**Perashat Bereshit**

The most basic elements of mankind are spotlighted throughout the first chapters of the entire Torah. The start of Bereshit is an introduction to humanity. In fact, humankind is named after both the first and last humans mentioned in the story of the first people roaming the earth: the term man is paired with “Adam” (Perek 1), and mankind is a synonym for “Enosh” (Perek 4). The text, beginning with the first mention of “Adam” until his grandson “Enosh,” clearly defines the most leading feature of the human race: imperfection.

Two major sins occur within the pesukim flanked by Adam and Enosh. First, Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge, defiantly disobeying God’s singular commandment to them. Next, Kayin kills his brother Hevel in the first instance of murder. These two sins can represent the two types of wrongdoings which humankind transgresses: the sins between man and God and the sins between man and his fellow. Since the beginning of creation, humans have possessed the tendency to perform both types of misdeeds.

This aspect of humanity– our inclination to execute wrongdoings– may cause us to feel as though we are worthless creatures. However, God does not view us in such a negative light due to our flaws; rather, God likens us to Himself both at the beginning of creation and even after the two great sins.

At the time of creation it states:

וַיִּבְרָ֨א אֱלֹקים ׀ אֶת־הָֽאָדָם֙ בְּצַלְמ֔וֹ **בְּצֶ֥לֶם אֱלֹקים** בָּרָ֣א אֹת֑וֹ

“And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him” (1:27).

And after Adam and Kayin sin it says:

זֶ֣ה סֵ֔פֶר תּוֹלְדֹ֖ת אָדָ֑ם בְּי֗וֹם בְּרֹ֤א אֱלֹקים֙ אָדָ֔ם **בִּדְמ֥וּת אֱלֹקים** עָשָׂ֥ה אֹתֽוֹ

“This is the record of Adam’s line.—When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God” (5:1).

Although we might think that our sins strip us of Godliness, it is not the case. God still regards us “like God” even after the sins were committed! Humanity is both imperfect *and* regarded as Godly– the two are not mutually exclusive.

Our ancestors themselves were not perfect. For example, Moses hit the rock, David sinned with Batsheva etc. There is debate amongst rabbinical figures as to what extent we can regard our forefathers and leading figures as flawed. Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch (1808-1888, Germany) believed that acknowledging our leaders’ sins is more beneficial than pretending they were perfect. He states in his commentary on Bereshit, “If they stood before us as the purest models of perfection we should attribute them as having a different nature.” To him, regarding our role models as perfect would make it almost impossible to relate and learn from them. Imperfections are what bond us together as a human nation.

Striving for perfectionism often blinds us of the opportunities that flaws possess. We were not created as angels, and perhaps that is because it would leave no room for growth. We were born with a mission to improve on ourselves. As it is written in Mishle 24:16, “כִּ֤י שֶׁ֨בַע ׀ יִפּ֣וֹל צַדִּ֣יק וָקָ֑ם''– Seven times the righteous man falls and gets up– Even the righteous one does indeed fall, but his growth is achieved every time he gets back up. Instead of regarding misdeeds as impediments, deeply introspecting on our negative tendencies can lead us to reach greater heights.

Flaws have the potential to spark growth, but they also have the potential to lead one to fall into a downward spiral. The key to approaching misdeeds with a growth mindset is by taking responsibility for the sin in order to improve from it. After Adam hides from his sin, God calls out to him with” אַיֶּֽכָּה”– *Where are you in life? Do you acknowledge what you have done?* Rather than taking the opportunity to humble himself before God, Adam first hides and then blames his wife. He fails to take responsibility for his misdeed. His son Kayin is no different than him. After Kayin kills his brother, God calls to him with “אֵ֖י הֶ֣בֶל אָחִ֑יךָ– where is your brother Hevel” (4:9). He responds audaciously with the failure to take responsibility for his wrongdoing saying, “לֹ֣א יָדַ֔עְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵ֥ר אָחִ֖י אָנֹֽכִי – I do not know, am I my brother’s keeper” (4:9). Both of these situations end in punishment. Rather than following Adam and Kayin’s reactions to sin, we should learn from David’s response to his sin of taking Batsheva from her husband and killing her husband. Immediately he responds with חָטָ֖אתִי לַהֹ– *I have sinned* (Shemuel II 12:13).

Imperfection is a defining feature of human beings and can represent itself as both a challenge and opportunity. As we go about our hectic daily lives, it is vital to take responsibility for our flaws, acknowledging our humanity. Tahanun, the prayer which states “we have sinned…” is recited on weekdays. Built into our daily tefillah is a reminder to hold ourselves accountable for our misdeeds, and use them as opportunities to improve ourselves. As Bereshit teaches us that perfection is a false illusion, it is our jobs to look past the false standard of perfection and strive to grow through our imperfections.

Vivian Cohen has grown up in the Yeshivah of Flatbush community for the past 12 years of her life. Throughout these years she has enhanced her love for Torah, Missvot, and Israel through engaging in conversations, asking questions, and participating in extra classes and clubs. She has also found a deep passion for devoting her time to helping the vulnerable, whether that was through implementing new ideas in the Tzedakah Commission, coordinating student/teacher activities, or volunteering at the Special Children’s Center in the summer. In her free time, Vivian enjoys being in nature and creating art. She is looking forward to learning and respecting various opinions in a diverse environment, expanding her knowledge of Neviim and Ketuvim, connecting with the land of Israel, and reflecting upon the intrinsic values that the Torah and Judaism hold.