent in the physical creation. We are imperfect because we are separate. The function of a Torah life is to ultimately transform that separateness into a state of cleaving totally to the Almighty.

I think we can now better understand the argument about creating man. Man is by his nature imperfect. By his nature, he is separate from G-d and is thus self-centered. "Truth" is right; man is full of falsehood by his nature. But "charity" is right too; man does many kind and good things. By nature, man is both good and bad.

G-d, in a manner of speaking, struggles with this too. Man is created to be separate so he will have bad in him. But as he strives to become connected, the good within him grows. G-d goes ahead with the creation because he knows that man can ultimately bridge the built-in contradiction in his creation and, indeed, in creation as a whole. To create man, "truth" must be thrown to the ground. But, ultimately, "truth" will rise. It will spring from the ground. The selfish creature (us) will become selfless. The separate will become united. Man will truly know G-d and then, finally, His creation will be justified.