

"And Hashem created the man." (1:27)

There is an interesting *Midrash* relating to this *pasuk*. Man was created on the last day. If a person is worthy, he is told, "You came before the entire creation," since he was the reason for the creation of the world. On the other hand, if he is not worthy, he is told, "Even a gnat preceded you, an earthworm preceded you." *Horav Boruch Sorotzkin z.l.*, explains this *Midrash* in the following manner: If man merits to fulfill his purpose in this world, if he is virtuous and carries out Hashem's mandate, then he precedes creation. The purpose gave way to the act of creation.

If man, however, merely exists, without achieving his G-d- given objectives in life, he does not distinguish himself from any other creature. In the order of creation, regrettably, man trails behind even the lowest insect. In chronological order, he may be the last of Hashem's creations, but in "purpose" and significance he is the crown of creation. It is within his power to ascend to the height of significance or to remain at the borderline of existence.

Horav Sorotzkin applies his interpretation of another *pasuk* to an alternative explanation of this *Midrash*. After Adam and Chavah ate of the *Eitz Ha'daas*, the *Torah* states, "And they became aware of their nakedness" (3:7). What change took place which made them suddenly cognizant of their unclothed state? *Horav Sorotzkin* explains that their self-image underwent a spiritual metamorphosis. Prior to the sin, they viewed their *neshamah*, soul, as their essence. Their bodies were consequently the "covering" for their soul. They did not need any other form of covering. After the sin, they sensed that their bodies were more than a mere outer shell. They now perceived their bodies as part of their essential characters. Hence, they were in need of clothing to cover themselves. More attention was now given to the superficial, material aspects of life.

This same idea relates to the *Midrash*. Man must define his essence. If he defines his hbt, self-image, as his *neshamah*, while the body is its container, then he preceded creation, since the *neshamah* is a part of Hashem. Conversely, if he views his body as the principal part of his essence, then he must realize that he trails behind all of the other creations.