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Berachot 17a

רב ששת כי הוה יתיב בתעניתא, בתר דמצלי אמר
הכי: רבון העולמים, גלוי לפניך, בזמן שבית המקדש קיים אדם חוטא ומקריב קרבן, ואין
מקריבין ממנו אלא חלבו ודמו ומתכפר לו = ועכשיו ישבתי בתענית ונתמעט חלבי ודמי, יהי
קרצון מלפניך שיהא חלבי ודמי שנתמעט כאילו הקרבתי לפניך על גבי המזבח ותרצני.

Berachot 23a

אמר רב ששת: לא שנו אלא בית
הכסא קבוע, אבל בית הכסא עראי - חולץ ונפנה לאלתר, וכשהוא יוצא - מרחיק ארבע
אמות ומניחן מפני שעשאו בית הכסא קבוע.

Berachot 30a

אימת מצלי? - אמר רבי יעקב אמר רב חסדא: משעה שמהלך בדרך, עד כמה?
- אמר רבי יעקב אמר רב חסדא: עד פרסה, והיכי מצלי לה? - רב חסדא אמר: מעומד = רב
ששת אמר: אפילו מהלך, רב חסדא ורב ששת הוו קאזלי באורחא, קם רב חסדא וקא מצלי.
אמר ליה רב ששת לשמעיה: מאי קא עביד רב חסדא? אמר ליה: קאי ומצלי, אמר ליה:
אוקמן נמי לדידי ואצלי, מהיות טוב אל תקרא רע.

Berachot 33a

אפילו נחש כרוך על עקבו לא יפסיק, אמר רב ששת: לא שנו
אלא נחש, אבל עקרב - פוסק.

Berachot 34a

אמר רב הונא: טעה בשלש
ראשונות - חוזר לראש, באמצעיות - חוזר לאתה חונן, באחרונות - חוזר לעבודה = ורב אסי
אמר: אמצעיות אין להן סדר, מתיב רב ששת: מהיכן הוא חוזר - מתחלת הברכה שטעה

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- Berachot 58a

- תנו רבנן: הרואה חכמי ישראל אומר ברוך שחלק מחכמתו ליראיו, חכמי אומות העולם - אומר ברוך שנתן מחכמתו לבשר ודם. הרואה מלכי ישראל אומר ברוך שחלק מכבודו ליראיו, מלכי אומות העולם - אומר ברוך שנתן מכבודו לבשר ודם. אמר רבי יוחנן: לעולם ישתדל אדם לרוץ לקראת מלכי ישראל, ולא לקראת מלכי ישראל בלבד אלא אפילו לקראת מלכי אומות העולם, שאם יזכה - יבחין בין מלכי ישראל למלכי אומות העולם.
- רב ששת סגי נהור הוה, הווי קאזלי כולי עלמא לקבולי אפי מלכא, וקם אזל בהדייהו רב ששת, אשכחיה ההוא מינא אמר ליה: חצבי לנהרא, כגני לייא? אמר ליה: תא חזי דידענא טפי מינך. חלף גונדא קמייתא, כי קא אוושא אמר ליה ההוא מינא: אתא מלכא, אמר ליה רב ששת: לא קאתי, חלף גונדא תניינא, כי קא אוושא אמר ליה ההוא מינא: השתא קא אתי מלכא, אמר ליה רב ששת: לא קא אתי מלכא, חליף תליתאי, כי קא שתקא, אמר ליה רב ששת: ודאי השתא אתי מלכא, אמר ליה ההוא מינא: מנא לך הא? אמר ליה: דמלכותא דארעא כעין מלכותא דרקיעא - דכתיב (מלכים א' י"ט) צא ועמדת בהר לפני ה' והנה ה' עבר ורוח גדולה וחזק מפרק הרים ומשבר סלעים לפני ה' לא ברוח ה' ואחר הרוח רעש לא ברעש ה' ואחר הרעש אש לא באש ה' ואחר האש קול דממה דקה, כי אתא מלכא, פתח רב ששת וקא מברך ליה, אמר ליה ההוא מינא: למאן דלא חזית ליה קא מברכת? ומאי הוי עליה דההוא מינא? איכא דאמר: חברוהי כחליניהו לעיניה, ואיכא דאמר: רב ששת נתן עיניו בו, ונעשה גל של עצמות.

- *findings suggest that small ions follow pathways common to both skin types, presumably the intercellular route,.... the initial resistances of both human and snake skin were in the same order of magnitude and showed the same declining profile during iontophoresis, ([Published: October 1995](#))*

Role of Appendages in Skin Resistance and Iontophoretic Peptide Flux: Human Versus Snake Skin
[Pharmaceutical Research volume 12, pages1506–1512\(1995\)](#)

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I want to share with you a secret from within a secret, a mystery from within a mystery, something impossible for the mouth to speak and even less

possible for the ear to hear. Consider it a slight distraction from the presidential brouhaha. Let us try.

Our ancients tell us that when we die and they put us in the ground, as our flesh shrinks, our tail grows. Yes, you heard me correctly. In the grave, our spinal cord becomes alive and begins to shape-shift. Into what? Into Snake. This is how snakes are made. You thought they emerge only from out of the eggs lain by *other* snakes. **Rubbish**, I tell you. Stop being so “modern.” Try a little ancient thinking, a bit of primitive reasoning. It won’t hurt you. At best, it will open your mind to some of the 90% of your brain you aren’t using. At worst, you will painfully keep this to yourself and not tell anyone about it lest they entertain the possibility of committing you.

So, again, my friends: not all snakes originate in snake *eggs*. Quite a few originate in the spinal cord of humans which, after death and upon burial, eventually morph into snakes and slither out of the earth (*Talmud Bav’li, Baba Kama* 16a). The ones you’ve seen or read about that come from eggs or “live” births are velveteen snakes. They’re not the real thing. The **real** snake is the one that used to be the spine of someone long gone and buried. Even those sages who didn’t quite buy the Spine-into-Snake theory still promoted the idea that “It is from the spinal cord out of which the human will resurrect in the time to come” (*Midrash Bereishees Rabbah*, Ch.

28). One way or another, then, your spine is far more than it's cracked up to be.

As Snake grows, it sheds a layer of its skin so that its growth will not be stunted or otherwise frustrated by the limitations of its original skin. God then takes the shed skin and weaves it into a special garment in which to embody an emerging soul, enabling that soul to become shoe-horned into a world that would otherwise be alien to it, namely the physical world, as is written: "And Elo'heem made for Clay (matter) and its Fire (spirit) garments of skin and dressed them" (Genesis 3:21). Taught the ancients: "What sort of skin? None other than the skin shed by Snake" (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer*, Ch. 20). The second-century mystic Rabbi Meir Ba'al Ha'Ness translated the text to read "garments of Light" (*Midrash Bereishees Rabbah* 20:12), clearly, again, referring to a form of ethereal element comprised of the qualities of both Spirit (light) and Matter (skin) in order to enable the physical embodiment of Soul.

Let's recap:

Ever since God dressed the first humans in mantles woven of the skin shed by Snake, our spinal cord became so infused with Snake that when we die, it resurrects and shape-shifts **into** Snake. In other words, when we live, Snake gives us his old skin, and when we die, we give Snake his **new** skin. And then, eventually, when Snake sheds this new skin that

became his upon our death, God weaves that shed skin into a magical mantle that enables a soul to become embodied for its life journey in the physical realm.

On another level of understanding, we were supposed to have died on the very day we ate of the Forbidden Fruit (Genesis 2:17), but God graciously extended our lives by embodying us in the skin shed by the very being who got us into trouble, to begin with: Snake. Thus, that which afflicted us became that which healed us, and so it continues to this day, as that which challenges us becomes that which strengthens us. And our Life is bound up with and made possible by that which causes our Death. With what do we heal the effects of a venomous snake bite if not the snake's venom itself? With what did Moses heal the people when they were bitten by snakes if not the very **image** of one? (Numbers 21:9). In a sense, he imbued the Tree of Life with the very same force that talked us into eating of the Tree of Knowledge; he daringly re-interpreted the snake story from one of nemesis to one of genesis.

You see, the Torah's opening narratives in regard to what went wrong in the Garden of the Ideal is an important wisdom about the paradox of Paradise. Sadly, we rush through this part of the story as if we deemed it inconsequential in relationship to the moral and ritual instructions for sacred personal and

communal living articulated in subsequent chapters. In truth, nothing is more important in the Torah than its obscure **beginning** chapters. Even the ancient sages admitted as much when they reminded us that "More precious is the Torah's recounting of the idle conversations of the servants of the ancestors than all of the laws of the descendants!" (*Talmud Bav'li, Mo'ed Katan 17a*).

You move, walk, sit, stand, think, eat, drink, make-love, all by virtue of the mystery of your spinal cord. Even if you are completely incapacitated, paralyzed from head to toe, whatever remains of your exceedingly limited body/mind/spirit capacity is made possible by your spinal cord, by your primitive connection with the Mantle of Skin by which your soul is embodied and the accompanying mythos of the Garden of Eden story encrypted within your spinal cord.

You first met Snake when you were assigned by Creator to "Name" all of the animals, a task that involved the activation of their souls, the kindling of their respective qualities and the roles of those qualities in the story of Human unfolding (Genesis 2:19). All of the animals received your interpretation of their Gestalt and wore it as their definition ever since. All, that is, but Snake. And so, the Torah tells us that of all the animals of the world, Snake was the most "naked" (Genesis 3:1), implying then that Snake

did not have a mantle of definition, meaning that it did not accept the quality you assigned it. And this is why Snake approached you while you were meandering about in the Garden – Snake, not Horse, not Hyena, not Peacock, only Snake. Snake was still naked. Still unassigned. Still undefined. Still bereft of all assumptions.

As were **you!** – “And they...were both naked and did not sense any uneasiness around it” (Genesis 2:25).

And so, just like one **tree** remained untouchable to First Human, so did one **animal** remain unimpressed by First Human. This is an important piece to the story. Creation involved Mineral, Plant and Animal. And Human was to incorporate all three and represent the unifying factor of all diversity (Genesis 1:26). Yet, Creator left Human one rock, one tree, and one animal beyond his mastery and out of his reach. Snake was the one **animal** exception. The Tree of Knowledge was the one **plant** exception. The Rock of Nurturance (*Talmud Bav'li, Yoma 53b*) was the one **mineral** exception, which explains why Jerusalem, where this rock is nestled, has been for thousands of years and continues to remain the site of the longest unresolved conflict and turmoil in all of human history. Everyone wants control over it, and it yields to no one. Neither Temple nor Mosque can awaken it. It is the “Kryptonite” of humanity, a

perpetual source of havoc and disunity no less than are the Tree of Knowledge and Snake. Some things God held back from us to remind us that while we are masters of sky, water and earth, we are but very limited masters at that. "Why did God leave the North unfinished? So that anyone who claims to be a god, let him come forward and finish it" (*Midrash Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer*, Ch. 3).

And so, one day while you were gallivanting about in the Garden of the Ideal, the Garden of "Everything is Perfect," the one animal assigned to deny you its obeisance noticed you were about to pass the one tree assigned to deny you its fruit, and seized the moment as a perfectly architected intersection of time, place and opportunity.

Snake's intent was to do onto First Human what First Human intended to do onto Snake: project some form of presumptive identity or definition. Indeed, by the end of the story, Adam and Eve walk away from the Garden of Eden experiment defined by both, the animal they weren't supposed to give a name to and the plant they weren't supposed to eat from. They – we – walked away in a cloud of intellectual obscurity and emotional upheaval. Our feelings had been muddled and our minds had been distorted to the point that what we once felt at ease with – our nakedness, our being bereft of labels – now became a source of unease, or, said differently: dis-ease. And

we did what we could to sweep our disconcertment under the carpet by covering our bodies and hiding our souls from the voice of the one who had called everything into open-ended being and becoming.

And then, and then Creator found us covered in the leaves and branches of the very tree that was off limits to us, a dead giveaway of our folly, and took the skin which Snake had quickly shed in order to rid itself of the evidence pointing to its chicanery, and God took that shed skin and transformed it into a beautiful mantle to replace our pathetically woven fig leaves, thus substituting the guilt which First Human felt with the guilt which Snake had shed.

The shedding of Snake's skin was a way of Snake saying to God: "It was the old me that did this thing, not the new me. I am changed. I am born again. I am no longer that conniving creature that did that sly thing of talking Adam and Eve into doing what they really didn't feel like doing, and weren't supposed to be doing."

And God said to Snake: "Be that as it may, I am more interested in Truth, and the Truth is embedded in the skin of guilt which you shed, not in the self-righteous skin you purport to now wear in its stead." One cannot transform into what **is** by discarding what **was**, but by **wearing** what was and integrating it into what is now becoming. Transformation is a

journey requiring the **acknowledgment** of our faults, not their denial.

It was the tradition of the second-century Rabbi Shey'shet that "when he would recite *ba'ruch* ['Blessing Source'], he would bow like a bamboo shaft bending in the wind. When he would next recite *atah* ['are you'], he would slither upward like a snake" (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Shekalim* 25b). In other words, how we use the snake we already are, largely determines the snake we will ultimately become – self-**deceiver**, or self-**healer**.

And so did God weave for Adam and Eve a mantle of skin. The skin of what? The skin that Snake shed. The skin of paradox that was originally woven in the Garden of **Paradise**. And this is the mantle we **all** wear, an ethereal garment, a magical mantle which enables the earthly embodiment of our heavenly souls and which is encrypted with deep Divine Wisdom for our life walk in the Garden of **Paradox**. And when we die and our skin is shed, our spine shape-shifts into Snake again, destined to once more shed **its** skin, albeit not to strip the past but to clothe the future, to become again a mantle of skin woven by God for the perpetuity of Life.

were given to Mosheh at Sinai, 365 prohibitions corresponding to the 365 days of the solar cycle, and 248 imperatives corresponding to

the 248 organs of the human body. Then came David and narrowed them down to *eleven*, as it is written: "O God, who shall merit living in your tent? Who shall merit to dwell upon your holy mountain? The one who walks a path of simplicity and performs acts of benevolence and whose heart resonates with truthfulness; whose speech knows no deceit and who does not wrong fellow creatures nor shame those who are kin; who despises those who are sinister and honors those who appreciate the gifts of the Creator; who keeps promises to others and will not renege even at personal hardship; who does not exact interest for money loaned nor accept bribes at the expense of the innocent" (Psalms 15). Then came Isaiah and narrowed them down to *six*, as it is written: "The one who walks with deeds of benevolence and resonates with rightness; who despises profits gained from oppressions; whose hands recoil at the offer of bribes; whose eyes are shut from gazing upon evil" (Isaiah 33:15). Then came Micah and narrowed them down to *three*, as it is written: "Perform justice, love benevolence, and humble your walk with your Creator" (Micah 6:8). Then came Isaiah again and narrowed them down

further to *two*, as it is written: "Be ever so cautious to do justice, and to deeds of lovingkindness" (Isaiah 56:1). Then came Amos and narrowed them down to *one*, as it is written: "Seek Me and live" (Amos 5:4). Rabbi Nachmon bar Yitzchak said: "Then came Chabakuk and narrowed them down to *one*, as it is written: "The just person shall live by their trust [in God]" (Habakuk 2:4).