YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Bereishit**

**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

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Dedicated in memory of Michael ben Avraham z"l,   
whose yahrzeit is 28 Tishrei, by Family Rueff

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**The Work of Man**

Adapted by Aviad Brestel

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

We are privileged at this moment – in the words of the songwriter Naomi Shemer – "to start again from the beginning." *Parashat Bereishit* addresses a number of fundamental issues, but this *shiur* will address only one: human efforts in the Garden of Eden.

We are familiar with this world that is "like a vestibule" (*Avot* 4:16) to the world to come – that is, the future Garden of Eden. We generally understand the relationship between these two worlds as follows: In this world, we are constantly working; we get up in the morning, we go to work – in short, man toils all his days, or as the verse formulates it: "By the sweat of your brow, you shall eat bread" (*Bereishit* 3:19). But when we reach the Garden of Eden, there we will rest; as *Chazal* describe it, "The righteous will sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the glory of the *Shekhina*" (*Berakhot* 17a).

But is this true? Is it correct to define our world as a world of work, and the Garden of Eden as a world of rest?

Before we turn to the verses themselves, note the problematic nature of the perspective just presented. Imagine what a world of rest would look like: the people there would have good food and comfortable beds, they would be served and others would clean up after them – in short, "the good life." But this really sounds like an old age home! There, too, people arrive to spend their closing years, and they sit while others serve them their meals and clean up after them. They are given good rooms that are easily accessible, and they don't have to work. Is this what the Garden of Eden is designed to be – an old age home?

**Work in the Garden of Eden**

Now that we see the problem with our proposed description of the relationship between our world and the Garden of Eden, let us examine the verses. According to the creation story that describes our world, man was created and arrived in a world that was all ready and set up – he was the last thing to be created. The only things that God says to him are various blessings: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (*Bereishit* 1:28); "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for food; and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air" (*Bereishit* 1:29-30). It should be noted that we are dealing here with *this world*: in *this* world, man needs to do almost nothing (to be precise, there is no mention of anything that he needs to do). He seems to have no responsibilities.

And then we reach the passage that describes the Garden of Eden: "No shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man **to work the ground**" (*Bereishit* 2:5). And then: "And then the Lord God formed man" (*Bereishit* 2:7), followed by: "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden **to work it and to keep it**" (*Bereishit* 2:15). Not only is there work, but things start to get hard for man, and therefore God says: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help-mate for him" (*Bereishit* 2:18). He needs somebody to help him; he cannot do it alone.

The Garden of Eden in the Torah, then, finds expression in one thing: Man is always working there. It is precisely in the Garden of Eden that man is given responsibility, and it turns out that this is the ideal: a world in which man works, and is given responsibility, and develops things on his own – not a world in which he sits idly by while others work for him.

This is the *parasha* of the Garden of Eden: "to work it and to keep it" (*Bereishit* 2:15). *Chazal* expound these words as referring to the Torah and its commandments (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Bereishit* 22)*.* This is certainly part of the work, but that does not mean work is performed only in this world. Indeed, *Chazal* say about the world to come, about the Garden of Eden: "The disciples of the wise have no rest either in this world or in the world to come, as it is stated: 'They go from strength to strength, every one of them appearing before God in Zion' (*Tehillim* 84:8)" (*Berakhot* 64a). There is no rest there; on the contrary, at all times, there is work.

**The Difference Between Toil and Pleasure**

One detail should be added to this revised description: work in the world to come does not involve suffering, but rather pleasure and satisfaction.

How so? Let us compare it to something that is close to my heart – a gym. There, everybody sweats, people work hard, they pant and have difficulty breathing – but they pay money to go, and they enjoy every minute that they are there. It would be incorrect to identify pleasure with idleness and suffering with work; work can be done willingly, with desire, and with satisfaction. Gyms and running groups cost a lot of money, yet people are willing to invest that money in order to work hard, and they enjoy it.

This is what life in the Garden of Eden will be like: very hard work. The work will involve Torah, *mitzvot*, and good deeds, as well as the trees of the Garden of Eden and the river that issues forth from the Garden of Eden. A person will have a lot of work to do, but this work will be done out of desire, out of pleasure – based on the clear knowledge that God, who created the world, chose man as His partner in managing it, the two of them together (of course, on levels separated by infinite distance). The essential point is that God took man as His partner in running the world together with Him, and that man *loves* filling that role.

[These remarks were made in the framework of the *Chidush mei-ha-Gush* video series for *Parashat Bereishit* 5780.]