

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

One of my closest friends contacted me to pray for his cousin, Hersh ben Pearl Hannah, who is a hostage to Hamas in Gaza. Rabbi Avi Weiss has a grandson on active duty with IDF. Most Jews have relatives or friends on active duty, in acute danger as hostages, or dead from the brutal Hamas attacks. Remember our people in danger in Israel. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully, with the help of Hashem.

Bereishis opens as God is creating. As He goes through the initial days, He declares that His creation is good. On the sixth day, God makes man in His image and declares that His creations on the sixth day are very good. By the end of the parsha, however, God concludes that the wickedness of man is great on the earth and that every thought of man is evil (6:5). What happens in only a few generations to turn good to evil?

Last weekend, on Shemini Atzeret, Hamas invaded Israel from Gaza, set off thousands of weapons, took dozens of hostages, and murdered an estimated thousand people. After the events of the past week, no one can doubt that the world is full of evil. While most people in free countries have expressed horror at the brutal attacks, dozens of student groups at leading universities (especially Harvard and the University of California) almost immediately issued proclamations stating that Israel invited the attacks because of their brutal treatment of poor Palestinians. These student groups applauded the attacks, and the leaders of the universities waited a few days before issuing mild statements of regret for the dead on both sides. The worst killing of Jews since the Holocaust, brutal beheading of babies and infants, and taking of sick and elderly hostages (including a 96 year-old Holocaust survivor) brought out statements blaming Israel for the attacks. Yes, there is much evil in our world.

Rabbi Marc Angel explains that "God created man in His image" means that humans have the potential to emulate our Creator. However, humans also have free will, and the ultimate challenge is to live up to God's image rather than chasing evil. Hamas and its supporters reject the opportunity to live in God's image. As Golda Meir said more than fifty years ago, the worst thing that the Arabs have done to Israel is to force our Jews to kill Arabs. Israelis do not want to go to war – we want to live in peace. However, for eighty years, the Arabs have prevented those who self identify as Palestinians from becoming citizens anywhere in the 99 percent of the Middle East outside Israel and have kept most of them in poorly maintained refugee camps. The citizens of Gaza who want to live in peace with Israel must keep silent about their wishes, lest Hamas murder them.

Cain and Hevel both give offerings to God. Hevel gives the best of the first born of his flock. Cain gives some fruit from the ground (apparently not the best of his crops and not the first fruits). God accepts Hevel's offering but rejects that of

Cain. God tells Cain that he has a choice. He can improve himself and gain forgiveness from God, or fail to do so and follow the evil that rests at his door (4:7). Cain's response is to attack his brother, an attack that kills him. When God confronts Cain, he denies responsibility and asks whether he is his brother's keeper (4:8-9).

The incident of Cain and Hevel raises numerous parallels later in the Torah. In Sefer Vayikra, we learn that a korban to Hashem should be a perfect Kosher animal, and that first born animals belong to Hashem. Hevel's korban is precisely what Hashem institutes for Jews later in the Torah. While some vegetation is acceptable as a Korban, the vegetation should be in prime condition, and first fruits in particular should go to Hashem. Cain's choice of fruit from the ground does not meet conditions from later in the Torah.

Rabbi David Fohrman observes another parallel, this time focusing on sin. After Chava and Adam eat from the forbidden tree, God asks Adam, "Ayeka" – "Where are you?" This term returns when God asks Cain, "Ei Hevel achicha" – where is your brother Hevel? The same verb returns in Devarim when Moshe exclaims "Eicha" – how can he alone manage the complaints and burdens of the people? (1:12) Eicha returns as the theme of the Book of Laminations, the bitter and painful reading for Ticha B'Av. In each case, this word (in each of its forms) expresses the pain and suffering that results from human sins.

Rabbi Fohrman also focuses on the cherubs that God puts at the gate to Gan Eden to keep humans from returning. God "vayashken" the cherubs – He enconsed them. The noun form of "vayashken" is "Mishkan" – the same cherubs reappear with wings open to welcome the Jews to the Mishkan. The cherubs who prevent humans from returning to the Tree of Life in Gan Eden later welcome B'Nai Yisrael to the Mishkan, which holds the luchot, which the Torah states is a tree of life to those who cling to it.

Israel has done as little as possible to impose itself on Gaza since turning over the area to the Palestinians nearly twenty years ago. Israel left a thriving agricultural center with modern irrigation and machinery when leaving. The Palestinian leaders immediately destroyed the agricultural center and equipment, turning the area back into a desert (to keep the people in Gaza as poor as possible). Israel has destroyed weapon centers and tunnels on previous occasions when the terrorist activities became too vicious. This time, after the worst incident of murder, rape, and brutality since the Holocaust, Israel has united with a goal of destroying Hamas. Any other government would have chosen this route long ago. Unfortunately, our tradition teaches us that Amalek will always return in some form and challenge us at our gates. Hamas is not the first enemy who has sought to kill all the Jews, and it will not be the last. Even so, we must protect our people. One way to do so is to ask Hashem to protect us. We do so by reciting Tehillim (psalms) and praying.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was a child during World War II – but he always remembered the horrors our people endured when he was a child. Rabbi Cahan's parents and sister both made aliyah, and Rabbi Cahan visited Israel frequently. He would have been horrified if he were alive during this time. Our family misses his emotional and religious support during difficult time such as now.

May Hashem protect our people, bring a swift end to the evils from Hamas and Gaza, and bring us a period (hopefully a long period) of peace.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Hersh ben Pearl Hannah (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Arye Don ben Tzivia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Bereishis: The Oldest Lesson in History

By Rabbi Label Lam * © 5763

The man said, “The woman that You gave to be with me – she gave me of the tree and I ate.”
(Breishis 3:12)

...that You gave to be with me...Evident here is a lack of gratitude. (Rashi)

So Hashem G-d banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the soil from which he was taken.
(Breishis 3:23)

You don't know what you've got till it's gone. You take paradise and put up a parking lot. (Joni Mitchell)

There are few important rules about what we call “punishments.” 1) They are never strictly punitive but are also somehow rehabilitative. There's always a cure for something mixed in with the soup of misery. 2) The punishment fits the crime in a manner of measure for measure. There's a poetic justice in implied in every Divine sentence. 3) What seems like a retributive reaction is really a mechanical effect caused by the misdeed. If a person puts his hand in fire he is automatically burnt.

Where do we see some of these ingredients active in the story of man's mishap in the Garden of Eden? Why was expulsion his just desert? A wealthy family raised an orphan in their home from infancy until early adulthood. His treatment and style of living were absolutely equal to the other siblings in the family. He wore the same elegant clothing and ate the same gourmet food as they. One day a poor man came to the door of this wealthy man. A deep chord of sympathy was struck within the wealthy man. So he gave to him one hundred gold coins.

The poor fellow was so shocked. He had never been given such a huge sum. One gold coin would have sufficed but such a demonstration of generosity uncorked a fountain of appreciation. The man started to praise his benefactor with every benevolent phrase.

He continually showered blessings and good wishes even as he exited. Still afterwards his voice could be heard ringing in the streets as it faded into the night.

The wife turned to her husband and remarked on what a stunning display of gratitude they had just witnessed. She then addressed the phenomena that this fellow with a single donation could not stop saying thanks and is probably still singing

praises as he sits in his home. In contrast, the orphan, who has been the beneficiary of kindliness worth much more, has never once offered even a hint of thankfulness.

The moment the husband grasped her meaning, he called over the orphan boy who had been a member of their household for so many years, and pointed him to the door. He held his head low and left. The days to follow were a bitter example of how brutal life can be “out there.”

Without food and shelter he was forced to take the lowest job. He slept on the floor where he worked from day to late night. The first few days of work were just to pay his rent and only then could he afford a drop of food. For weeks he struggled and suffered just barely subsisting, and all the while looking longingly back at the blessed and dainty life he left behind.

At a calculated time the wealthy man sent for the boy to be returned to his former status within the family. However, now, having gone through what he had, he thanked his host constantly for every bit of goodness and percolated continuously with the joy of genuine appreciation.

As a nation and as individuals we have all witnessed this pattern and experienced it too many times. The key to holding a blessing is appreciation. Without that attitude of gratitude the weight of the goodness that surrounds a man pushes him into exile till he is ready to gratefully surrender. This is only the most fundamental, oft repeated, and the oldest lesson in history.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5763-bereishis/>

Breishit: A Story of Growing Up

By Rabbi Dov Linzer

Rosh Yeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015, 2019

When the world was freshly minted and created, we heard the refrain with each act of creation, “*And God saw that it was good*,” and that the world as a whole was “*exceedingly good*.” Then, humans came and made a mess of everything, and a different refrain is heard: And God saw “*massive was the evil of man on the earth, and all the thoughts of his heart were only evil the entire day*” (Bereishit 6:5). How did we get to this stage? How did man bring evil – in his heart and in his actions – to the earth that God had made. Undoubtedly, this is the result of eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Man now knows evil, and as a result, evil has entered into the world. So God starts again. God wipes out the entire world and preserves only Noach, hoping that this time humans will choose the good. All of this, because of the tree.

What was the knowledge that the tree imparted and how did it introduce evil into the world? There are those that say that the eating from the tree gave humans free choice, gave them the ability to choose between good and evil. But if this is the case, if they did not have this ability prior, how could they have chosen to eat from the tree, and how could they have been held accountable? A more satisfying explanation is the one offered by Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch and, more recently, the philosopher Michael Wyschograd. Rav Hirsch explains that the tree did not give them the ability to choose, it gave them the ability to know, that is, to judge. Until they ate from the tree, they only knew of God’s definition of right and wrong. They could violate God’s commandment, but with the clear knowledge that they were doing something wrong.

We, of course, make choices all the time that we know are wrong: Cheating on our diet, speaking lashon hara, and the like. These bad choices come from weakness of will, what Greek philosophy terms akrasia. This is the source of much wrongdoing. But it is not the only source. For when humans ate from the tree, they began, for themselves, to determine what is good and what is bad. They gained not moral choice, but moral judgment, an ethical sensibility. Now, not only could they choose to disobey, but they might also decide that what God has determined to be bad is, in their eyes, good. They could do wrong, thinking that it was good.

The Biblical verses bear out this interpretation. We are told, not only by the snake, but by God as well, that the tree will make the humans “*like God*.” What is it that we know about God so far in the narrative? We know that God creates. We also know that God assesses and makes judgments. “*And God saw that it was good*.” And what do we hear as soon as the woman chooses to eat from the tree, “*And the woman saw that it was good...*” (Bereishit 3:6). The tree has made them like God. Man and woman will from this day forward see, for themselves, whether something is good or evil. They will make their own moral decisions.

And what is wrong with that? According to Hirsch, what is wrong is that the moral decisions of humans will, oftentimes, be incorrect. We are not omniscient. We have our own drives, lusts, and self-interest. What about the tree did the woman see that was good? She saw “*that it was good for eating, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and desirous for gaining wisdom*.” It is good from a self-interested perspective, from a perspective of satisfying desires, but not from a moral perspective. For Hirsch, the problem is that we might decide that something is good, when it is, in fact, bad.

Wyschograd goes one step further. He states that even were we to judge correctly, there is a sin in making the judgment ourselves, in being independent moral agents. If we are to be in a truly faithful relationship with God, then only God should define what is good and what is bad. To judge other than God, even if we choose in the end to obey, is to have left the Garden of Eden, to have left a perfect relationship with God.

Read this way, the narrative of the first two parshiyot of the Torah is one of a fallen humankind. How much better would it have been had we never eaten from the tree, had we not known of good and evil, had we never become independent moral agents. But... really? Is this how we think of our own humanness? Don’t we feel that in not having the ability to make moral judgments we are giving up a very central part of what it means to be human, of the value of being human?

Rather than seeing the eating from the tree as a “*fall*,” Nuchama Leibowitz offers a different explanation of this newfound state. Isn’t it odd, she asks, that God has placed such an irresistible temptation in front of Adam and Eve? Imagine a parent saying to a child: “*I am leaving some delicious candies right here in the center of the table – you can’t miss them – they are really delicious, and they will make you feel like an adult – but don’t eat them. I’m only going to be gone 5 minutes. Bye.*” Is there really any question what the child will do?

The sin of the first man and woman was inevitable. It was a necessary act of becoming independent, of growing up. Adam and Eve had been living like children – everything was provided, all decisions and rules were made for them, all they had to do was obey the rules. But this is not the life of an adult. And to become independent, to leave the home, inevitably some rebellion, rejection, statement of separateness will have to take place. The sin was an act of individuation, it was what allowed Adam and Eve to become adults, but it forced them to leave home, where everything was perfect and taken care of for them. Now they would have to go it on their own.

And when our children leave home, we want them to think for themselves. We want them to make their own judgments, their own decisions. Just one thing. We want those decisions to be the same ones we would have made. This will be the challenge for humans from here on in. As independent moral agents, we can make judgments, decisions, that are not as God would have us choose. But the other side of the coin is that as independent moral agents, we bring something important into our relationship with God. We bring our own thoughts, ideas, and judgments. Many of them may be bad and misguided, but some will be good, worthwhile suggestions and contributions.

The first generations after the sin tell the story of how easy it is for this independence to lead us astray. Left totally to our own devices, we will make one wrong decision after another, we will turn “*good*” into “*bad*.” We continue to see, to judge, but to see wrongly, and to act wrongly. “*The sons of elohim saw the daughters of men that they were beautiful; and they took as wives all those whom they chose*” (Bereishit 6:2). We have what to contribute, but for this relationship to succeed, we will need more guidance. And thus, when God starts the world all over again, God formalizes our relationship and God gives us the needed guidance. God makes a covenant, a brit, and God gives commandments. With these clear directives, with a relationship built on brit and mitzvot, it is hoped that humans, if they act like responsible adults, will be able to take a world that is good, and to build it.

This is the complicated and complex reality in which we live as humans in a relationship with God. Even with a covenant, even with commandments, we can continue to see, to judge and to choose wrongly: “*And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside*” (Bereishit 9:22). Of course, because we can now think and make decisions for ourselves, it is also possible that we can introduce something new, something that God has not commanded, but that is nevertheless good: “*And Noah built an altar to the Lord ... And the Lord smelled the pleasing odor...*” (Bereishit 8:20-21).

Consider the greatest religious leader, Moshe. In the last verse of the Torah we are told that no prophet has ever arisen in Israel like Moshe, “*for all that mighty hand, and in all the great and awesome deeds which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel*” (Devarim 34:12). This verse extols Moshe as the faithful conduit of God’s mighty hand and awesome deeds, as the perfect vessel for God’s mission. Rashi, however, turns this verse on its head: “*In the sight of all Israel – that his heart carried him to break the tablets... and God approved of this decision, as it says, “which you have broken,” i.e., strength to you for having broken them!*” The last image of Moshe that Rashi leaves us with is that of a leader who used his own judgment to act radically and decisively, not in violation of God’s command, but certainly without God’s explicit command. Here was a different type of seeing, a good type of seeing: “*And Moshe saw the calf and the dancing... and he cast from his hands the tablets*” (Shemot 32:19). And it was this act that was exactly what was needed at this moment. “*Strength to you for having broken them.*”

We are adults. We can judge and choose, and we must face the responsibility of doing so wisely, with a commitment to God’s covenant and God’s mitzvot. And because we are adults, because we are able to think for ourselves, because we are able to innovate and contribute in the moral and religious realm as well, we have the ability not only to preserve the good of the world, but to increase the good within it.

Shabbat Shalom!

Israel at War

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Our prayers are with the people of Israel as they once again are compelled to defend themselves against the forces of terror, hatred and destruction. We pray that the time will come, speedily and soon, when Israel and its neighbors will live in peace and friendship, enabling all the people of the region to prosper and enjoy God’s blessings.

War is ugly. It has been a scourge of humanity from time immemorial and it continues to plague humanity today. War entails fighting and killing enemies. It entails a vast commitment of resources to mobilize and arm one’s forces and to strengthen one’s defenses. It involves heavy financial, social and psychological costs. It entails casualties and loss of life. War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook taught: “*We must see life in two dimensions, as it is, and as it should be. Absolute righteousness is always rooted in how things should be, but provisional righteousness which touches more on acting in the present, is built on how things actually are...The two are connected, like alternating horizons on a long journey.*” (Igrot Ha Reiyah, 194).

How things should be: peaceful, with love prevailing among humankind. How things are: warlike, with hatred and violence spreading like wildfire.

How are we to deal with this dichotomy? We are to maintain our commitment to absolute righteousness, peace, a world of love and harmony. At the same time, we must deal with harsh realities with strength and courage. Even while engaging in ugly warfare, our dreams need to be squarely focused on peace.

As I write these lines, Israel is engaged in an ugly war. Hamas terrorists have launched a massive attack on Israel, firing thousands of missiles at Israeli cities and towns, killing hundreds, taking captives, wounding thousands. Their hatred of Israel knows no bounds; they intentionally aim at Israeli civilians. The Israeli Defense Forces have mobilized for a protracted war.

Anyone who knows anything at all about Israel knows that this is a country that wants peace, that strives for peace, that has sacrificed incredibly to attain peace. But in spite of Israel's desire for peace, its enemies preach hatred, violence, terrorism, and the most vicious anti-Israel, anti-Jewish propaganda.

War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer. But we must view life in two dimensions: as it is, and as it should be. As it is: we must fight in order to maintain ourselves and our nation. As it should be: we are fighting for a righteous, loving and peaceful world.

Hashem oz le'amo yiten, Hashem yevarekh et amo bashalom. God will give strength to His people, God will bless His people with peace.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/war-and-peace>

Created in God's Image? – Thoughts for Parashat Bereishith

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"So God created Mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Bereishith 1:27).

This verse has perplexed our sages for many generations. Since we believe God to be non-corporeal and not representable by any physical image, what does the Torah mean when it declares that humans were created in God's image?

Various interpretations have been offered. Image refers not to any physical quality but to reason; or free will; or creativity; or spirituality.

A widely-held teaching is that each human being is of infinite value since he/she is created in God's image. To harm a person in any way is to debase the Godliness within that human being. Jewish philosophers and social activists promote the view that each human life is infinitely precious; each person, in a sense, is an image of God and therefore should be honored as God is honored. Although this is a comforting and idealistic interpretation, it strikes me as being false.

History — including our own time — is replete with human beings who are the antithesis of Godliness. Can we really maintain that Stalin or Hitler were worthy to be honored for the image of God within them? Can we honestly see Godliness in terrorists, murderers, pathological haters?

In her recent novel, *“The Enemy Beside Me,”* Naomi Ragen describes the work of a woman who devotes her life to hunting down and prosecuting Nazis. The novel focuses on the mass destruction of Lithuanian Jewry, with the most heinous crimes against Jews committed by Lithuanians themselves. Can we say with honesty that the murderers, rapists and thieves were created in God’s image, that their lives were infinitely precious?

I can’t.

Then what does the Torah mean when it states that God created human beings in His image?

I believe this passage must be interpreted as stating a potentiality, not a fact. God endowed human beings with the possibility of becoming Godly. But this is a quality that must be developed by each person. Some are able to actualize this potentiality so as to be worthy of being in the image of God. Others, though, suppress the possibility of Godliness. They choose to defile the seeds of Godliness within them, so that in fact, they live and die without actualizing the image of God. Such people are not worthy of respect. On the contrary, they are to be deplored for having crushed the potentiality of Godliness within them.

When people strive to actualize the image of God within them, their lives are indeed infinitely precious. When they abort the image of God within them, they distort and defile the potential for Godliness within them.

God planted His image in all of us, so that we can develop it and allow it to grow and flourish. To live as an image of God is not a guaranteed gift: it is the ultimate challenge.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3166>

Shabbos: Unity and Determination

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

With the season of the holidays completed it is exciting to begin Torah once again from the beginning. The story of creation reminds us that the world is not some fortuitous accident. There is a Creator, and the world was created for a purpose. The Torah was given to us in a great revelation to guide us in discovering that purpose. Each week on Shabbos we commemorate that G-d created the world in six days and on the seventh day He rested.

One of the treasured highlights of this week’s Parsha is the section known as Vayichulu (Bireishis 2:1-3). When we wish to declare the meaning of Shabbos we use these verses, first in Friday night Amida and then again in Kiddush. Additionally, after the Amidah on Friday night we recite these verses in unison. The Talmud (Shabbos 119) tells us that one who recites Vayichulu on Friday night is like a partner with G-d in creation. G-d created the world as a gift to us to give us free choice. When we acknowledge the gift through the great words of Vayichulu, the gift of love is fulfilled.

An interesting practice on Friday night is that we try to recite Vayichulu together with someone else. The reason given is that it is like a testimony (that G-d created the world), and testimony in Jewish tradition is presented by two witnesses. Therefore, if someone did not recite it with the congregation (because he was still reciting the Amida, or for some other reason) it is proper to connect with another person and recite it together. Thus, not only the Shabbos meals and Shabbos prayers are opportunities to connect, but even for the basic declaration that it is Shabbos, we look to connect with a partner.

In contrast, one of the most tear-jerking rules in the laws of Shabbos pertains to a person who is disconnected from civilization and has lost track of the days of the week. Perhaps he is lost in a desert or on an island; perhaps he was shipwrecked. If he doesn't know what day of the week it is, then he will be unable to reliably observe the correct day of Shabbos. The rule in this unfortunate case is that he counts six days and then observes a day of Shabbos (Shulchan Aruch 344). Although it probably is not the real Shabbos, the Jew will do this if he is alone, because he has no choice. A Jew cannot be without Shabbos. No matter what situation G-d placed this Jew in he remains determined to keep Shabbos, until better times will come, and he will find out when the real Shabbos is.

I think these two qualities of Shabbos define the essence of a Jew. Vayichulu in unison represents the fact that we desire partnerships and connection. The rule of the Jew who is shipwrecked and alone represents that we are determined to stay on track even when it is lonely, even in the most challenging of circumstances.

This past week the world has experienced a brutal massacre of Jews. Due to social media, there is absolutely no question worldwide about the barbaric behavior. The events bring to mind a quote from the Nazis, "Yes, we are barbarians. It is a pride to us." In the aftermath of the assault and during the ongoing crisis we unite, knowing that especially in crisis we must be together. We even reach out and hope for partners and support from whomever will offer it. Indeed, as I walked around in different places this week numerous people noticed my Yarmulka and approached me saying, "It is obvious, of course, but I just wanted to tell you that we are with you, with Israel."

Yet, with all our desire for partnerships and support, there is a determination with which the Jew is blessed. We carry it in our DNA. It is the incredible determination of a Jew who is shipwrecked and says, "I will still keep Shabbos even if I do not have any partners and I don't know what day it is. I must." And it is a similar determined stance that we take on a global level in processing and dealing with this crisis.

Some people and nations understand what happened. They recognize evil and barbaric behavior and readily condemn it. Others — many of whom should know better — find themselves stammering about how sorry they are, without openly siding with morality and condemning evil. It is unfortunate that they have chosen to place themselves on the wrong side of the law. History will consider them complicit in the crimes.

There is a country of Jews which tries to be kind. Wherever there is a crisis they strive to send a mobile hospital and talented assistance to save lives, whether it be in Haiti, Mexico, or Turkey.

And there is a country who looks for trouble to exploit it, to send arms, drones, and funds and see how much trouble they can make and how many people they can kill.

Unfortunately, this is not all that surprising. G-d created this world to provide humanity with free choice. Human beings can choose to become angelic; others can choose to become barbarians. Likewise, people worldwide have free choice. The facts are before all of us. Social media has made it all readily available. We can choose to speak up and condemn evil, or through silence, some will choose to tolerate and condone the barbarians. This is a moment in history when there really is no middle ground. This world is a struggle between good and evil. Each person, country, and institution gets to choose which side they wish to be counted with.

For us, as Jews worldwide, we have our work assigned to us. Jewish tradition describes how Jews go to battle. For every soldier in the front lines there are corresponding Jews who pray for their wellbeing (Medrash Rabboh, Parshas Matos). Instinctively we know that we are partners. Worldwide we mobilize with prayer, with Tzedaka, with extra Torah learning, and by bettering our interpersonal relationships. As a nation we have a sense of unity and awareness of purpose. We step forward in the numbing and painful reality with deep internal faith and strength.

May G-d provide wisdom, level headedness, and determination.

May G-d grant us success, clarity, and unity.

May G-d bless His nation with peace.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

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Bereishis: It All Begins With Respect... For Yourself

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

Rash"i open his commentary on the Torah with an insightful question. He quotes Rabi Yitzchak who notes that the Torah is a guidebook to life and not a history book. Yet, the Torah does not begin recording the mitzvos given to the Jewish people until the third Parsha of Sefer Shemos, Parshas Bo. Why then does the Torah begin with creation? We would have expected the Torah to begin with the giving of the mitzvos.

Rabi Yitzchak answers quoting a verse from Tehillim, *"The power of His actions He told His nation, to give them the inheritance of nations."* (Tehillim 11:6) When we declare Israel as our ancient homeland, the nations of the world may challenge that we are thieves. They will say we stole the land from the seven nations of Canaan who lived there before us! G-d, therefore, gave us the answer to this challenge. He taught us that He created the entire world and that it all belongs to Him. He taught us of the history of the nations and of how we were chosen. This way we can tell the nations of the world that we are not thieves. The entire world belongs to G-d, and He gives it to whomever He sees fit for them to use it. G-d saw fit to take it back from them and give it to us. It was on G-d's word that we took the land, and therefore, we are entitled. It is all His.

There is much discussion about Rabi Yitzchak's answer. There are two questions I would like to focus on. One is how this answer helps – why would the nations of the world care what it says in the Torah? Just look around the world today. Those who challenge our right to live in Israel, have no interest in what we have to say. They certainly would not care if we explained that our G-d said we should live there.

The second question is that the answer seems to contain two separate and distinct points. One is that G-d owns the entire world and has chosen to give it to us. The second is that we took the land at G-d's command. Why do we need to explain G-d's right to give it to us? Why wouldn't it suffice to tell the nations of the world that we took the land because G-d is the All Powerful, and He commanded us to conquer it? It would seem to be an answer unto itself that we are following the commands of our G-d.

Based on these questions the Levush Ha'orah explains that Rabi Yitzchak is not concerned with defending ourselves in the courts of the other nations. Rather, the nations of the world have a much more significant challenge to us – they are challenging that we are unfaithful to our own Torah, to our own way of life. Our Torah dictates that we should not steal. Yet, we have stolen the land we have established as our homeland. How can we claim a homeland in violation of our own standards?

The Levush Ha'orah adds that we cannot simply answer this question by saying that G-d has told us to conquer the land of Israel. That would only deepen their question into one of blasphemy, Heaven forbid – how can G-d dictate that we should steal? How can a homeland given by G-d, come through theft?

Now we can understand Rabi Yitzchak's answer. We are not concerned with living by the standards and regulations of the nations of the world, and we do not need their approval. However, we are concerned with our own integrity. If they can challenge that we are dishonest with ourselves, that needs to be addressed. G-d, therefore, begins Torah with the story

of creation and the history of the nations of the world. G-d is ensuring that we know and understand why we are living in consonance with ourselves. He wants us to be able to explain – to ourselves and to others – that we are living up to our own standards.

With this insight, Rash"i is opening his commentary on Torah with a most important and fundamental lesson. As we begin Torah we have to ensure that our lives are in consonance with our principles. If our practice of Torah seems to be in conflict with our understanding of what G-d wants from us, we need to take the time to study, to ask and to understand. We need to be true to ourselves in all that we do.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Bereishis

By Rabbi Herzl Heftter *

[Note: Rabbi Heftter was unable to send me a Dvar Torah this week. As with all Israelis, Rabbi Heftter's first priority is the safety of his family and students in Israel. Please think of the Har-el Beit Midrash for donations during this time of war against our people.]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Heftter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Commentary on Parashat Bereshit

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

[Although Rabbi Ovadia did not submit a new Dvar Torah for Bereshit, he has an excellent, insightful essay posted on his Sefaria pages. I have copied some initial pages here. For the continuation, see his complete post on Sefaria at <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/475266?lang=bi>]

1:1 In the beginning of _____, God created... there is an insinuated blank space after "the beginning of," to teach us that the beginning of creation is hidden from us, both on the theological and on the scientific plane. Theologically, we do not know why God created the world, and scientifically, we will always ask "and what was before that?"; ברא – from the bi-radical¹ Hebrew root בָּרַךְ which means to bring out, at times with a burst of energy, as in the nouns ברך, ברך – hail, lightning, and the verbs ברך, ברך – sort out, escape. אלוהים – Elohim represents rigorous judgment. Only the first, perfect world², can be governed by that Name of God, because an imperfect world would not be able to withstand punishment.

1:2 – these words are usually translated as chaos, but maybe it would be more correct to translate "terrifying emptiness." וְתֹהַר – Darkness represents the pre-creation world because it potentially contains everything, and we usually identify it with evil and fear because we focus on the dangers lurking in it. – the wind of Elohim hovers above the water: a subtle rejection of the ancient creation myths of the Near East.³ In these myths there is a violent struggle between the gods and the powers of evil, led by the deity of the abyss. By contrast, the abyss here is subdued by a gentle wind blowing above it. Instead of a violent struggle there is a sense of calmness and total control, showing the sovereignty of the Creator.

1:3: – let there be light: The first act of creation is separation and distinction. Both physically and spiritually, we identify light with goodness and clarity of thought, and darkness with evil and confusion. The creation of the light on the first day

conveys the message that the first step in approaching a task or a problem is discerning the facts and the circumstances and clearly defining that task or problem. The light of the first day is abstract and symbolic, while the light we see will appear on the fourth day.

1:4: טוב – Good: the first world is characterized by goodness. It is a successful world which functions with precision according to the will and plan of the Creator.

1:5: – It was evening, it was morning....: This formula appears at the conclusion of each day and conveys a sense of order and careful planning, unlike in the second story; – One day: this is the first appearance of the concept of time, and since there are no other days yet, it is one day.

1:6: – firmament... between water and water: This is the first case of – the Torah speaks the language of humans. In the past, people believed that the sky is a transparent, physical dome, in which the stars are set like gems, and on top of which lies a tremendous water reservoir[4]. Even today, most people think of the sky as a physical entity and not as space, at least in the vernacular. – It will separate: in rejection of the belief that natural phenomena are wars waged by the gods against humanity, the Torah describes the heavens, or firmament, as a boundary placed by the Creator between the water above it and the water below it. As in verse 1:2, there is a sense of complete control by the Creator.]article continues in Sefaria[

* <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/475266?lang=bi>

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria article includes Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Read, Reread, and Reread it Again and Again

by Rabbi Yoscher Katz *

We live in NYC, but my wife and I and our two boys spend summers in Israel. We have been doing this for fourteen years. Each time, on our way to Israel, we stop over in a different European country for about seven to ten days for a short family vacation.

About ten years ago we chose Berlin as our vacation destination. Our boys were four and six years old at the time. While the four-year-old was too young to appreciate the historical gravitas of this particular destination, the six-year-old was starting to grasp the significance of the experience.

Of all the sites we visited, for some reason, the remnants of the Berlin Wall made the biggest impression on him. He was extremely curious about the story of the wall and its subsequent demolition. He inquired about it, and we shared with him an age-appropriate version of its history.

After a few days it became clear to us that he was deeply impacted by the story and he kept asking us to repeat it. We of course obliged, repeating the tale again and again, keeping the basics of the event intact but adding something unique each time: a new detail, a different angle, or perhaps a bit more color. By the time we left Berlin, we must have repeated the story to him about thirty times.

Around this time of year, I am always reminded of this experience.

As we are embarking on a new cycle of Torah-reading it is hard to avoid a sense of deja vu: again we are going to read the stories told in the book of Genesis, Numbers, etc? Don't we know them already?! Did we not hear them last year, the year before that, and the year before that?!

Well, that is not what our son taught us. He believed that one can listen to the same story multiple times and still find each reiteration vivifying and informative.

If that is true for stories in general, it is all the more so for the Torah, which we reread every year.

Mattan Torah, the students of the Ba'al Shem Tov claim, was not a one-time occurrence but instead happens anew every time we read from the Torah. Kri'at HaTorah encapsulates a modicum of Mattan Torah. We consequently encounter a "new" Torah every year, week after week.

While the texts we were originally given at Har Sinai are eternal and always the same, our existential experience of what those words tell us is new every year. Certain aspects of the Torah's narrative and laws deeply resonated last year but could perhaps lose their resonance this coming year, and vice versa.

As Maimonides explains (see his Mishnah commentary at the end of Tractate Makkot), the vastness of the Torah was by divine design, precisely for this reason. The enormity is there so that it offers something for everybody. It is unlikely that all of Torah would resonate with us all the time. But with such abundance, we can always choose to focus on those aspects that enhance our religious journey.

This Shabbat, therefore, when the Torah reader calls out the opening verses of Parshat Breishit, allow yourself to encounter our covenantal text anew, to experience a personal Mattan Torah (see *Zohar Shemot* p. 106a). Perhaps you will discover something that was not there -- for you -- last year.

Allowing yourself to experience those tales anew, as if you never heard them before, could possibly reveal to you *kol q'var bat torah*, the aspect of Torah that is uniquely and exclusively yours. And if you do not open yourself in this way, it perhaps will never come to light, depriving you of some aspects of Torah and also making the Torah incomplete and (metaphysically) *pasul*. A Torah that is incomplete is invalid, even if only a single letter is missing. You might be in possession of that single -- so far missing -- letter (metaphorically speaking).

For myself, I can't wait to hear the current version of these majestic stories. Looking at them through the prism of the annual new lenses we bring to this encounter I will wonder: What is the story of creation? How does my perception of its particulars differ from the way I perceived them last year? What happened to Noach and his family when the world was wiped out by an unnatural occurrence? What were our patriarchs and matriarchs like? How did they grapple when tragedy struck (starvation, infertility, spousal and familial strife)? What can we learn from that? Can we infer from those experiences some guidance for our current situation?

Similarly, in what way will the legal edicts of the Torah be similar to last year's and in what way will they be different, conceived differently by the new us that has so drastically changed since the last time we read them.

I am really curious.

* Rabbi, Prospect Heights Shul, Brooklyn, New York. Ordination from Rabbi Yechezkel Roth, dayan of UTA Satmer.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/10/breishit5784/>

Israel Under Attack

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Israel has the bragging rights to housing the majority of Jews in the world. Among many things, that means that a

majority of us will have family, friends, and/or close acquaintances in the line of fire. An attack on Israel means an attack on our family. On people we know and love.

Because of that, words seem to fail. If someone breaks into your house and threatens you and your family, do you think it's the right time to give an eloquent speech about peace and love? No. Now is the time to fight for your life by any means necessary. A prayer for peace is insufficient. We must pray for victory. An absolute, one hundred percent victory where Israel rescues all our hostages, pounds and destroys our attackers into the dust and strikes fear into the hearts of all its adversaries who will never think about doing something so vile as to attack Israel again.

Sometimes I wish to live in the Garden of Eden world we read about this week. The world of peace, bountiful resources and no violent aggression. But we don't. We live in a world where Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and their child Kayin murdered his brother. It's an ugly world and it has gotten uglier. Let us hope and pray that by shouting our cries of support for the IDF, this helps provide them with strength and resolve to undertake their heroic task.

Victory for Israel! Am Yisrael Chai!

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera (Auckland), New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel (Birmingham, AL)

Special note: The police in Auckland, NZ have closed the Jewish Community Center, which houses the Auckland Hebrew Congregation, for the entire weekend – to allocate police resources when the police cannot guarantee being able to protect Jewish lives and property. The shul is making alternative arrangements for a safe location for services for this Shabbat. The Jewish community in New Zealand seems to have excellent rapport with the police, who work closely with our community in the country.

Rav Kook Torah Faith in Troubled Times

[The following story took place during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. As told by a student of Mercaz HaRav at that time, it illustrates Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook's guidance how we should conduct ourselves during troubled and difficult times.]

That Yom Kippur I prayed in Beit HaRav, the original location of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva in Jerusalem. Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook also prayed there. During the chazan's repetition of the Musaf prayer, we were startled to hear the civil defense alarms wailing throughout Jerusalem.

After Yom Kippur ended, I was called up to my unit. For over a month I was stationed in the Sinai Desert. When I finally received a short leave from the army, I made my way to Jerusalem. First I went to the Kotel, where I poured out my heart over the terrible sights I had witnessed during the war. Then I visited my fiancee. Our wedding date had already arrived, but due to the war it had been postponed indefinitely.

My fiancee asked me, "What will be with our wedding?"

I told her that now, during this terrible war, with so many killed, wounded and missing, I didn't think it was the right time to get married. The situation was still very tense. We were afraid the fighting would start up again. It was impossible to know when and in what condition we would return from the war. Therefore, I explained, we must postpone the wedding until the situation stabilizes.

Without a choice, my fiancee accepted my decision.

I returned to Sinai. We dug into our lines and kept a constant lookout for enemy forces. Tensions were high. Henry Kissinger, the American Secretary of Defense, had arrived in Israel, with his shuttle diplomacy between Jerusalem and the Arab capitals. But our worries and fears grew.

After a few weeks, I was granted a second leave. My fiancee asked me again — what will be with our wedding?

I told her that the situation was still difficult. We have no choice, we must wait.

“You have a rabbi,” she suggested. “Ask him. Listen to daat Torah — consult with a Torah scholar.”

I was pleased with her suggestion and immediately made my way to Mercaz HaRav. The yeshiva was almost empty, as many of the students had been called up to fight.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook

I met with Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook and explained my dilemma. I spoke about the terrible war, about the unfathomable number of casualties and soldiers missing in action, about the palpable dangers which we faced against the enemy armies. I concluded saying that I felt that, in this difficult time, it was not appropriate to organize a wedding.

The rabbi listened to me with complete attention. He reflected on the matter. After a minute of silence, he said,

“We act according to the rules of Halakha (Jewish law). In Halakha, one decides according to the principles of rov (the majority of cases) and chazakah (the presumption that pre-existing conditions will persist). The majority of wounded soldiers recover. The majority of those who go out to battle return.”

Normally, Rav Tzvi Yehudah would conclude with some guidance but leave the ultimate decision to the person seeking advice. This time, however, he finished his words with an unequivocal declaration: *“Mazal tov! Congratulations!”*

Smiling, he shook my hand warmly.

I went back to my fiancee and related the rabbi’s verdict. We set a new date for the wedding. I returned to the army, and the news that I was about to get married lifted the spirits of the entire battalion. They all rejoiced. Soldiers volunteered days of their army leave — it was called a ‘Day Bank’ — and proudly presented me with a gift of 13 vacation days.

The day before the wedding, I took a flight to Lod airport. I prayed at the Kotel, immersed in a mikveh, and stood under the chupah. Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook attended the wedding, as did a few fellow students from yeshiva and some soldiers on leave.

The joy of the wedding raised everyone’s spirits, infusing them with renewed strength. So it was that, during the very days of that blood-soaked war, when our enemies sought to destroy us, we built our home ke-dat Moshe veYisrael, *“according to the laws of Moses and Israel.”*

In another incident from the war, involving the burial of one of the rabbi’s beloved students, Rabbi Hanan Porat noted:

“It was clear that our rabbi, in his unique manner, wanted to teach us that the Yom Kippur War — despite the many sacrifices, despite the deep crisis that it created — will not break us. On the contrary, our job is to increase light and engage in matters of the ‘land of the living.’”

(Translated from *Mashmia Yeshuah (Harbinger of Redemption)* by Simcha Raz and Hilah Volbershtin, pp. 359-360, 363.)

Why Were We Created? (5772, 5777)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

There is a deep question at the heart of Jewish faith, and it is very rarely asked. As the Torah opens we see God creating the universe day by day, bringing order out of chaos, life out of inanimate matter, flora and fauna in all their wondrous diversity. At each stage God sees what He has made and declares it good.

What then went wrong? How did evil enter the picture, setting in motion the drama of which the Torah – in a sense, the whole of history – is a record? The short answer is man, *Homo sapiens*, us. We, alone of the life forms thus far known to us, have freewill, choice and moral responsibility. Cats do not debate the ethics of killing mice. Vampire bats do not become vegetarians. Cows do not worry about global warming.

It is this complex capacity to speak, think and choose between alternative courses of action, that is at once our glory, our burden and our shame. When we do good we are little lower than the angels. When we do evil we fall lower than the beasts. Why then did God take the risk of creating the one form of life capable of destroying the very order He had made and declared good? Why did God create us?

That is the question posed by the Gemara in Sanhedrin:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create man, He created a group of ministering angels and asked them, "Do you agree that we should make man in our image?"

They replied, "Sovereign of the Universe, what will be his deeds?"

God showed them the history of mankind.

The angels replied, "What is man that You are mindful of him?"]Let man not be created[.

God destroyed the angels.

He created a second group, and asked them the same question, and they gave the same answer.

God destroyed them.

He created a third group of angels, and they replied, "Sovereign of the Universe, the first and second group of angels told You not to create man, and it did not avail them. You did not listen. What then can we say but this: The universe is Yours. Do with it as You wish."

And God created man.

But when it came to the generation of the Flood, and then to the generation of those who built the Tower of Babel, the angels said to God, "Were not the first angels right? See how great is the corruption of mankind."

And God replied)Isaiah 46:4(, "Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient." Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38b

Technically the Gemara is addressing a stylistic challenge in the text. For every other act of creation in Genesis 1, the Torah tells us, "God said, 'Let there be' ... And there was..." In the case of the creation of humankind alone, there is a preface, a prelude. Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness ..." Who is the "us"? And why the preamble?

In their seemingly innocent and childlike – actually subtle and profound – way the Sages answered both questions by saying that with)to quote Hamlet(an enterprise of this pith and moment, God consulted with the angels. They were the “us.”

But now the question becomes very deep indeed. For, in creating humans, God brought into existence the one life form with the sole exception of Himself, capable of freedom and choice. That is what the phrase means when it says, “*Let us make mankind in our image after our likeness.*” For the salient fact is that God has no image. To make an image of God is the archetypal act of idolatry.

This means not just the obvious fact that God is invisible. He cannot be seen. He cannot be identified with anything in nature: not the sun, the moon, thunder, lightning, the ocean or any of the other objects or forces people worshipped in those days. In this superficial sense, God has no image. That, wrote Sigmund Freud in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, was Judaism’s greatest contribution. By worshipping an invisible God, Jews tilted the balance of civilisation from the physical to the spiritual.

But the idea that God has no image goes far deeper than this. It means that we cannot conceptualise God, understand Him or predict Him. God is not an abstract essence; He is a living presence. That is the meaning of God’s own self-definition to Moses at the Burning Bush: “*I will be what I will be*” – meaning, “*I will be what I choose to be.*” I am the God of freedom, who endowed humankind with freedom, and I am about to lead the children of Israel from slavery to freedom.

When God made humanity in His image, it means that He gave humans the freedom to choose, so that you can never fully predict what they will do. They too – within the limits of our finitude and mortality – will be what they choose to be. Which means that when God gave humans the freedom to act well, he gave them the freedom to act badly. There is no way of avoiding this dilemma even for God Himself. And so it was. Adam and Eve sinned. The first human child, Cain, murdered the second, Abel, and within a short space of time the world was filled with violence.

In one of the most searing passages in the whole of Tanach, we read at the end of this week’s parsha:

God saw that man’s wickedness on earth was increasing. Every impulse of his innermost thought was only for evil, all day long. God regretted that He had made man on earth, and He was pained to His very core. Gen. 6:5-6

Hence the angels’ question, the ultimate question at the heart of faith. Why did God, knowing the risks and dangers, make a species that could and did rebel against Him, devastate the natural environment, hunt species to extinction, and oppress and kill his fellow man?

The Talmud, imagining a conversation between God and the angels, is suggesting a tension within the mind of God Himself. The answer God gives the angels is extraordinary: “*Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient.*” Meaning:

I, God, am prepared to wait. If it takes ten generations for a Noah to emerge, and another ten for an Abraham, I will be patient. However many times humans disappoint Me, I will not change. However much evil they do in the world I will not despair. I despaired once, and brought a Flood. But after I saw that humans are merely human, I will never bring a Flood again.

God created humanity because God has faith in humanity. Far more than we have faith in God, God has faith in us. We may fail many times, but each time we fail, God says: “*Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient.*” I will never give up on humanity. I will never lose faith. I will wait for as long as it takes for humans to learn not to oppress, enslave or use violence against other humans. That, implies the Talmud, is the only conceivable explanation for why a good, wise, all-seeing and all-powerful God created such fallible, destructive creatures as us. God has patience. God has forgiveness. God has compassion. God has love.

For centuries, theologians and philosophers have been looking at religion upside down. The real phenomenon at its heart – the mystery and miracle – is not our faith in God. It is God's faith in us.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bereishit/why-were-we-created/>

The Moment After You Do Something Terrible

By Aharon Loschak* © Chabad 2023

"All neurotic manifestations are in fact incarnations of self-hate." – Dr. Theodore Rubin¹

In his famous book *Compassion and Self-Hate*, Dr. Rubin argued — as the above quote suggests — that self-hate lies at the root of all nasty, destructive, and hateful behavior, including behavior directed at others. His pioneering work was, and still is, subject to much debate, making major waves in its time, including multiple screen adaptations.

It's not hard to see why, as his basic premise strikes a deep chord. When we are honest enough to face our own inadequacies, it can be excruciating to deal with life, causing all types of destructive behavior.

Dr. Rubin's suggestions of radical self-acceptance have proven quite popular. But what should we do when we don't think ourselves worthy of such love? What if you really did something terrible? Can you shake off shame and guilt and live an honorable life?

Cain's Unanswered Plea

Parshat Bereshit has many important stories, not the least of which is the world's first murder. Brothers Cain and Abel decided to offer a sacrifice to G d, and due to the cheapness of Cain's offering, G d shunned it while He graciously accepted Abel's.

Furious at this spurn, Cain murders his brother in cold blood. G d calls out and chastises him, eventually leading Cain to the realization that he just did something terrible.

Cain cries, *"My sin is it too great to bear!"* and proceeds to express his fear that everyone will try to kill him with his newfound reputation as a murderer. G d responds:

"Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be wrought upon him sevenfold," and G d placed a mark on Cain that no one who finds him slay him.²

Now, if the only thing Cain was worried about was saving his own skin, G d's response makes sense. *"Don't worry, I got your back."* But that's not everything Cain said; he said a few more important words, namely, *"My sin is it too great to bear!"*

If we take just a few seconds to think into these words, G d's response seems to be sorely lacking.

Cain just realized that he made a grave, catastrophic mistake. A historic error the likes of which had never yet been committed. He had taken the life of another human, and his very own brother no less. Staring down the barrel of his own monstrousness, Cain threw his hands up in despair, *"My sin is just too much to bear! How will I ever live with myself?"*

This is a piercing, painful question.

How did G d answer? By simply telling him that no one would kill him. That may address Cain's physical safety, but what of the remorse and the mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish Cain expressed?

This isn't just a question about Cain. This is a question about me, you, and anyone else who ever made or makes mistakes — sometimes grave ones. How are we supposed to live with ourselves in the aftermath? What should we tell ourselves to still the cascade of guilt, shame, and horror after we do something terrible?

An Inner Holiness

The Chassidic masters shared a remarkable new reading of this verse that gifts us the answer. In Hebrew, the word for “sign” can also mean “letter” — a reference to the letters of the Torah. In this reading, G d gave Cain his personal letter in the Torah, fortifying his soul with an inner holiness that flows from the sanctity of Torah.

What was this “sign/letter” for? What was the point of giving Cain a strong bond to the sanctity of Torah?

To stand against any voices — external or internal — that would seek to deter Cain from his path of teshuvah. When the verse speaks of “*all those who would find him*,” the reference is to anything, say the Chassidic masters, that may get in the way of self-redemption through honest teshuvah.

There's the answer Cain sought, and the answer for all of us, too: The truth of sin is indeed terrible, and it really is terrifying to live with. But G d promises us that if we're honest and make amends, if we really set out on a path of teshuvah, He'll help us live cleanly and peacefully with ourselves.

Don't Let Your Past Hold You Hostage

Very often, the worst thing about doing something wrong isn't so much the act itself, but the moment after the sin.

We're so disgusted and horrified with ourselves, so terrified to honestly admit that, “*Yes, I am the type of person who did such and such*,” that we simply cannot bear it. In such cases, what usually happens is one of two things: We deny it internally, try to sweep it under the rug, and fake our way through life. Or we give in to the “*bad guy*” narrative and go full-on supervillain.

Obviously, neither of these are good options. But they are realistic, simply because facing our own mistakes is sometimes just too hard.

The deep truth revealed in this exchange between G d and Cain is that if it was up to us, it would indeed be too hard to face the truth of our own rap sheets, and we'd be up a creek without a paddle. But we're not alone. Once we take the courageous step of teshuvah, G d steps in and helps us from getting bogged down by anything that gets in the way.

So if you've ever done something that you're afraid to even tell your closest friend; if you've done something that horrifies you and makes you think that you're a raging hypocrite and you don't deserve nice things, and certainly have no right proceeding through life as if all's well; if there something in your past that makes you think it's never your place to claim any sort of moral, ethical, or religious ground because you're just such a blazing faker, then this is for you:

You're not worse than Cain. He murdered his own brother over a piece of flax! And yet, after expressing true remorse and setting out on his path of repair, he then turned to G d in a terrified voice and cried, “*My sin is too much to bear!*” To which G d responded: “*Don't worry. If you're honest, if you're serious about making amends and turning over a new leaf, I'll chase away all those inner demons. I'll make sure your past doesn't hold you hostage.*”

Your past won't either. Make amends, do sincere teshuvah, and then go on and live a better life without ever looking back.³

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Compassion and Self-Hate*)New York: David McKay, 1975(, p. 133.
2. Genesis 4:15.
3. This essay is based on teachings of Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl and Rabbi Mordechai of Lekhovitch, cited in *Divrei Shalom*)Koidanov(, Genesis 4:15.

* Editor of JLI's popular Torah Studies program.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5668679/jewish/The-Moment-After-You-Do-Something-Terrible.htm

Bereishit: A Light In The Darkness

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

A Light In The Darkness

"In the beginning of G-d's creation of heaven and earth..."

This Shabbos we will read the opening words of the Torah. The Torah commentator par excellence, Rashi, immediately sets the record straight, forever. He cites the midrash:

Said Rabbi Yitzchak: ...Why, does the Torah begin with "In the beginning of G d's creation of heaven and earth"?

Because He declared to His people the power of His works in order to give them the inheritance of the nations.

So that if the nations of the world say to Israel, "You are robbers, for having conquered the lands of the seven nations," they will say to them: "The entire world is G d's; He created it, and He grants it to whoever He desires. It was His will to give it to them, and it was His will to take it from them and give it to us."

During these days of unfathomable loss and anguish, yet astonishing in the bravery, resilience and unity of the Jewish people, we need to remind the world of our eternal ownership of the holy land.

From the moment G-d created the world, He intended that the Jewish people should inherit the land. The permanent acquisition of the land by the Jewish people, and its transformation into the holy land, is Divinely willed.

We should be proclaiming this truth to the world, unabashedly and persistently.

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May the Almighty grant our prayers, for a total and definitive victory.

A Chasidic insight on parshat Bereishit, selected from the Kehot Chumash edited by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky:

A Light In The Darkness

G-d said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.)Gen. 1:3(

G-d seeks “partners” in His ongoing re-creation of the world. Thus, whenever we take upon ourselves to begin some project intended to promote holiness, goodness, and Divine consciousness in the world, we should remember that we are G-d’s emissaries in this endeavor, acting on His behalf.

This being the case, our own “act of creation” must take its cue from G-d’s creation of the world. Just as the initial state of reality seemed antithetical to Divine consciousness – void, chaotic, and dark – so will there be challenges and obstacles to our own creative projects. Nonetheless, just as light broke through and illuminated the world on the first day of creation, paving the way for the rest of the creative process to unfold, so too, when we resolve to see our endeavors through to fruition, G-d will turn the tables, and light and order will displace chaos and darkness.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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"All Israel are bound to each other", all the more so, when all the inhabitants of the land are in great trouble. It is a duty to arouse oneself to the right emotion, to share in the public's sorrow, and to pray to God from the bottom of the heart and with tears, that He will stand with our soldiers, and return all the captives to their homes in peace. May all our enemies fall. May God hear our prayers and have mercy on his people. May we soon have complete redemption in our day. *Halacha Yomit, Ovadiah Yosef Institute*

Volume 30, Issue 1

Shabbat Parashat Bereshit

5784 B''H

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

A Double Sacilege: "Terror, the killing of the innocent and the sacrifice of human life in pursuit of political ends are not mere crimes. They are sacilege. Those who murder God's image in God's name commit a double sacilege." *Not in God's Name*, p. 202

The Art of Listening

What exactly was the first sin? What was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Is this kind of knowledge a bad thing, such that it had to be forbidden and was only acquired through sin? Isn't knowing the difference between good and evil essential to being human? Isn't it one of the highest forms of knowledge? Surely God would want humans to have it? Why then did He forbid the fruit that produced it?

In any case, did not Adam and Eve already have this knowledge before eating the fruit, precisely in virtue of being "in the image and likeness of God"? Surely this was implied in the very fact that they were commanded by God: Be fruitful and multiply. Have dominion over nature. Do not eat from the tree. For someone to understand a command, they must know it is good to obey and bad to disobey. So they already had, at least potentially, the knowledge of Good and Evil. What then changed when they ate the fruit? These questions go so deep that they threaten to make the entire narrative incomprehensible.

Maimonides understood this. That is why he turned to this episode at almost the very beginning of *The Guide for the Perplexed* (Book 1, Chapter 2). His answer though, is perplexing. Before eating the fruit, he says, the first humans knew the difference between truth and falsehood. What they acquired by eating the fruit was knowledge of "things generally accepted."^[1] But what does Maimonides mean by "things generally accepted"? It is generally accepted that murder is evil, and honesty good. Does Maimonides mean that

morality is mere convention? Surely not. What he means is that after eating the fruit, the man and woman were embarrassed that they were naked, and that is a mere matter of social convention because not everyone is embarrassed by nudity. But how can we equate being embarrassed that you are naked with "knowledge of Good and Evil"? It does not seem to be that sort of thing at all. Conventions of dress have more to do with aesthetics than ethics.

It is all very unclear, or at least it was to me until I came across one of the more fascinating moments in the history of the Second World War.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, Americans knew they were about to enter a war against a nation, Japan, whose culture they did not understand. So they commissioned one of the great anthropologists of the twentieth century, Ruth Benedict, to explain the Japanese to them, which she did. After the war, she published her ideas in a book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.^[2] One of her central insights was the difference between shame cultures and guilt cultures. In shame cultures the highest value is honour. In guilt cultures it is righteousness. Shame is feeling bad that we have failed to live up to the expectations others have of us. Guilt is what we feel when we fail to live up to what our own conscience demands of us. Shame is other-directed. Guilt is inner-directed.

Philosophers, among them Bernard Williams, have pointed out that shame cultures are usually visual. Shame itself has to do with how you appear (or imagine you appear) in other peoples' eyes. The instinctive reaction to shame is to wish you were invisible, or somewhere else. Guilt, by contrast, is much more internal. You cannot escape it by becoming invisible or being elsewhere. Your conscience accompanies you wherever you go, regardless of whether you are seen by others. Guilt cultures are cultures of the ear, not the eye.

With this contrast in mind we can now understand the story of the first sin. It is all about appearances, shame, vision, and the eye. The serpent says to the woman: "God knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing

Good and Evil." That is, in fact, what happens: "The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked." It was appearance of the tree that the Torah emphasises: "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and desirable to the eyes, and that the tree was attractive as a means to gain intelligence." The key emotion in the story is shame. Before eating the fruit the couple were "naked, but unashamed." After eating it they feel shame and seek to hide. Every element of the story – the fruit, the tree, the nakedness, the shame – has the visual element typical of a shame culture.

But in Judaism we believe that God is heard not seen. The first humans "heard God's Voice moving about in the garden with the wind of the day." Replying to God, the man says, "I heard Your Voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." Note the deliberate, even humorous, irony of what the couple did. They heard God's Voice in the garden, and they "hid themselves from God among the trees of the garden." But you can't hide from a voice. Hiding means trying not to be seen. It is an immediate, intuitive response to shame. But the Torah is the supreme example of a culture of guilt, not shame, and you cannot escape guilt by hiding. Guilt has nothing to do with appearances and everything to do with conscience, the voice of God in the human heart.

The sin of the first humans in the Garden of Eden was that they followed their eyes, not their ears. Their actions were determined by what they saw, the beauty of the tree, not by what they heard, namely the word of God commanding them not to eat from it. The result was that they did indeed acquire a knowledge of Good and Evil, but it was the wrong kind. They acquired an ethic of shame, not guilt; of appearances not conscience. That, I believe, is what Maimonides meant by his distinction between true-and-false and "things generally accepted." A guilt ethic is about the inner voice that tells you, "This is right, that is wrong", as clearly as "This is true, that is false". But a shame ethic is about social convention. It is a matter of meeting or not meeting the expectations others have of you.

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Report to Readers and Sponsors

Welcome to the 30th year of Likutei Divrei Torah! All sponsorship donations are contributed to the organizations which provide the articles included in LDT. During 5783, your sponsorships provided over \$1,150 in contributions to these organizations. Thank you for your support.

Shame cultures are essentially codes of social conformity. They belong to groups where socialisation takes the form of internalising the values of the group such that you feel shame – an acute form of embarrassment – when you break them, knowing that if people discover what you have done you will lose honour and ‘face’.

Judaism is precisely not that kind of morality, because Jews do not conform to what everyone else does. Abraham was willing, say the Sages, to be on one side while all the rest of the world was on the other. Haman says about Jews, “Their customs are different from those of all other people” (Esther 3:8). Jews have often been iconoclasts, challenging the idols of the age, the received wisdom, the “spirit of the age”, the politically correct.

If Jews had followed the majority, they would have disappeared long ago. In the biblical age they were the only monotheists in a pagan world. For most of the post-biblical age they lived in societies in which they and their faith were shared by only a tiny minority of the population. Judaism is a living protest against the herd instinct. Ours is the dissenting voice in the conversation of humankind. Hence the ethic of Judaism is not a matter of appearances, of honour and shame. It is a matter of hearing and heeding the voice of God in the depths of the soul.

The drama of Adam and Eve is not about apples or sex or original sin or “the Fall” – interpretations the non-Jewish West has given to it. It is about something deeper. It is about the kind of morality we are called on to live. Are we to be governed by what everyone else does, as if morality were like politics: the will of the majority? Will our emotional horizon be bounded by honour and shame, two profoundly social feelings? Is our key value appearance: how we seem to others? Or is it something else altogether, a willingness to heed the word and will of God? Adam and Eve in Eden faced the archetypal human choice between what their eyes saw (the tree and its fruit) and what their ears heard (God’s command). Because they chose the first, they felt shame, not guilt. That is one form of “knowledge of Good and Evil”, but from a Jewish perspective, it is the wrong form.

Judaism is a religion of listening, not seeing. That is not to say there are no visual elements in Judaism. There are, but they are not primary. Listening is the sacred task. The most famous command in Judaism is Shema Yisrael, “Listen, Israel.” What made Abraham, Moses, and the prophets different from their contemporaries was that they heard the voice that to others was inaudible. In one of the great dramatic scenes of the Bible, God teaches Elijah that He is not in the whirlwind, the

earthquake, or the fire, but in the “still, small voice.”

It takes training, focus and the ability to create silence in the soul to learn how to listen, whether to God or to a fellow human being. Seeing shows us the beauty of the created world, but listening connects us to the soul of another, and sometimes to the soul of the Other, God as He speaks to us, calls to us, summoning us to our task in the world.

If I were asked how to find God, I would say, Learn to listen. Listen to the song of the universe in the call of birds, the rustle of trees, the crash and heave of the waves. Listen to the poetry of prayer, the music of the Psalms. Listen deeply to those you love and who love you. Listen to the words of God in the Torah and hear them speak to you. Listen to the debates of the Sages through the centuries as they tried to hear the texts’ intimations and inflections.

Don’t worry about how you or others look. The world of appearances is a false world of masks, disguises, and concealments. Listening is not easy. I confess I find it formidably hard. But listening alone bridges the abyss between soul and soul, self and other, I and the Divine.

Jewish spirituality is the art of listening.^[3]
[5777]

[1] Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, I:2.
[2] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1946.
[3] We will continue our theme of listening in Judaism later in this series, particularly in the essays for Bamidbar and Eikev.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) Why does the Torah, the word of God given to Moses as His legacy to the Jewish people, begin with an account of creation, going off into gardens of Eden and towers of Babel? It could, and perhaps should, have begun at the point when the Jews are given their first commandment as a nation after departing from Egypt: ‘This month shall be unto you the beginning of months’ [Ex. 12:2], referring to the month of Nissan, when Pesach, the uniquely Jewish festival commemorating our emergence as a nation, is celebrated. After all, is not the Bible primarily a book of commandments? So asks Rashi at the beginning of his commentary on Bereishit.

I would like to suggest three classical responses to this question, each of which makes a stunning contribution to our opening query, What is Torah?

Rashi’s answer to this question is the Zionist credo. We begin with an account of creation because, if the nations of the world point their fingers at us, claiming we are thieves who

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have stolen this land from the Canaanites and its other indigenous inhabitants, our answer is that the entire world belongs to God; since He created it, He can give it to whomever is worthy in His eyes. From this perspective, Rashi has masterfully taken a most universal verse and given it a nationalistic spin. He has placed our right to the land of Israel as an implication of the very first verse of the Torah!

It is also possible to give Rashi’s words an added dimension. He concludes this particular interpretation, ‘and He (God) can give (the land) to whomever is worthy in his eyes.’

These words can be taken to mean to whomever He wishes, i.e., to Israel, because he so arbitrarily chooses, or they can mean to whomever is morally worthy of the land, which implies that only if our actions deem us worthy, will we have the right to Israel. Jewish history bears out the second explanation, given the fact that we have suffered two exiles – the second of which lasting close to two thousand years. If this is indeed the proper explanation, Rashi’s words provide a warning as well as a promise.

Nahmanides also grapples with this question. For him, it is clear that God’s creation of the world is at the center of our theology, and so it was crucial to begin with this opening verse.

After all, the Torah is a complete philosophy of life. The first seven words of the Bible most significantly tell us that there is a Creator of this universe, that our world is not an accident, ‘a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,’ a haphazard convergence of chemicals and exploding gases. It is a world with a beginning, and a beginning implies an end, a purpose, a reason for being. Moreover, without the creation of heaven and earth, could we survive even for an instant? Our very existence depends on the Creator; and in return for creating us, He has the right to ask us to live in a certain way and follow His laws. The first verse in the Torah sets the foundation for all that follows.

First of all, there is a beginning. Second, there is a Creator who created heaven and earth. Third, everything in heaven and on earth owes its existence to the Creator; and fourth, in owing one’s existence to the Creator, there could very well be deeds the Creator wants and expects from His creation. According to Nahmanides, the opening verse of the Torah is the one upon which our entire metaphysical structure rests!

After all, the Creator has rights of ownership: He owns us, our very beings. He deserves to have us live our lives in accord with His will and not merely in accord with our own subjective, and even selfish desires. He deserves our blessings before we partake of any bounty of the universe and our

commitment to the lifestyle He commands us to lead.

In addition, Nahmanides further suggests that the entire story of the Garden of Eden teaches us that the punishment for disobeying God's laws will be alienation and exile, just as Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden of Eden after eating the forbidden fruit. This process is experienced by Israel during our difficult exile. This too is a crucial element in Jewish theology.

The Midrash [Gen. Raba 12] offers yet a third explanation. Implied in our opening biblical verse is a principle as to how we ought to live our lives. 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.' In this sentence, 'created' is the verb; the world reveals to us the creative function of the divine. And since one of the guiding principles in the Torah is that we walk in His ways, our first meeting with God tells us that, just as He created, so must we create, just as He stood at the abyss of darkness and made light, so must we – created in His image – remove all pockets of darkness, chaos and void, bringing light, order and significance. In effect, the first verse of Genesis is also the first commandment, a command ordained by God to all human beings created in His image: the human task in this world is to create, or rather to re-create a world, to make it a more perfect world, by virtue of the 'image of God' within each of us. The Midrash sees the human being in general, and the Jew in particular, as a creative force. Our creative energies – religious, ethical, scientific and artistic – must work in harmony with the Almighty to perfect a not yet perfect world, to bring us back to the peace and harmony of Eden.

All too often, Bible critics make two fatal errors. They divest the Torah of context and subtext, losing sight of what the Torah really wants to say. They take apart the grammatical mechanics of the words, disregarding the majesty and the fire, the vision and the message.

What we must remember is that essentially the Bible is not merely a book of laws, no matter how important they may be, and is certainly not written by man in his feeble attempt to understand creation and God; it is rather the Book of Books emanating from God, which gives instruction and life direction. It reveals not only what humanity is, but what we must strive to become; it teaches us that we must not merely engage the world, but attempt to perfect it in the majesty of the divine.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Undeserved Favoritism?

With this week's Torah portion, Bereshit (Genesis 1:1-6:8), we begin a new cycle of

Torah readings. No wonder that we somehow feel that the new year has finally really begun. It is also the beginning of a new academic year for many of us. No wonder that "newness" is in the air.

For the past month or so, we have been consumed by the range of emotions evoked by our religious holiday observances. We've traversed the days of judgement and penitence and have paraded through joyous and festive days as well. Many of us, however, are still haunted by the question, "Did I pass the trials of the days of judgement? Do I really deserve a 'good and sweet' new year?"

Thankfully, there is a verse in this week's Torah portion that can provide us hope and comfort. It is a verse that seems to indicate that, at least sometimes, the Almighty favors us although we haven't earned His favor. Strange as it seems, He "plays favorites" even with those who don't deserve such favoritism.

Allow me to prove my point by referring you to the very last verse in this week's parsha. The preceding verses declare the Lord's regret that He created mankind and His decision to "blot out from the earth the men whom I created." We then read, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord."

The Hebrew for "found favor" is *matsa chen*. Did Noah deserve *chen*? Did he deserve to be favored? The answer lies in an understanding of the word *chen*. For this, we must turn to another biblical passage, this time in Exodus 33:19. There, we find ourselves shocked by the Lord's own words: "I will favor those whom I pleased to favor and show compassion to those to whom I am pleased to show compassion."

This is interpreted by the Sages of the Talmud (see Berakhot 7a) to mean, "I will favor those whom I choose to favor, even if they are not fit to deserve My favor!"

Do we dare conclude that the Lord arbitrarily favors whomever He pleases, at His whim? Do humans have the right to favor whomever they please, without rhyme or reason, even if that means favoring those who are not truly entitled to such favor?

To answer the latter question, let us consider the observation of the great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Yochanan (Sotah 47a). I paraphrase his keen insight: "There are three examples of people who display *chen*, i.e., who show favor even when that favor is not objectively deserved. One is the *chen* that one harbors for one's own hometown even if that town is a slum; another is the *chen* that a loving husband shows to his wife even if she is less than perfect; and the third is the *chen* that a

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consumer retains for an item he purchased even if that item is deficient."

Chen, then, is favor which is bestowed, even when it is not fully deserved. Thus, for example, when the Kohanim bless us in the synagogue, they recite these words: "May the Lord shine His countenance upon you and show you *chen* (vichuneka)." The *Sifre* translates *chen* in this verse as *matnat chinam*, an undeserved gift.

So too does the Talmud (Sanhedrin 108a) comment on our verse at the very end of this week's parsha: "The heavenly decree to deluge the earth initially included Noah, but although he was undeserving, he found *chen* in the eyes of the Lord."

One particularly insightful commentator, however, will have none of this. I refer to Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, the eighteenth-century author of the work *Ohr HaChaim*, who does not wish to define *chen* as unearned favor. Rather, he suggests that there are virtuous behaviors which are performed so simply and so modestly that they are not seen as such. They are taken for granted by the observer and even by the virtuous individual himself. These actions seem petty and trivial to us mortals, but to the Almighty, they are shining and glorious deeds, deserving of the highest rewards.

The author of *Ohr HaChaim* maintains that there are several, although few, such mitzvos that we take lightly but which are of great spiritual significance. There is no explicit list of these mitzvot, or else we would concentrate on fulfilling them, and only them, to the exclusion of all other mitzvot.

Noah was thus an individual who seems quite ordinary in the eyes of others, but the Lord viewed his ordinary deeds with divine eyes, and in His eyes, Noah deserved to be spared.

All of us can be comforted, then, that although we may often judge ourselves to be undeserving, we are unduly harsh in our self-judgement. For surely there is much that we've done in the way of charitable and otherwise praiseworthy deeds that we have underrated but which merited inclusion in the divine list of deeds deserving *chen*.

We pray that the Almighty "plays favorites" with us and judges us less harshly than we

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sometimes judge ourselves, and grants us a

good and sweet year, beginning with Parshat Bereshit.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Moon Provides an All-Star Example of Sincere Repentance

In the beginning of Parshas Bereshis, the Torah says that the Ribono shel Olam created two big luminaries in the heavens—the sun to rule by day and the moon to rule at night. There is a well-known teaching of Chazal (Chulin 60b) that the moon complained to the Ribono shel Olam that it is not practical “for two kings to share one crown.” The Talmud says that the Almighty’s response to the moon was “You are right. Go ahead and make yourself smaller.” As a result, the moon downsized. It made itself much smaller and became the “smaller luminary that ruled at night.” Not only did it make itself much smaller, but originally, at the time of Creation, it had its own source of light. After downsizing, the moon accepted a status of only being able to reflect the light of the sun, forgoing being a source of light on its own.

The Gemara says that the moon felt bad about its diminished status, and therefore the Almighty consoled it, saying, “Don’t feel bad about being the ‘small luminary’ because Tzadikim will be called ‘small’ as we see Yaakov is called ‘Katan,’ Shmuel is called ‘Katan,’ and Dovid is called ‘Katan.’” Then the Ribono shel Olam consoled the moon even further. The Medrash says, “Since this luminary diminished herself to rule at night, I decree that she shall be accompanied by innumerable stars and galaxies.” The moon received a consolation prize of many billions of stars. When the moon becomes visible at night, the stars become visible as well.

The question must be asked: Where do we ever find that the Ribono shel Olam punishes someone and then seemingly reconsiders and says, “You know, I feel bad that I am punishing you, so I will give you a consolation prize to compensate you for the punishment.” The moon acted improperly by complaining about the two co-rulers. Hashem commanded her to minimize herself. The Ribono shel Olam is not a parent who has second thoughts – “Maybe I punished my child too severely so I am now going to give him a treat.” The Ribono shel Olam does not act like that. What He does is Just. If it is proper that the moon had to make itself smaller, then there was no need for any consolation prize!

Rav Leibel Heiman offers an interesting observation in his sefer Chikrei Lev: The Almighty told the moon to make itself smaller. How much smaller? He left that up to the moon. The moon did not need to reduce itself to a fraction of what the sun is. The moon could have said, “Okay. Three percent. Five

percent. Ten percent.” The sun is so many times bigger than the moon. In addition, who said the moon had to give up its own source of light? The moon could have even reduced itself by fifty percent but held onto its own source of light. Becoming merely a reflection of the sun was not part of Hashem’s instruction. That was not part of the punishment.

When the moon greatly reduced its size and changed its entire nature—going far beyond what was decreed upon it—the Ribono shel Olam saw a tremendous teshuva in that.

We are talking about the moon, but this is a metaphor. This is a lesson for all of us. It is a lesson that when we do something wrong, real teshuva is demonstrating our sincere regret by doing much more than we need to do. If someone insults another person or hurts the person’s feelings, he needs to apologize. “I’m sorry.” That is required. But when a person really tries to make it up to the other person and goes out of his way to demonstrate his sincere regret, that is a true teshuva.

The Ribono shel Olam provided all this consolation by saying that Yaakov, Shmuel and Dovid are all called Katan and by providing billions of stars, because the moon’s action demonstrated tremendous contrition. “Ribono shel Olam, You were right. That was no way for me to talk!” To prove it, the moon goes lifnim m’shuras haDin—so much further than was necessary. The moon was rewarded with consolation prizes for that sincere teshuva!

The Garments of Adam and Chava Were Made from the Skin of the Nachash

The pasuk says that when the Nachash (snake) seduced Adam and Chava into eating from the Etz HaDa’as, they realized they were naked, and “G-d made for them garments of skin and dressed them.” (Bereshis 3:21) The Medrash says that these garments of skin came from the Nachash. The Ribono shel Olam skinned the Nachash (which was a huge animal), took his hide and made it into clothing for Adam and Chava. What is this Medrash trying to teach us?

These are metaphors. Chazal say that jealousy prompted the Nachash to try to entice Adam and Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and change the world. Rashi quotes the Medrash that the Nachash observed them engaging in marital relations and he lusted for Chava. He was jealous of Adam and hatched this plot to bring them down. Jealousy was the root cause that prompted the Nachash to change the world.

What caused the Nachash’s jealousy? He saw them engaging in private activity that is

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supposed to remain private between a man and a woman. He looked where he was not supposed to look, and he wanted what he was not supposed to want. The root of Midas HaKinah (the Attribute of Jealousy) is that someone looks where he is not supposed to look, and as a result, wants that which is really off limits to him. If someone restricts his eyes and his thoughts to his own four amos (cubits), there is no jealousy. That is the way it is.

I see my friend or my neighbor driving a better car. I want that car. I see that my friend remodeled his kitchen. I need to remodel my kitchen. He has granite counter tops. I also want granite counter tops. Why are you going around looking at his kitchen? His kitchen is his kitchen! Your kitchen is your kitchen. Maybe you can’t help seeing a car. But kinah stems from me looking into the private affairs of someone else where I have no business looking.

This is perhaps why a famous Gemara in Maseches Taanis (8a) equates the Ba’al Lashon HaRah to the Nachash. The Gemara asks what pleasure does either get from their destructive actions? Lashon HaRah is also an aveira of revealing information which should be hidden. What is Lashon HaRah? I know something about someone that others do not know. I spread it. Again, I am looking at that which should remain hidden. I see it and I share it with others. It is the same aveira as the Nachash—looking where you should not look, wanting what you should not want, and going where you do not belong.

The Tolner Rebbe explains the reason why the Ribono shel Olam punished the Nachash by taking its skin and making garments of hide for Adam and Chava. What is skin? Skin is the most basic covering of being. It keeps hidden that which should be hidden. The Nachash failed to understand that. There are things that should remain closed, should remain behind the screen, behind the skin. They should be hidden. Do not look where you are not supposed to look.

By taking the skin of the Nachash, the Ribono shel Olam was teaching us that this Nachash did not respect the privacy of a human being and looked where he should not look. As a result, the Ribono shel Olam took off his skin—uncovered him—and used that skin to cover the human beings.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

The very first verse of the Torah – “Bereishit barah Elokim et hashamayim v’et haaretz,” – “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” contains seven words and 28 letters. (Bereishit 1:1.)

Quite remarkably the opening verse of the ten commandments, “Vayedaber Elokim et kol hadevarim haeileh leimor,” – “And God spoke all of these things saying,” also has seven words and 28 letters. (Shemot 20:1.)

In Hebrew lettering, the number 28 is kaf chet (כח) which spells koach, meaning power. So therefore we find that these two verses of great importance reflect the power of Hashem: Hashem’s power in His act of Creation and Hashem’s power in His act of revelation. This indicates that Hashem created this world so that all of His creatures could appreciate His revelation and as a result live sacred and uplifted lives.

But that is not the whole story. When we recite Kaddish in the memory of somebody who sadly has passed away, we note that the key statement is when the community joins the mourner to exclaim, “Yehei shemei rabbah mevorach leolam uleolmei olmayah,” – “May the great name of God be blessed forever and ever.”

And note that this ‘yehei shmei’ exclamation also has seven words and 28 letters.

So through Kaddish we recall how those who have passed away utilised their lives to appreciate the revelation of Hashem and to put every moment of life to practical and useful advantage. We read Bereishit at the beginning of a new cycle – at the commencement of a new year. May all of us during this coming year appreciate the creation of Hashem, celebrate his constant revelation to us and through all of our deeds, may the great name of Hashem be blessed forever and ever through the kiddush Hashem, the sanctification of His name, which we, please God, will achieve.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

When Heaven turns into Hell

Rabbi Nir Koren

Adam and Eve were not only the first human beings in the world, but also, quite symbolically, the first humans to leave a life of comfort and go into a life of exile and constant yearning for the Paradise that was.

Who is to blame for the fact that we were expelled from the Garden of Eden?

Well, it depends on who you ask.

If you asked Adam, the answer would surely be: “The woman whom You gave to be with me.” The woman, in turn, blamed the snake, and the snake’s excuse is of no interest to anybody.

Why, then, were they expelled from the Garden of Eden?

It is commonly believed that the expulsion was a natural consequence of Adam’s eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Indeed, this notion is easily supported by the verses of the Torah. However, there may very well be another reason.

I would like to suggest that Adam’s ultimate test did not involve abstaining from the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge or the Tree of Life. Rather, Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden was symbolic even more than it was practical.

When a couple stands under the chuppah we wish them a happy life together. We bless them with joy and glee and mirth and all things good. In short – we wish upon them to live in a Paradise of sorts. Indeed, married life can be the recipe for a blissful and heavenly experience. Why then were Adam and Eve expelled from their Paradise? What was the root of the problem when it came to the first couple in human history?

It seems to me that the answer lies in the question we initially asked: What was the test they had to undergo? I wish to propose that the ultimate test was not whether they could resist eating from the forbidden fruit, but what their response would be to their sinful action. As much as it is hard not to satisfy the physical desire aroused by the tempting fruit, and indulge the craving, it is harder still to resist the urge to blame the other, especially those closest to us.

When God asked Adam why he had eaten from the fruit, if he had only responded as King David did “ –I have sinned” – there would have been no need for the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. In fact, Adam’s sin was his casting the blame on his own wife. His response was an evasion of responsibility; a failure to protect his wife at the time she most needed his support; and, most of all, an expression of ingratitude. Where was Adams’ gratitude to the Almighty for saving him from the torment of loneliness? “The woman whom You gave to be with me” denotes that all are to blame except for me: the woman is guilty; the snake is guilty; even God Himself is guilty for having created for Adam a woman who would be a perfect match...

How differently would things have played out if Adam were not just a Man but also a mensch! If he had only said: “You know what, God? I take full responsibility. Indeed, you commanded me not to eat from the tree, but I conveyed the message to my wife inaccurately. I also told her not to touch the tree because I did not trust her judgment. And because I did not trust my woman and didn’t pass on the instructions as I had received them, I am the guilty party. I am the one who has

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sinned. If somebody has to be punished, it is me, and not my wife.”

When it comes to fulfilling any type of shlichut, a crucial factor is the resilience of the family circle. In other words, to what extent are we able to stand firm and strong and protect our most dear ones – our children, our wives, our husbands – from the evil snakes lurking outside.

I am convinced that had Adam conveyed this message to God instead of casting blame on “the woman whom you gave to be with me”, he would not have been expelled from the Garden of Eden for the simple reason that his life would have continued to be a Paradise. His marriage would have been a happy one; his wife would have shown him infinite gratitude for protecting her during the time she needed him most at her side.

On my mother’s sixtieth birthday we went on a family cruise: my father and mother, my brother and my sisters and their families. We will forever remember this vacation as heavenly – a floating Paradise, as it were. We were all together, and there was no greater pleasure. The strong smells that came from deep inside the ship did not bother us; we did not complain about the tiny rooms, which were so small that had they been prison cells somebody would surely have sued the prison for violating human rights... We didn’t even complain about the fact that to go to the bathroom, the beds had to be lifted. Nor did we say a word about the endless sways and surges of the ship, not to mention the noise....

Truth be told, there really was much to complain about because, in actual fact, we were in a type of floating prison. However, for us – this was a true Paradise, a Garden of Eden. Paradise is not any specific place; it is an experience created by the people one is with. One can be in the most beautiful spot on the face of the earth, but feel like one is in hell if the company is bad. Alternatively, one can be somewhere awful, and yet have loving friends as company, and the dreadful place will feel like a true Paradise.

Man was not expelled from the Garden of Eden because he ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Rather, the expulsion was a natural consequence of his actions. What kind of marriage could Adam and Eve have expected after what had transpired? The idyllic existence, the Paradise that was, was transformed into a hell by one action. As expressed so aptly by our Sages in their commentary on the words in Bereshit referring to the Woman - “ezer kenegdo” (“a helper suitable for him”): If he merits – she is his helper; if he does not merit – she becomes his adversary (kenegdo).

Marriage can be a true Paradise, or – a hell. God knows we are mere mortals, and although we aspire to never fail or sin, Kohelet, the wise king, said: "For there is not a righteous man upon earth that does good, and sins not." Man is bound to sin at some point in his lifetime, so the question is not whether he will sin or not, but how he will deal with his sin.

Same goes for marriage. Even the best marriages have their low points, and the question one should be asking is not how to avoid such moments, but how to learn from them, how to overcome the difficulties without blaming all others except myself.

Let me conclude with the words of Ilan Goldshirsch: "It makes no difference where we go; it makes no difference what we do. The main thing is that we do it together.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yaakov Neuberger

Reaping What We Sow

Both eating the forbidden fruit and listening to his wife to do so seem to have contributed equally to Adam's fate. This emerges from a careful reading of the text, (3:17) "...because you followed your wife's instructions and you disobeyed me as you ate from the forbidden tree...". Had both factors not contributed, the brevity of our Torah would certainly argue for simply saying "because you disobeyed me" or "because you ate from the forbidden tree", without adding that which we all know. Hashem's reasoning parallels Adam's original defense of his actions (3:12), "The wife that You gave to me, gave me the fruit and I ate it." While it's true that Adam's argument is hard to explain, how can we make sense of Hashem's response?

Furthermore, the Rabbis are quick to point out the conundrum that learning from our iconic forbearers creates: Adam is censured for heeding his wife while Avraham is mandated to carry out his wife's wishes. The conclusion (Devarim Rabba 4,5): "Some listen to their wives and lose and some reap benefit."

This directionless comment, suggests Harav Nosson Wachtfogel zt"l, the legendary mashgiach of Lakewood, must simply describe that it is natural for men to follow their wife's advice, but this only leads some in a productive direction. However, he argues that if indeed Chazal express that all men naturally respect their wives' advice and are responsible to carry it out, they are really instructing men to be more influential in shaping what their wife's indeed request. Thus is his complaint, "The wife that You gave me", Adam was saying that the wife that You fashioned could not possibly have directed me to veer away from You, so why should I even have considered distrusting her direction? To this

Hashem respond that Adam was not influenced by "the wife" but rather "because you heeded your wife's request". That can be paraphrased as, "It's your home and your relationships and your priorities, and undoubtedly you heard from Chava exactly what you planted and nurtured in that home."

According to Rav Wachtfogel, Chazal, through the careful reading of Hashem's censure of Adam, are instructing the Avrahams of the world, who have carefully steered the culture of their homes and received Hashem's blessings in doing so, that they are indeed blessed to be able to gain much from the guidance and strength that now comes from the homes they carefully shaped.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

The Spiritual Universe to Come

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, on the day that HASHEM, G-d made earth and heaven. (Breishis 2:4)

when they were created, on the day that HASHEM...made: This teaches you that they were all created on the first day (Gen. Rabbah 12:4). Another explanation of the word **בָּרָא** He created them with the letter "hey," as it is written (Yishaya 26:4: "for in Kah (Yud and Hey) HASHEM, is the Rock of eternity." With these two letters ["Yud" and "Hey"] of the Name, He fashioned two worlds, and it teaches you here that this world was created with a "Hey". – Rashi

There is plenty to explain here. The Letter Hey in the verse is written small. It is implied that HASHEM made this world with the letter Hey and based on a verse from Yishaya there is further evidence that HASHEM made Olam Haba, the next world with the letter Yud. I am saying the words here but how that is done is beyond everyone's paygrade besides HASHEM. There are many important lessons planted here for us to grasp, though.

Although it looks like these two realms, Olam Haba and Olam HaZeh were created with two distinct letters, the Maharal explains that the letter Hey is comprised of a Dalet and a Yud. That means that Olam Haba, the next world is imbedded within this world. That helps explain why Olam Haba is called the world to come, literally, and not another world, because it is a world that comes from this world. It is mined out of our experience in Olam HaZeh.

Maybe now we can appreciate that after Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur and Sukkos we are left with one tiny souvenir that we carry until Pesach, and that is the phrase, the insert in our prayers, "Mashiv HaRuach v Morid HaGeshem – He makes the wind blow and He makes the

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rain descend". HASHEM is credited with guiding the winds that deliver rain clouds to thirsty populations of people, animal, and plant life. That is the simple meaning. There is another deeper hint here as well.

Mashiv means to return and HaRuach refers to Ruchnios – spirituality. Morid is to bring down and Geshem refers to Gashmios – physical matter. HASHEM made and constantly makes the world Yesh M'Ayin, something from nothing. Before HASHEM willed a world into being there were no laws of physics. There was only HASHEM! From a material perspective HASHEM takes the ultimate spirituality and makes it into matter. From a spiritual vantage point HASHEM made the world Ayin M'Yesh –nothing from something, because HASHEM is eternal and all in this world is temporal.

Our task in this world is defined by Mashiv HaRuach v 'Morid HaGeshem. We take the material stuff of this world which is really dense Ruchnios/spirituality and though eating and drinking and learning Torah and Davening and serving HASHEM we convert this physicality back into Ruchnios – Mashiv HaRuach. We return to material back to HASHEM by revealing the ultimate spirituality within. Since we are making the best use of the goodness of this world, HASHEM then brings down and delivers to us more Gashmios, material stuff to work with, – U'Morid HaGeshem.

In Loshon HaKodesh, the chemistry set with which HASHEM created the world, the word for table is Shulchan. A Shulchan does not mean a flat surface. Shulchan defines the ideal function of a table. The root of Shulchan is – send. It is a mailbox of sorts from which gifts are launched and received. HASHEM takes spirituality and miraculously creates various delicious foods for our table and we then reconvert those material goodies back to spirituality. We return the Ruchnios and then HASHEM brings down more Gashmios for us to process.

What is the purpose of all the food we eat in the course of a lifetime? Were all those lakes of drinks and mountains of meat and grain only to produce a net 180 pounds for the ground!? No, we are like nuclear power plants. We produce eternal energy and light that is forever. We discovered in the latter part of the 20th century what happens when we split open the smallest particles. Now imagine the enormity of the spiritual universe to come.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz: Shirking Responsibility – The Great Human Failing

What is the greatest human failing? That failure at the dawn of time, when G-d Himself

had placed us in the Garden of Eden, no sooner had we been in the place of utopia, the idyllic world G-d had created, were we ejected so soon.

It is not what it seems – it was not because Adam and Chava (Eve) ate from the Tree of Knowledge. After all, “to err is human”. That is forgivable.

It was not the sin, it was the cover-up. The moment G-d says “ayekka, where are you?” – they were hiding away. How can it be that Adam and Chava, in the very Garden that G-d created, they are hiding?

G-d asks Adam if they ate from the tree, and instead of admitting his mistake, he plays the blame game! Not only does he blame Chava who gave him the fruit, he even blames G-d for sending her to him! He deflects any responsibility.

The same happens when G-d asks Chava whether she sinned, saying it wasn’t her but the serpent caused her to sin – denying that she was to blame.

Similarly, when Kayin kills Hevel, G-d asks where is Hevel and what has he done – Kayin answers “am I my brother’s keeper?” He doesn’t take any responsibility.

Three times – Adam, Chava and Kayin – each one of them refuses to take responsibility. They lost the Garden of Eden and perpetuated their banishment even further because they were unable to take personal responsibility – not because of their sin – everybody was to blame but them.

That is the greatest challenge – we all make mistakes, can we own up to those mistakes? Three times during the course of the story of the Akeida, Avraham says “hineini, here I am” – to G-d, to Yitzchak and to the Angel. Perhaps, we waited 2,000 years for humanity to answer the question of “ayekka, where are you?” You have been banished from Gan Eden and you want to come back? It begins with taking personal responsibility. That is what Avraham did “–hineini, here I am”, I am present and take responsibility. Perhaps those three times he said “hineini” was a tikkun for the sin of Adam, Chava and Kayin.

May we all, just as Avraham began that journey back to Gan Eden, take full responsibility for the course of our lives and those around us. Perhaps that is the path that leads to redemption and back to the Garden of Eden.



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from: **Rabbi Efrem Goldberg** <reg@brsonline.org> date: Oct 12, 2023, 2:21 PM subject: **Behind the Bima From the Front Lines, Living Am Yisrael Chai, and More...**

OCTOBER 11, 2023 כ"ו תשרי ה' אלף תשפ"ד | DON'T JUST SING AM YISRAEL CHAI, LIVE IT! BY RABBI EFREM GOLDBERG

When the Jews of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp were liberated on April 20th 1945, they sang Hatikvah. At the end of the anthem, British Army Chaplain Rabbi Leslie Hardman, cried out, "Am Yisrael Chai – the People of Israel live!"

When Golda Meir visited the Great Synagogue in Moscow as the Israeli Ambassador in 1948, the crowd of 50,000 ecstatically welcomed her with shouts of "Am Yisrael Chai!"

In 1965, in order to energize the Soviet Jewry movement, Shlomo Carlebach was asked to compose a song. He wrote the famous version of Am Yisrael Chai.

In 2009, Prime Minister Netanyahu visited Wannsee Villa in Berlin, where the Final Solution for the destruction of Europe's Jews was planned in 1942 by Hitler and leaders of the Third Reich. In the visitors' book he wrote just three words in Hebrew and then translated them into English: "Am Yisrael Chai – The people of Israel live."

As a slogan, Am Yisrael Chai affirms that despite the systematic attempts to exterminate and annihilate the Jewish people, thanks to God's guiding hand and the tenacity and resilience of the Jewish People, we stubbornly persevere. God has made an eternal covenant with the Jewish People; He has their back.

Am Yisrael Chai is also a tefilla, a longing for a united Jewish people living together in safety, security and with unity and harmony.

Explaining the words "I will take you to Me as an "ם", a people (Shemos 6:7), Rav Soloveitchik writes:

The political-historical unity as a nation is based on the conclusion of the covenant in Mitzrayim, which occurred even prior to the giving of the Torah at Sinai. This covenant forced upon us all one uniform historical fate. The Hebrew word מַמְלָכָה Am, nation, is identical to the Hebrew word מַמְלָכָה Im, with. Our fate of unity manifests itself through a historical indispensable union...No Jew can renounce his part of the unity...Religious Jews or

irreligious Jews, all are included in one nation, which stands lonesome and in misery in a large and often antagonistic world...

In the ashes of the crematoria, the ashes of the Chasidim and pious Jews were put together with the ashes of the radicals and the atheists. And we all must fight the enemy, who does not differentiate between those who believe in God and those who reject Him.

The secret to a strong Am Yisrael is a sense of Im Yisrael, being in it together, united, loyal, giving one another the benefit of the doubt and judging each other favorably.

The Torah relates that at the end of the first day of creation, "וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹּקֶר, יּוֹם אֶחָד" – "It was evening and it was morning; the first day" (1:5). Rav Zev of Strikov advances a beautiful chassidic reading of this pasuk. ערב (evening) represents the gloom of exile, periods when we are thrust into "darkness," struggling, suffering, and in distress. בֹּקֶר (morning), then, symbolizes the "light" of the redemption, the joy of salvation. The way we proceed from בֹּקֶר to ערב, from the darkness of suffering to the light of redemption, is מִבְּקֶר עֶרֶב אֶחָד – having days of oneness, days of achdus, unity, togetherness.

This is a major gut check moment for those who live outside of Israel. Do we feel connected to the plight of our brothers and sisters there? Are we in profound pain by the events unfolding? Are our lives severely interrupted and different while this is going on?

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 3:11) writes that a person who vigilantly and righteously observes Jewish law, but separates himself from the Jewish People, has no portion in the World to Come. How does he define separating from the people? Someone who doesn't identify with the tzarah, with the crisis and tragedy Jews are enduring, has no portion in the World to Come. There is so much we can and must be doing. We are all called to serve in this war, our courageous and brave heroes on the front lines but also Jews and decent people everywhere in the world. Daven, learn, send funds and supplies, text, call and check in on family and friends in Israel. Rally, advocate, write letters in gratitude to elected officials and media who are getting it right, and stand up to and protest those who are grossly wrong. As we recite in the beracha of יוצר אור וברא את הארץ ("Maker of peace and Creator of everything") – once there is shalom, then there is "everything." If we are embroiled in conflict and strife, we will remain in darkness. It is only when we transcend our differences and join together in mutual love and harmony that we can emerge from בֹּקֶר עֶרֶב to ערב, from the darkness of exile to the light of redemption.

It must be clarified that unity does not mean uniformity. We do not need to be the same, act the same, think the same, or hold the same opinions, in order to achieve the "light" of מִבְּקֶר עֶרֶב אֶחָד. We need simply to focus on all that we share in common – which far exceeds that about which we disagree – and build and strengthen our bonds of friendship despite our relatively few differences.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, standing in Auschwitz-Birkenau at the March of the Living several years ago said, "We always knew how to die together. The time has come for us to know also how to live together."

During this most difficult time, may the people of Israel learn to live with one another in harmony and unity. Am Yisrael Chai!

<https://www.5jt.com/yom-kippur-war-2-0/>

Avinu Malkeinu

October 11, 2023

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

No words. No breath. Our hearts are dizzy with shock and trauma, and burning tears stream down our cheeks. Our people and our land suffered their worst day in the 75-year history of our state. More Jews were killed on this one day than on any single day since the Holocaust. The pain and suffering are indescribable, the fear is palpable, and the mourning is overwhelming. I feel uncomfortable writing anything. There is absolutely nothing to say while so many are still suffering, while so many are being buried, while so many are fighting for their lives, and while so many are in the line of fire. This is not the time for "ideas," or the time to draw larger

conclusions or to search for meaning. It is a time to cry and cry. For our people and for our land. For the name of Hashem that was so horribly desecrated. I only write to provide basic “guidance,” and to recommend a few responses, not that there is any protocol for a catastrophe like this. Most of these “responses” to this disaster are self-evident, but on the slim chance that they aren’t, it is worth repeating them. Larger conversations about the ramifications of this tragedy will have to wait until a more appropriate time. Tefillah Though tefillah is always central to our relationship with Hashem, there is a specific mitzvah to daven during a time of crisis, or an eit tzarah. The Torah describes the prototypical eit tzarah as:

The most severe form of national crisis occurs not only when we are at war but when the war assaults our country. It has been 50 years since we last experienced war in our own country during the Yom Kippur War. This is far worse. During the Yom Kippur war, the battles were waged along empty borders in sparsely populated areas, limiting the amount of civilian casualties. Sadly, we have currently suffered a massive pogrom directed at our own people. There is no other word to describe this vicious, premeditated attack designed solely for the purpose to kill and kidnap as many innocent people as possible, including elderly and babies. If there ever were an eit tzarah, this is it. The special mitzvah to daven during an eit tzarah can be accomplished by adding tefillot, and some have added “Avinu Malkeinu” Though every perek of Tehillim is effective, the perakim which most directly petition Hashem for salvation from heartless enemies include: 2, 7, 9, 13, 20, 22, 23, 27, 44, 55, 59, 60, 70, 74, 79, 80, 83, 121, and 130. Even without adding extra tefillot, the mandate of eit tzarah demands that we invest more deeply in our routine tefillot. This extra commitment can be attained through better minyan attendance or better decorum and discipline while davening. Mere awareness that our tefillot possess an added dimension can often deepen the experience, even without any inserting additions. There are lives hanging in the balance, and a Jew’s first response is to daven to the Redeemer of our people to send us redemption. Mourning The scenes are already apocalyptic. Thousands of lives have been shattered by senseless hatred of our people. Witnessing hundreds of funerals in the span of a few days is unfathomable. Even for those who haven’t been directly impacted by the tragedy, there is a basic human and religious responsibility to sympathize and identify with the suffering of the direct victims. Obviously, with few exceptions, any celebratory events or even enjoyable social events should be canceled. Additionally, until the intensity of our national mourning subsides, recreational media consumption should be curbed. It is unthinkable that while we are burying hundreds of korbanot, a Jew is relaxing and watching a sporting event or a movie. Part of living Jewish history is the responsibility to identify with tragedy. Cheshbon HaNefesh Whenever a tragedy occurs, moral introspection is mandated, and certainly a catastrophe of this magnitude requires self-examination. It is impossible to play G-d and to know what causes such tragedy. It is always easiest to critique others and to lay the blame on someone else or something else. Instead, each person should look inward, at themselves and their communities, to identify areas for improvement. Hashem is sending us a message. Though we don’t exactly know the specifics of the message, it is crucial to personalize the experience and look for individual paths for improvement, and not just harp upon collective issues, which are always less manageable. Hashem expects us to respond to a crisis by improving our religious behavior. Emunah The ways of Hashem elude human comprehension, and we certainly can’t wrap our minds around this catastrophe. Yet, our bitachon assures us that Hashem has some purpose for allowing this to occur. Faith also demands that we have confidence that, in the long run, Hashem has our best interests in mind and cares for and redeems His people. This is a dark hour in modern Jewish history and is not a time for simple faith. We cannot be afraid to ask genuine questions but also cannot be dispirited when we are thwarted in attempts to uncover answers. These horrific events cannot shatter our deep belief that our return to our ancient homeland is part of a larger historical redemption. Our country has seen very dark days before, and though the trauma of this day far surpasses anything we have endured in the past, the wheels of redemption continue to turn. For some reason, over the past few days,

witnessing the grotesque and nauseating images, I kept thinking about the pogroms that battered our people about 120 years ago, in 1905. According to some reports, we suffered over 600 pogroms in one year. There is one difference, though, between 1905 and 2023. We have our land and we have our army and despite whatever shortcomings were exposed, our army, with Hashem’s help, will punish the murderers and continue to protect us. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war, my Rebbe, HaRav Yehuda Amital, cited a Midrash that would become a staple of his as he wrestled with demoralizing national events. Commenting on the fact that in Shir HaShirim Hashem is compared to a gazelle, the Midrash elaborates:

A deer is so swift and furtive that almost immediately after it appears, it disappears from view. Its disappearance doesn’t mean that it has entirely left the scene. Redemption can have lags and lulls and even terrible setbacks, but once the process begins it unfolds with inevitability. This tragedy tests us to maintain our resolve and our vision that we are part of a larger historical trajectory. Our faith survived the Holocaust, and we hope and daven that with His help, iy’H, our faith will survive this incalculable tragedy. It takes great faith to participate in the final chapters of history. We pray to Him to give us strength and faith to navigate the sorrow and pain of this process. There is a fabled song with ancient roots, which was sung by many European Ashkenazic communities on Simchat Torah. This song describes Hashem observing us celebrate Simchat Torah and remarking that our love for Him is so impressive “that we even ignore our suffering and celebrate His Torah.” We ask Hashem to allow us to celebrate His Torah without any more suffering. n

This essay was written Sunday, October 8. Rabbi Moshe Taragin is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has semichah and a BA in computer science from Yeshiva University, as well as a master’s degree in English literature from the City University of New York.

“RABBI’S MUSINGS (& AMUSINGS)”

R’ Dani and Chani Staum

Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Bereishis Mevorach Chodesh Cheshvan 21 Tishrei 5783/October 13, 2023 FOR HIM I don’t remember the last time I was able to so relate to a powerful story I heard, in a manner I never could have imagined. I was asked to share divrei Torah in my neighborhood Shul before hakafos on Simchas Torah evening. As I was walking to the bimah to begin speaking, I was told that we would be saying Tehillim first. At the time I had no idea why. The wife of one of the Shul’s board members is a Physician’s Assistant and keeps her phone on in case she is called with a medical emergency. On Shmini Atzeres afternoon, her phone had been buzzing incessantly. Although they couldn’t see anything more than flashing headlines, it was enough for them to realize that there was a serious terrorist attack in Eretz Yisroel. After we said Tehillim, he informed me of the developments. With two of our children in Yerushalayim, it was quite unnerving to say the least. We also have many family members living in various communities throughout the country, and many students and friends in various yeshivos there. That’s aside for the fact that, like every Jew, my heart is with Klal Yisroel, particularly in Eretz Yisroel. As I stood by the bimah and the assemblage waited for me to begin speaking, I had a strong urge to apologize and say that I was unable to proceed. But I knew that would be demoralizing and disheartening. So instead, I said a silent prayer asking Hashem for the strength and guidance to say the right thing. I also thought about the story I had heard a day earlier. As I have done the last few years, during Chol Hamoed Succos, I had the great zechus to facilitate a beautiful learning program called Greater Adventure. Each Chol Hamoed morning, after a 45-minute learning session, we heard divrei chizuk from an esteemed Rav in our community. That was followed by an exciting raffle with many great prizes. On Hoshanah Rabbah morning, the grand finale, our speaker was Rabbi Daniel Coren, a noted lecturer in the Monsey community (who also has many shiurim posted on Torahanytime). He related the following story: “About thirty years ago I was the mashgiach in a Jewish owned old-age home in Riverdale. “One year on Simchas Torah I was together with ten elderly men in wheelchairs from the home, helping

facilitate hakafos “dancing”. They took turns holding a Sefer of Nevi’im (used to read haftorah) because it’s smaller and lighter than a Sefer Torah. “One of the residents, Mendel Steinberg, was an Auschwitz survivor. At one point during the dancing, Mendel shared a recollection from his days in Auschwitz. “One miserable day, they were sitting together in the barracks, when suddenly one of their fellow inmates got up and started dancing. They looked at him like he fell off the moon, but he told them that it was Simchas Torah. When they retorted that even on Simchas Torah, one cannot dance in Auschwitz, he ignored their rationalizations and continued dancing. “Eventually, people started joining in, until a large circle had formed. They sang together the famous niggun to the words, “Utzu eitzah v’sufar dabru davar v’lo yakum ki imanu e-l - They (our enemies) make plans that are annulled, they speak words that never come to fruition, because G-d is with us.” “The Nazi guards heard the spirited singing and burst in. But when they saw what was happening, they didn’t know what to make of the inmates’ unbreakable devotion and they turned around and left. Mendel said it was the most emotional Simchas Torah he ever had. “My friend, Rav Shmuel Stauber z”l, worked with me at that old aged home. After I was no longer employed in that nursing home, Rabbi Stauber related to me that when he was informed that Mendel was very ill he went to visit him. When he arrived at Mendel’s room, the attending nurse told him that Mendel was in a coma, and it was clear that he didn’t have much time left. It was a waste of time to even visit. “Despite her words, Rabbi Stauber walked over to Mendel, leaned close to Mendel’s ear and began to sing, “Utzu eitzah v’sufar dabru davar v’lo yakum ki imanu e-l”. As he sang, Rabbi Stauber saw a tear trickle down Mendel’s cheek. Mendel passed away a few minutes later. “I often think about Mendel on Simchas Torah and that helps me dance more enthusiastically.” Rabbi Coren concluded by quoting the Satmar Rebbe who noted that the word *rikud* - dance has the same letters as the word *meraked* - to sift (one of the 39 forbidden melachos on Shabbos). When one dances with energy and excitement, he sifts negativity from within himself. By exuberantly demonstrating his desire for spiritual connection and growth he breaks through spiritual blockages within himself. As I stood at the bimah on Simchas Torah, I was encouraged by the thought of a Mendel’s fellow inmate in Auschwitz dancing despite his surroundings. After I proceeded to share some thoughts about the significance of Simchas Torah, I noted that we were about to dance for the honor of Hashem and His Torah. Therefore, it was incumbent upon us to display joy, even if we weren’t feeling it. Like many others, this past Simchas Torah was by far the most difficult Simchas Torah of my life. But I tried to bear my own words in mind, and I continued to dance in the circle. I ignored the deep pit in my stomach and pushed myself to keep dancing, knowing it was a zechus for Klal Yisroel, particularly at that time. We don’t dance for our own gratification, but for the honor of the heart and soul of our people. During our hakafos on Simchas Torah we made sure to sing Utzu eitzah as well. Mendel’s message, eloquently shared by Rabbi Coren, must resound loudly in our ears and souls. Our enemies hurt us terribly and caused us untold anguish and pain. Yet, we know we will ultimately prevail, “Ki imanu e-l - For G-d is with us.” May Hashem comfort Klal Yisroel. May all our captives and soldiers return home in peace and serenity and may we merit great salvations for our holy people. Shabbat Shalom & Good Shabbos, R’ Dani and Chani Staum www.stamtorah.info

from: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com> via auth.ccsend.com reply-to: jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com to: internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Oct 12, 2023, 11:34 PM

Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Beraishis 5784

1 – Topic – The Current Matzav in Eretz Yisrael

As we begin from the beginning of the Sefer Torah once again but more with trepidation instead of the usual joy. Let’s look into the Parsha and see if we have a little bit of an insight that would help us with our functioning as Avdei Hashem during this difficult time.

When man is created, the Torah says in 2:7 (וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאָדָם, נֶשְׁתַּת חַיִם). HKB”H blew through his nostrils a soul of life. Then the Posuk says, (וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה).

The person became a living person. Rashi says on (לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה) he quotes the Targum (בָּאָדָם לְרוּת מִמְלָא). That human beings are able to speak, they are human beings who are unique among the creatures that Hashem created and their ability to speak.

There is a problem with this Rashi. Where in the Posuk did Rashi see this? Rashi doesn’t come to tell us Drashos, or Medrashim, Rashi comes to tell us Pshat. We have a rule, that Rashi is coming to answer some sort of question. What is the question, what is wrong with the Posuk? (וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאָדָם, נֶשְׁתַּת חַיִם; וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה). What is wrong?

The Netziv in his Peirush on Chumash answers this with a Klal, and it is a Klal that he repeats numerous times throughout the Hameik Davar. Let me share the Klal. He says (דְּשֶׁוּרֶשׁ חַי בְּלָהָקְמָה שְׁמַעַן עַמְּדָה וְלֹא מִתְּפַעַם חַי וְלֹא עַמְּדָה). The Shoresh Chai in Lashon Hakodesh, the idea of being alive in the Chumash, the meaning is found in two ways. One is that a person is alive as opposed to being dead. In other words, he is a living human being. Chai means something else as well. Sometimes you have a living human being, but he is not able to function properly. He is depressed. He is not functional. He doesn’t have a Simchas Hachaim. That is a lack of life as well. In Lashon Hakodesh the word Chai or Chaim refers to life. Chaya refers to a person who is alive. Even in English or Yiddish you say he is alive, he is Leibidig. Chaya is used that way.

So what bothered Rashi is (וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאָדָם, נֶשְׁתַּת חַיִם), Chaim I understand means life. (וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה) a person was a functioning, outgoing human being. He says Targum Unkelos (לְרוּת מִמְלָא), that is what Chaya means. Chaya means not just that he was alive. The Posuk is adding that he was (לְרוּת מִמְלָא), he was a person that is outgoing, he was able to communicate, able to function well with other human beings. Therefore, we have an insight into the very life that human beings have. The idea of Tachlis Hachaim, the purpose of the life that G-d gave us. It is not just to be alive, to breathe in and out and have a beating heart and functioning inner organs, but more than that.

The Tachlis of a person’s life is to be able to function with a clear mind, with a Menuchas Hanefesh, with serenity. Without being able to function with clarity and purpose, there is something missing in the Chaim of the person. He is not Chai Bish’laimus.

The Posuk says in Chavakuk 2:4 (וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאָדָם, נֶשְׁתַּת חַיִם). The Tzaddik lives by his faith. Life is challenging. There is a lot in life to get a person down.

There are many moments, many opportunities for a person to feel a lack of energy and a lack of ability to function properly. There are many such moments. (וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאָדָם, נֶשְׁתַּת חַיִם). The Chaya, the ability to live and to function comes from the faith of a person. When there are moments that we are down and we find it hard to function, (וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאָדָם, נֶשְׁתַּת חַיִם). The Torah really gives a person this ability.

The Netziv later in Parshas Va’eschanan in the beginning of Perek Daled adds to this theme. In Pirkei Avos Perek Beis it says (מְרַבָּה תּוֹרָה מְרַבָּה חַיִם). When a person adds Torah to his life he adds Chaim to his life. The Netziv explains that it doesn’t just mean that you live longer. There are people who were (מְרַבָּה תּוֹרָה) that didn’t live longer. But it means the Simchas Hachaim, the feeling of life. Jews even in the Ghetto, Jews even when they suffered Pogroms in different parts of the world, they gathered in the evening and the Batei Medrashim and they were alive with their Avodas Hashem. They were alive with their Ketzos and their Nesivos and Tumulung about learning. Some people live a lesser life. They are not into it. They are not functioning totally. But the goal of a Yid is to be alert. To be aware. To be attentive. That in Avodas Hashem, we see that as life.

A Tzarah, a difficulty in life that has no purpose, leaves a person drained. He is missing in his Chiyus. Someone who believes that whatever comes his way has a purpose, that whatever comes his way as confusing as it may be, has its Tachlis, has its purpose, such a person is Chai (בָּאָדָם). Such a person really lives.

In a third place, in Parshas Eikev at the beginning of Perek Ches, the Netziv discusses this again and adds a new dimension. The Posuk there 8:1 says (לְמִשְׁמָרָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מַצְאֵךְ הַיּוֹם – תִּשְׁמַרְתָּ לְמִשְׁמָרָה לְעֶשֶׂת). All the Mitzvos that I have given you (תִּשְׁמַרְתָּ לְעֶשֶׂת) be careful to obey them and follow them.

(למען החיים) so that you have Chiyus, so that you have life. We understand that you are really a (מרבה תורה מרבה חיים). Limud and Shemiras Hamitzvos gives a person a Chiyus, a purpose in his life even in times of challenge and difficulty.

But wait, it says (למען החיים) with an Ende Nun. The Ende Nun usually shows that something is smaller than it would have otherwise been. The little Chiyus. What does it mean (הירקון) as opposed to Tich'ye? Says the Netziv, the Neshama of a Jew is incomplete. The Simchas Hachaim, the sense of purpose is incomplete as long as a person is not in Eretz Yisrael. (י'נ'ת'ו'ת הנפש בשלהות עד בום לא'ן). When a person is in Chutz L'aretz that connection is never a complete connection. That Chiyus in serving Hashem is never complete. Maybe that is what Chazal mean when they say that when you go into a Beis Medrash, that is different. It is like Eretz Yisrael. The place that you can have that Chiyus of connection to HKB" H.

So the message is that you want to really be alive you have to have a certain Chiyus in life, a certain sense of purpose in life. There are challenges, people are ill, people are poor, people are suffering from Tzar Gidal Banim. If it is all arbitrary, it is very painful. Where is G-d? But if we understand that there is a purpose, that gives Chiyus to a person. That gives a person something more.

In times of challenge such as these, the feelings are overwhelming. We don't have Koach. It is very hard for us to function knowing what is going on. Very difficult. How do we go forward?

The psychology of a human being is that motivation is divided between the Koach Haleiv and the Koach Hamoach. The ability that comes from an emotional enthusiasm and the ability that comes from the Moach, from the Seichel, from a sense of mission. There are two different things.

When you talk about Seichel, intelligence, a sense of mission, the intellect of a person has the ability to withstand difficulties. A person can have a Kasha. Anybody who learns Gemara knows that with all the Ameilus, with all the effort you put into learning, sometimes you just end with a Kasha.

Sometimes the Gemara itself says Kashia, it is difficult. It doesn't take away from the Geshmak of learning, it doesn't take away from the Chiyus of learning. There is a Kasha. Sometimes Aderaba, the Kasha gives the Geshmak. We say in Yiddish, Besser a Gutte Kasha Vi a Shvacha Teretz. A Good Kasha is satisfying more than a weak answer.

If someone asks his Rabbi and he says I don't know, it is not depressing, it means it is a good Kasha and it lifts up a person. The Klal is that as long as a person functions with Seichel and intellect it doesn't bring a person to depression. On the contrary, it brings a person to Hasmada.

If a person has a difficulty, and the difficulty is in understanding, it is in the Koach Haseichel, our intellect knows that we can't answer ever Kasha. The emotional part of a human being is not that way. The Koach Haleiv is different. The Koach Haleiv suffers when there is a Kasha. It suffers greatly. When things happen to a person and he looks to heaven and he says G-d I don't understand, it takes away his wind. It takes away his clarity, it creates Behala and is Mevalbeil people. Without Eitzta if a person is stuck and there is no way out, that is Eitzavon, that is depression. It makes a person unable to function. It causes a person to take wrong Eitzas, wrong ideas.

Yishuv Hadas is the opposite of intellectual panic. It doesn't come together. Sometimes it is better to make no decision then to make a decision when depressed. Sometimes you leave it with a Kasha. Sometimes we are desperate to try to help. Not a reason to grab onto donations to charities that may or may not be real. Sometimes we have a difficulty and we feel no energy. The emotional part of us finds it hard to Daven. We need to be Misgabeir with Seichel. The Moach needs to be stronger. The Moach has to do it.

I remember once I had gone with one of the Talmidim of the Yeshiva to see a Yeshiva in the Baltimore area, and we had flight back to NY at Reagan Airport in Washington DC. There is a shuttle that flies every hour. As we were waiting, they announced that due to a storm in NY the 5 o'clock, 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock and 8 o'clock shuttles are cancelled. It was 5 o'clock. Everyone rushed the counter to try to get a remaining seat on the 9 o'clock shuttle. I turned to the young man with me and I said quick, let's go the

rental car counter because in 15 minutes the rental car counter will be crowded with people looking to rent a car that could go one way to NY. We rented a car and went. A Yeshiva Man uses his Seichel. Emotionally, you will rush the counter so that you are one of the 100 people trying to get the 5 seats available. When the intellect kicks in people make better decisions. In the introduction to Mishlei, in Medrash Rabbah, there is a Machlokes. The Medrash asks what is greater the Moach or the Lev. The brain or the heart. Who are the Baalei Machlokes. Who is arguing about it? Dovid Hamelech and Shlomo Hamelech. Dovid says that the Moach, the brain is more. Shlomo says the Leiv, the emotion is more.

Anybody who learns this is astounded. Dovid, Tehillim is the heart of the Jewish people. Shlomo is the Chochom Mi'kol Adam, he is the intellect, he is the brain. It is the opposite. Dovid says the brain is more, the Moach and Shlomo says the Leiv is more. What is going on?

The answer is Shlomo Hamelech lived during good times. There were no wars during his times. It was peaceful. Jews were successful and prosperous. In good times your emotion can lead you. A joy and Simchas Hachaim can lead you. Dovid lived during times of war. He took Klal Yisrael to battle multiple times. During times of Tzarah, Dovid says the Moach is first. You have to lead with your brain. You have to lead with your Seichel.

We have to get a hold of ourselves. We say that we are going to storm the heavens with prayer. We are going to storm the heaven with Tefilla. What does that mean? What do we need to storm? What are we going to do gather and storm the heavens?

I'll tell you what it means. It means when you the individual stand and Daven Shemoneh Esrei it is a different Shemoneh Esrei. If you multiplied by hundreds and thousands, then we are storming the heavens. When your Shemoneh Esrei is said, if it is said with words of feeling, when you say (בראה נא בעתינו), the Beracha of (בראה נא בעתינו) is for Berachos during a Tzarah that takes place during the Galus. If when you get to that you are storming the heavens, that is what you should be doing. The Leiv gets you depressed, makes it hard to have a good Davening. The Moach, the Seichel makes it stronger.

Our Yiddishe Kinder who are soldiers on the battlefield. A soldier has to be guided by his brain and not by his emotion. Emotions are too overwhelming. He has to be guided with his brain. If we are going to be the soldiers of Acheinu Bnei Yisrael and we are going to be the Mispa'elim for them, we are going to be their representatives, we are there for them, then we need to let our Seichel lead. We have to use our Seichel, we have to use our brain. We have to do what we know is the smart thing to do. That is not to say that we are not emotional. We are all emotional. It is very hard. Very challenging. It is challenging for the soldiers too. Frightening for the soldiers too.

May HKB" H grant us a way out. A way out of the terrible difficulties in which we find ourselves, in which Klal Yisrael finds itself. We are in a trap with no exit strategy. May HKB" H provide for us a Yeshua at the 11th hour. We suffered so much Pogrom in our day. Don't fool yourself. This week the government expressed support for Israel. Next week they will criticize Israel. A week later they will sanction Israel. The Umos Ha'olam are not going to be our help. It is only Avinu Sheba'shamayim. Let HKB" H help us get out of this difficult time. More important, let us feel that we deal with it properly. Let us feel that we are doing what we have to do during this time. B'ezras Hashem we will succeed in serving HKB" H properly and being able to come to a time of greater joy. Be alive, be a Chai, don't be depressed. Be alive in your Avodas Hashem. See a mission as any soldier sees a mission and put aside feelings to go and do what he has to do. May it be a Shabbos of Besuros Tovos for one and all! A Gutten Shabbos!

Tidbits for Parashas Bereishis Inbox

Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> 7:04 PM (4 hours ago) to me

Parashas Bereishis • October 13th • 28 Tishrei 5784

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Cheshvan. Rosh Chodesh is on Sunday and Monday, October 15th-16th. The molad is Shabbos afternoon 6:33 PM and 1 chelek.

There is no Yom Kippur Katan observed for this Rosh Chodesh as Yom Kippur was previously observed this month.

With Parashas Bereishis we begin a new cycle of Shenayim Mikra v'Echad Targum, the mitzvah to read the Parashah twice, along with the Targum Onkelos once. The Gemara (Berachos 8) says the reward for this mitzvah is arichas yamim (longevity). Can one fulfill the obligation to read Targum by reading an alternate translation, such as English? Consult your Rav.

We began saying Mashiv HaRuach U'Morid haGeshem on Shemini Atzeres. One who said Morid Hatal (i.e. Nusach Sefard) instead, does not need to repeat Shemoneh Esrei (the same applies if one is unsure if he said one or the other). For Nusach Ashkenaz (whose adherents do not otherwise say Morid Hatal), the omission of Mashiv HaRuach requires repeating Shemoneh Esrei. One who realizes his error before beginning Atah Kadosh may immediately say "Mashiv HaRuach..." and continue with Atah Kadosh etc. If he realizes his error after beginning Atah Kadosh, he must return to the beginning of Shemoneh Esrei. If one is unsure if he added Mashiv HaRuach, for the first 90 tefillos it is assumed that he did not say Mashiv HaRuach, as he is not yet accustomed to saying it (the 90th tefillah will be Minchah on Sunday, November 13th). However, one who repeated the phrase "Mechaye Meisim Atah Rav L'hoshia, Mashiv HaRuach u'Morid Hageshem" 90 times can be halachically presumed to be accustomed to saying it; he would then not need to repeat Shemoneh Esrei in case of uncertainty.

As Rosh Chodesh begins on Motzaei Shabbos, one who extends seudas shelishis after sundown is in a quandary whether to say Retzei or Ya'aleh Veyavo (or both) in bentsching. Some are careful not to eat bread after tzeis (for this purpose 35-40 minutes after shekiya) and then only say Retzei. Speak to your Rav.

Tzidkas'cha is omitted at Minchah on Shabbos.

The first opportunity for Kiddush Levanah is Tuesday evening, October 17th. The final opportunity in the USA is Motzaei Shabbos, October 28th. One should remember to fulfill his/her Yizkor tzedakah pledges.

Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Kiddushin 61 • Yerushalmi: Shevi'is 6 • Mishnah Yomis: Chagiga 1:2-3 • Oraya: Next week is Yoma 18b-21a

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rabbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

The series of days of BeHaB begins on Monday, October 23rd.

BEREISHIS: The Seven Days of Creation. Day 1 - the world, starting with light (day & night) • Day 2 - the sky, separation of waters • Day 3 - earth and seas, vegetation and seeds • Day 4 - sun, moon and stars • Day 5 - fish and birds • Day 6 - beasts of the earth, Adam and Chavah (Kayin and Hevel were born on this day as well) • Day 7 - blessed and holy rest • Adam and Chavah are placed in Gan Eden • The Tree of Knowledge is forbidden to them • The serpent entices Chavah to eat of the Tree of Knowledge • The serpent, Chavah, and Adam are cursed • Adam and Chavah are expelled from the garden • Kayin and Hevel offer sacrifices; only Hevel's is accepted • Kayin kills Hevel • Hashem warns Kayin about the nature of the evil inclination • Generations later, Lemech kills Kayin • Sheis is born • Ten generations from Adam to Noach • Hashem 'regrets' creating man and resolves to obliterate mankind • Noach found favor in Hashem's Eyes.

Haftarah: As Shabbos is Erev Rosh Chodesh, the haftarah of Machar Chodesh replaces the regular haftarah. It discusses the interaction that took place on Erev Rosh Chodesh between David Hamelech and Yehonasan, son of King Shaul. Although David would become king instead of Yehonasan, they remained as close as brothers. The haftarah tells the story of how Yehonasan saved David's life from King Shaul.

Parashas Bereishis: 146 Pesukim • 1 Obligation

1. Peru U'revu - A man must marry and bear a son and a daughter.

וְקַיִן עָלָה בְּרִגְגָהוּ "Kayin rose against his brother Hevel, and he killed him" (Bereishis 4:8)

We know everything that occurs is just; that being the case, why did Hevel deserve to be killed by his own brother?

Rav Nachum Partzovitz zt"l, quoted by Rav Elya Baruch Finkel zt"l, explains that from the pasuk it is clear that Kayin looked obviously

distressed when Hashem did not accept his korban. It is reasonable to assume that Hevel saw Kayin's disappointment, yet it does not seem that Hevel attempted to comfort his brother in any way. This lack of empathy for his brother's distress made Hevel deserving of death at his brother's hand! Chazal say, "Yesh koneh olamo besha'ah achas," literally translated as "Some acquire their portion in the World [to Come] in one moment." However, the Ba'alei Mussar explain that an alternate translation of "sha'ah" is "attentive". Thus, explaining the phrase, "Some acquire their world through one instance of paying attention", by being mindful of a fellow's need at just one occasion. If Hevel had considered his brother's pain, he may have "acquired his world", and could have been spared his brother's rage. Recent events have shaken Jews worldwide. There are so many in mourning, others awaiting nervously the fate of their family, and many in constant fear and danger. We must constantly be attentive and give thought to all our brethren while doing all we can both materially and spiritually until each person is granted the yeshua and nechamah they await.

Rav Kook on Breishit: Cherishing Troubles Inbox

Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> Thu, Oct 12, 5:01 AM (19 hours ago) to me

Is this email not displaying correctly? View it in your browser. Rav Kook Torah

Breishit: Cherishing Troubles

The Scroll of Fasting One of the more surprising statements in the Talmud concerns a document composed over two millennia ago known as Megillat Ta'anit. This 'Scroll of Fasting' lists 35 days in the year when fasting is prohibited due to some joyful event that took place on that day.

The majority of these minor holidays commemorate the rescinding of some evil decree against the Jewish people. The most well-known of these is the holiday of Purim, when the Jews of Persia were saved from Haman's plot to destroy them.

"Our Rabbis taught: Who wrote Megillat Ta'anit? Hananiah ben Hezekiah and his colleagues, who cherished the troubles." (Shabbat 13b)

What an unusual trait for a scholar — "who cherished the troubles." Who likes hardships and suffering? What does this mean?

Rashi explained that they cherished the miraculous rescue from these persecutions. They appreciated the opportunity to express our thanks and gratitude to God.

But the literal meaning of the phrase indicates that these scholars found value in the troubles themselves.

Watching Over the Nation Rav Kook suggested a bold theory, proposing that these harsh events in the history of the Jewish people played an indispensable role in the nation's survival. Paradoxically, they have a part in the Divine providence that guards over the Jewish people, particularly throughout the long and difficult centuries of exile.

How do persecutions protect the people of Israel?

Israel's continued existence hinges upon the love and connection that each individual Jew feels for God, for His Torah in our midst, and for the Jewish people. This is an innate love, flowing from the soul's natural inclinations; and it is substantiated by the recognition of the appropriateness of this love for Israel, with its Torah and unique national mission.

On occasion, especially in periods when the nation is scattered across the world, this love may wane. Connection to the Jewish people often weakens as individuals chart their own path in life. They become absorbed in their own personal goals and aspirations, neglecting the ties that bind them to God's covenant — a covenant granted to the nation as a whole, which reaches the individual through the collective.

At such times, additional means are needed to bolster the connection of each individual to the nation.

Protecting the Family Unit In an earlier age, Divine Providence provided a means to strengthen humanity's awareness of its moral obligations. After the sin of Adam and Eve, the distinction between right and wrong became blurred, and commitments to family and community were less binding.

The punishments meted out after Adam's transgression — "I will greatly increase your sorrow and your pregnancy; in pain you will give birth to children... With toil you will derive food from [the land] all the days of your life" (Gen. 3:16-17) — were not arbitrary punishments. They were meant to safeguard and fortify the family unit. By increasing the difficulty in bringing children into the world and providing for them, they reinforced the natural love of parents for their offspring. More invested in their children, fathers and mothers would be more willing to suffer the burdens of raising children until they become independent.

The Role of Afflictions A similar dynamic is at work with the Jewish people. It was critical that the connection to Torah, Jewish faith, and the nation of Israel should not be broken as a result of dispersion and exile. This is particularly true when we witness many peoples, after losing their independence and sovereignty, assimilate within conquering empires and disappear from the annals of history.

What will strengthen the inherent love of Israel, so that even its most humble members will recognize its value?

This is the function of troubles and persecutions. The challenges and dangers confronted for the sake of observing Torah, for the sake of Jewish faith, or even just for the sake of Jewish identity — they lead to a resurgence of love and connection in the hearts of subsequent generations. We learn to appreciate the steep cost which the Jewish national spirit has borne for its survival and the preservation of its Torah. This awareness imparts strength and resolve, fostering a deep sense of connection and loyalty.

With this in mind, these scholars compiled Megillat Ta'anit. They understood the importance of preserving the memory of these trials and tribulations in our nation's history for the benefit of future generations. They truly "cherished the troubles."

(Adapted from Ein Eyah, Shabbat vol. 1 (1:62) on Shabbat 13)

Meshech Chochmah on Bereishis

Inbox

Rav Immanuel Bernstein <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com> Thu, Oct 12, 6:05 PM (5 hours ago)

Dear Friends,

We are excited to announce that this year we will be returning to mine the treasures of the Meshech Chochmah, whose mastery of and ability to blend together all areas of Torah, as well his unique parshanut and vision, make this such a special sefer.

At this time, when the Jewish people are reeling from the horrors of the events of this past Shabbos, our hearts and tefillos go out to our brothers and sisters, both those who are in grief and distress and those who are placing themselves in danger to fight the enemies of Israel.

May all the Torah learning be a zchus for them, may the outpouring of love for our fellow Jews remain long after our enemies have been defeated, and may we hear only besoros tovos, yeshuos ve'nechamos.

Journeys in Torah MESHECH CHOCHMAH PARSHAS BEREISHIS The Sin of the Etz Hadaas

כִּי יְדַע אֶלְקִים כִּי בַּיּוֹם אֶקְלֶכֶם מִפְנֵנו וְכִפְרְקָחָנוּ עַיִנִיכֶם וְהַיִתֶם כְּאֶלְקִים יְדַעַת וְרֹעַ

For God knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and

you will be like God, knowers of good and evil. (Bereishis 3:5)

Many commentators over the generations have struggled with the question of how the snake was able to convince Chava to do something which Hashem had expressly forbidden — on pain of death, no less. Likewise, for her part, how could Chava allow herself to be convinced?

The Snake's Argument The approach of the Meshech Chochmah to this question is truly astounding. He explains that the snake was not trying to convince Chava that she would not die if she ate from the tree, contrary to what Hashem had said. Rather, he was arguing that if she and Adam truly valued closeness to Hashem, then they should be prepared to do anything that would bring that closeness about, even if it meant that they would die!

Since eating from the tree would make them more Godlike in the sense of knowing good and evil, they should be prepared to do it even if it required them give up their lives. What's more, argued the snake, the idea that you would be prepared to offer your lives in defiance of Hashem's command in

order to attain closeness to Him is actually what He really wants you to do — that is the Divine will!

In this light, the Meshech Chochmah explains that the snake's words to Chava at the end of pasuk 4, "מִתְּהִלָּת מִתְּהִלָּת אֶלְקָנָה," are not to be translated as "you shall not surely die," i.e. with the snake disputing what Chava had been told in Hashem's name. Rather, they are to be translated as "No, you should indeed die!" In this way, the snake was seeking to convince Chava to perform what is known as "aveirah Lishmah — a sin for the sake of Heaven." And indeed, Chava, and in turn Adam, were taken in by this appeal to their lofty desire to attain the maximum level of closeness to Hashem possible — whatever the cost.

The Reality However, almost immediately upon eating from the tree, it became abundantly and painfully clear that it had not brought them any further degree of closeness to Hashem at all, and in fact, had only served to distance them greatly. The first consequence of their sin was their consciousness of their nakedness as a source of shame for them. Prior to the sin, man's physical make-up was of an elevated nature, attuned toward goodness, so that no element of his anatomy was any reason for shame. After the sin, his physicality assumed a coarser nature, and his nakedness was now cause for shame and had to be covered up.

The second indicator of the distance that had been engendered by their eating from the tree is mentioned pasuk 8, which states that they heard the sound of Hashem walking in the garden, whereupon they hid themselves among the trees. The point of the pasuk is not that they heard the sound of Hashem coming and tried to hide themselves in order to avoid detection. Rather, prior to the sin, man's encounter with Hashem had taken the form of a Godly vision as well as a Divine message. Having eaten from the Etz Hadaas, however, he was no longer able to experience any visions; his communication from Hashem now took the form solely of hearing Him. Therefore, upon (only) hearing Hashem and thereby realizing the extent to which he had fallen through his sin, and the agonizing distance he had created between Hashem and himself, he hid among the trees in shame of having been taken in by the persuasive arguments of the snake.^[1] Hence, when Hashem asked Adam the question "where are you?" meaning, 'Where has your sin left you?' Adam answered by mentioning the above two points: "I heard Your voice in the Garden," i.e. I only heard a voice but with no accompanying vision, "And I was fearful for I was naked," i.e. I saw that my nakedness had become a cause for shame in my lowered state, and so I hid. For this reason, in His rebuke to Adam, Hashem referred to the tree as "the tree from which I commanded you not to eat,"^[2] and not simply as, "the Tree of Knowledge." Through this, Hashem was emphasizing to Adam that His commandment regarding the tree represented His essential will, and that no form of closeness to Hashem could ever come from disobeying His word.

Avraham: Paving the Way Back The situation of "hearing from Hashem without seeing" pertained for all the Neviim in the generations that followed.^[3] The first one to begin to reverse this trend was Avraham. In the beginning of Parshas Lech Lecha, Hashem tells Avraham to go to the land of Canaan where He will bestow on him great blessing. After Avraham had arrived at the land, Hashem appears to him and again blesses him, whereupon the pasuk says, "וְיַעֲשֵׂה שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לְה' הַגָּדוֹלָה אֶלְيָהוּ" — he [Avraham] built an altar for Hashem Who appeared to him.^[4] The Meshech Chochmah explains that the words "Who appeared to him" are not merely a reiterative description of Hashem on that occasion — they are the reason for the building of the mizbeyach! While still in Charan, Avraham only heard Hashem's word, but having arrived in Canaan, he rose in spiritual level so as to be able to merit Hashem appearing to him — the first such occurrence since before the sin of the Etz Hadaas — and to mark his gratitude he built a mizbeyach "to Hashem Who appeared to him."

I Am A JEW
By Ben Shapiro
October 12, 2023 0
I am a Jew.

Those have been the words of the Jewish people for three millennia. Those were the words of the men, women and children of Masada. Those were the words of the followers of Bar Kochba. Those were the words of Jews in Granada in 1066 and the Rhineland in 1096 and Khmelnytsky from 1648-1657 and Kishinev in 1903, in Hebron in 1929. Those were the words of Jews in Auschwitz and Treblinka. Those were the words of Daniel Pearl. Those are my words, too. They are the words of my parents, my wife, my children. Over the weekend, my people were attacked. Murdered. Mutilated. Our women raped. Our children kidnapped. This has happened millions of times before, to millions of Jews. Jew-hatred exists because evil exists. Because there are people who have, for all of human history, hated the Jews and sought to strike at them while they are weak. Who have blamed the Jews for their own problems, who have crafted complex conspiracy theories about the supposed power of the Jews, who have sought to destroy the Jews. From Pharaoh to Haman. From Hitler to Hamas. The words of the Nazis are indistinguishable from the words of the Hamas charter. The chain is unbroken. And for two millennia, since the destruction of the last Jewish dynasty in the holy land of Israel, those Jew-haters were ascendant. No longer. That is the promise of the State of Israel. Never again. The Jews will not stand by and be murdered. They will not leave their Biblical homeland. They will not surrender. They will be strong and courageous, as Joshua said three thousand years ago. Israel is indispensable. Its presence is a miracle, its strength a gift. Thank Heaven for the State of Israel. There are those who say that anti-Zionism is not antisemitism. Tell that to the dead women and children in Sderot. Tell that to Hamas, who proclaim in their charter: "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it." There are those who say that the Israeli-Arab conflict is a "cycle of violence." Only the morally blind and obtuse could ever say such a thing. Look at the videos. Look at the pictures. That is what evil looks like. LOOK. Look, because this is what moral equivalence brings. Rape of women. Kidnapping of children. Murder of hundreds of innocents, including full families. For decades, we've been told that to look evil in its face was somehow unsophisticated. That to pretend evil away was an act of intellectual virtue. That to cater to evil, to concede to evil, was the pathway toward a better world. It was all a damned lie. LOOK. There are those who proclaim the complexity of it all. Those people are fools. What's worse, they are enablers of evil, fellow travelers, justifiers of the worst human rights violations on the planet, from targeting civilians to hiding behind them. Do not turn away. LOOK. This was the worst week for Jews since the Holocaust. Do not turn away. LOOK. Look it in the face. I know that you will. I know you will because I am a Jew, and because I am an American. Americans love justice. Americans love good. Americans resonate to the book of Psalms, that says, "Hate evil, those who love the Lord." Hate evil. And fight it. Americans always have, and they always will. I know we will.

from: **Naaleh Torah Online** contact@naaleh.com
date: Oct 12, 2023, 8:44 PM subject: Parshat Bereishit: Seeing the Source

Supplication: Seeing the Source—Parshat Bereishit

Based on a Naaleh.com by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Adapted by **Channie Koplowitz Stein**

Dedicated l'iluy nishmot the kedoshim of the war in Israel, and for the safe return of the hostages and our IDF Tzivot Hashem.

Parshat Bereishit recounts the creation narrative. In chapter two, there is a pause between the creation of the world and the creation of Man. The Torah has told us that the world was complete, yet here the Torah says, "Now all the trees of the field were not yet on the earth...for Hashem had not yet sent rain.... and there was no man to work the soil." If all the world was complete, what was man's work on earth? All vegetation had indeed been created in potential but remained beneath the soil's surface until Adam was created and prayed. Rashi explains that man's work was to understand the significance of rain and to pray.

We see the importance of prayer throughout Tanach, whether it is our Patriarchs and Matriarchs praying for a child, or Bnei Yisroel crying out to Hashem in Egypt. Rain is the symbol of all the goodness that comes down to us from heaven. In fact the word **טַהַרְתָּ**/rain is the root of the word **לְהַתָּהַרְתָּ** to materialize. In essence, rain is the physical materialization and result of our spiritual prayer. Praying for rain expresses our eternal dependence on the Creator.

Rabbi Lopian explains that there are four keys that cannot be predicted and remain exclusively in Hashem's hands. A **מְפַתֵּח**/key, is an acronym for **פְּרָנָסָה** /rain, **מְמֹרָא** /livelihood, income, **תְּחִיַּת הַמֵּתִים** /resurrection, **תְּחִיַּה** /childbirth. Our prayers, like those of Adam, help unlock those keys, and we become partners with Hashem.

Rebbetzin Smiles quotes Rabbi Sternbach speaking about the current situation in Israel. There are gates in heaven as well as gates on earth. When the heavenly gates have been broken and our relationship with Hashem has been severed, the gates below reflect that break and are also broken. So those evil ones could barrel through the gates of our people down here. We have to know that our safety depends on our relationship with Hashem.

Rabbi Biederman offers a metaphor of a group of boys riding in a jeep down the steep road from Har Hazeitim. Within the jeep, it was frightening; would the jeep careen out of control? Then they were reminded that there was an experienced driver at the wheel. They could feel assured that they would be safe. Likewise, Hashem is at the steering wheel of our world. Let us be strong and respond by putting our trust in Him and praying.

As the world was dependent on prayer from its very creation, so does it continue to be dependent on our prayers, writes Daas Torah. Even when Hashem has promised children, as he did to our patriarchs, the promise is the potential waiting for prayer. Through our prayers, we get what we need. The conduit is the gates; our prayers enter, and whatever we need comes out. Sometimes Hashem needs to awaken us to cry out to Him. He needs to send us challenges, for if we stop praying, the world will cease to exist, writes Rabbi Pincus. Tefillah is talking directly to Hashem.

When someone is ill, we automatically call a doctor. But do we remember to also pray to Hashem, asks Rabbi Lopian? We should be having a constant conversation with Hashem, a concept both Avraham Avinu and King David knew in essence. How often did Avraham raise his hand to God? And King David described himself as prayer personified, **אָנָּה תְּפִלָּה**.

Rain, coming directly from heaven without human intervention, becomes the symbol of creation and awakens man to Hashem's presence, writes the Mesillot Bilvovom. We are forced to look heavenward. And on Shemini Atzeret, through praying for rain, we proclaim the greatness of Hashem, for we remember that everything, both big and small is completely in God's hands. [This is perhaps one message of the massacre happening specifically on Shemini Atzeret; a vivid reminder that Hashem is orchestrating everything from Above, Hamas is a tool in His Hands.]

Hashem's greatest desire is to give, and the best gift a person can have is a relationship with Hashem which is created through prayer writes the Rigshei Lev. Our challenges are catalysts for prayer. When we feel blessed, we should pray with gratitude, and when we are hurting, we should call out. Life

is cyclical, and we should use both the ups and the downs to connect to Hashem.

The Sifsei Chaim points out that gratitude only comes after one realizes something had been lacking. Therefore, Hashem planted Adam into a bleak world, spurring him to pray for rain. After the rains came and Adam saw the world blooming, he understood that all good comes from Hashem, and he could pray now from a sense of gratitude, not only from need.

Hashem wants to come close to us and waits for our call to respond. As we call out to Hashem now in times of distress, may we merit to soon call out to Him in gratitude.

from: Isralight <isralight@isralight.org> via auth.ccsecd.com reply-to: isralight@isralight.org to: internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Oct 12, 2023, 4:1 PM subject: A Weekly Byte from Isralight (Bereishit)

SMALL TASTINGS OF TORAH, JUDAISM AND SPIRITUALITY FROM RAV BINNY FREEDMAN – PORTION OF BEREISHIT

Reprinted from 2006

Endings and beginnings: the black and white of life.

Close to 80 years later, the image still remains, burned into his memory, as if it were yesterday.

He was five and a half years old, but already an adult, standing in the central square (the umshlagplatz) of the Piyotrekov ghetto, next to the synagogue. His father, the Rabbi of the town, stood tall and proud in the middle of the square surrounded by the men of the village, distinguishable by his long full beard and his black rabbinic frock. The men were all on one side of the square and the women and children, by decree of the Nazis, off to one side. Tension filled the air, with an intense, silent fear of the unknown, as they stood waiting in the square from where Jews were sent to... where? Seventy-eight years later Rav Yisrael Lau remembers watching as the commandant of the Gestapo approached his father, the Rabbi, with murder in his eyes. He stood opposite him and drew his mika, the meter-long rubber truncheon favored by the Gestapo, from his belt. Suddenly, without warning or provocation, he brought the truncheon full force down on his father's back. The suddenness as well as the force of the blow caught the rabbi by surprise, causing him to stumble forward a few steps and his body bent forward, and it appeared he would fall to the ground.

But in a moment of enormous will power the Rabbi caught himself and, straightening up to his full height, stepped back to where he had been standing. Rav Lau still remembers the intense look on his father's face as, with tremendous force of will, he removed all emotion from his face, refusing to give the Nazi the satisfaction of seeing the Chief Rabbi of Piyotrekov fall or shout in pain.

It was clear to little five year old Srulli, that his father knew how humiliating and demoralizing it would be for the Jewish community to see their rabbi fall to his knees before the grinning Gestapo officer, and by sheer force of will, refusing to give the Nazis that satisfaction he betrayed no emotion whatsoever and turned back to face the Nazi officer, his face a stone mask. Years later, in his book Al Tishlach Yadcha' el Ha'na'ar (do not stretch out your hand against the lad), Rav Lau, the boy who had risen to become no less than the Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, describes this moment as the absolutely most painful moment of the entire six years he spent in the ghetto, work camp and concentration camps in the Holocaust.

And yet, it was this moment, more than any other, that gave him strength in his darkest moments, and to this day, that earliest childhood memory, (one of the last times he saw his father), remains with him wherever he goes, motivating him under the most trying of circumstances.

An ending, a painful farewell; and yet, also a beginning. The gift of strength and inspiration against the most trying of circumstances that would ultimately become a gift to motivate a young boy against all odds, and allow him to survive a painfully dark journey and live to reach his destination. Endings that are really beginnings, and beginnings that are endings are the stuff this week's portion, Bereishit (Genesis), is all about.

Just a week ago, we danced with the Torah scrolls on the festival of Simchat Torah as we concluded the entire five books of Moses, only to roll it back to the beginning and start all over again.

But this week's portion is not just about starting all over again, because that would mean we had finished what came before; no, this beginning is really the continuation of last week's conclusion.

I recall a number of years ago; a student spent Shabbat with us in Efrat at the beginning of winter, and ended up visiting a Synagogue the following week in Jerusalem. It happened that these two Shabbatot were the first two Shabbatot he had ever celebrated, much less attended a Synagogue, and that they happened to fall during the time of year when the Torah readings are about the saga of Joseph and his brothers.

He later remarked how brilliant it was that the Torah reading leaves off in the middle of such a good story almost ensuring that everyone would come back the next week to hear the next installment read.... I guess it was a good thing he wasn't visiting during the book of Vayikra (Leviticus) with its portions full of sacrifices, but in truth, he was right: Bereishit (Genesis) really is the continuation of Ve'zot Habracha (the last portion of the Torah), and every beginning really is just a continuation of the illusion of a previous ending. And of course, if on his next visit, this student came during these two weeks of Bereishit and Ve'zot Habracha, he might assume that the continuation of Moshe's death and the moment of anticipation of a second generation of Jews born free in the desert and about to enter the land of Israel (the end of Ve'zot Habracha) is in fact the story of the creation of the world and the beginning of the saga of mankind in this week's portion. (Interestingly, when Joshua enters the land of Israel which might be considered the historical continuation of the end of the Torah (Ve'zot Habracha) he gives the Jewish people a speech which comes very close to this idea.)

This leads us to note that the theme of this week's portion, Bereishit, is all about beginnings which are really continuations, and endings which are really beginnings.

The creation of the world is not as much a beginning inasmuch as it is an extension of G-d who has no beginning. And the creation of humanity is also really not a beginning as we are, each of us, created in the image of G-d, who has no beginning and no ending, such that a part of us as well has no beginning and no ending.

And the story of Adam and Eve's mistake in eating from the Tree of Knowledge leading to an end of their sojourn in the Garden of Eden was really the beginning of the human journey to become partners in creating a better world (Tikkun Olam).

And then there is the story of Cain and Abel. Firmly ensconced, by no accident, in this week's portion as well, is the ultimate question of the ultimate ending: the challenge of death.

Eating from the Tree of Knowledge, of good and evil, is somehow meant to introduce death into the world.

"Ki' beyom acholcha' mimenu' mot tamut." (Bereishit 2:17) "... For on the day you will eat of it (the Tree of Knowledge) you will surely die."

On some level, man's expulsion from the Garden and his confrontation with the physical world represents the confrontation with mortality.

And then follows the story of Cain and Abel, whose ultimate result is the death by murder of one brother at the hands of another.

"Va'yakam Kayin el Hevel achiv va'yehargehu." "And Cain arose against Abel his brother and killed him." (4:8)

Followed by Lemech's lament over having killed as well: "... Ki' ish haragti' lefitzi'..." "For a man have I killed by my wound..." (4: 23)

All of this leads to the chapter of generations (Genesis chapter 5), which when listing each successive generation of mankind, concludes each generation (each life) with the simple and yet so very final word: "Va'yamot", "And he died."

In fact, in Chapter Five this word appears no less than eight times, (verses 5,8,11, 14, 17, 20, 24, 27, and 31, the only exception being the story of Hanoch who is not described as dying but rather as "Einenu", "He is no longer", implying a different experience, and suggesting that the death term

("Va'yamot") being employed here does not mean that a person is no longer....

(It is also interesting to note that in an actual Torah scroll, each instance here where the word "Va'yamot" is used, appears as the end of a paragraph.)

Ernst Beckett, in his award-winning book, Denial of Death, suggests that our entire lives and everything we do are ultimately about our attempts to deny our own mortality.

Why then is 'death' introduced here at the beginning of the Torah, which seems to be such a central part of life, whether in its denial or anticipation, challenge or solution?

It is interesting that although the book of Genesis (Bereishit) begins with the question of death, the Torah never actually defines it, much less describes what follows this seemingly end of life. Death seems to be the indefinable, the unknowable, and remains as a question described even as "sheo'lah" (see Bereishit 37:35, where Ya'acov describes his mourning over Joseph as lasting till the end of his days...) whose root sha'al, the question suggests death as the ultimate question.

Indeed, it is only at the end of the book of Genesis, when Ya'acov lies on his deathbed, that we are given the barest suggestion as to what death is about. Ya'acov, the third of the patriarchs, is the first figure in the Torah and perhaps in history, who has the opportunity to anticipate death. His is the first narrative of the actual process of death, and according to the Midrash (rabbinic legend) he may have been the first individual who actually became ill, giving him the chance to prepare for death.

(According to the Midrash, up until that time when a person died it was like the battery ran out, he simply sneezed, expelling the air breathed into us as the giving of soul (see Bereishit 2:7) and dropped dead, literally. Which may be why, to this day we say "G-d bless you" when a person sneezes....)

And what indeed, was his last task here on earth? He gathers his children, the future twelve tribes of Israel around him (as well as his grandsons Menashe and Ephraim) and blesses them before he dies.

And as soon as he concludes this task, the Torah tells us:

"Va'yechal Ya'acov le'tzavot et banav, va'y'e'asef raglav el ha'mittah, va'yigvah, va'yeseaf el amav." "And Ya'acov concluded instructing his children, and he gathered his feet onto the bed and he expired and was gathered unto his people." (Bereishit 49:33)

A puzzling verse, to say the least.

Onkelos (the Mishnaic period scholar who translated the entire Torah into Aramaic, the language of the day) translates the term va'yigvah, (and he expired) as va'itnagid, which loosely translated means he went opposite or against, implying perhaps that death is just a step in a completely different direction.

But what does it mean that Ya'acov was 'gathered unto his people'? Where are these people? And what does it mean that he 'gathered his feet unto the bed'? Why do we need to know how Ya'acov was lying when he died? What do his feet have to do with his death?

And then there is the Talmud's cryptic comment on this verse (Taanit 5a, quoted in Rashi on the verse):

"Ya'acov Avinu' lo' met." "Our father Ya'acov is not dead."

While this comment may be based on the fact that the word death (mavet) in fact does not appear here in this verse, nonetheless, it sure seems like Ya'acov died. So what does this mean?

Perhaps in order to deal with death we need to understand what life is all about.

There are many different levels to life. There is physical life, what Jewish mysticism describes as the nefesh be'hemi' the animal side to who we are which basically is about consciousness, and the fact that even an animal is conscious of its needs and desires.

But then there is what we do with that life and the need we all carry to ascribe meaning to it. Our innate desire to make life meaningful is the part of us that rises beyond the animal part of who we are, and taps into the soul of life itself.

When Hashem breathed a soul into each one of us, we were given the opportunity to rise above our own physicality and to tap into why we are

really here. This process, incidentally, cannot exist without our having been created by a Creator (What we call G-d, or Hashem). If we are created then we are not random; we must have purpose and our greatest challenge, along with life's greatest joy, is in our attempt to tap into that purpose and figure out why we are here, and what we are meant to do with being here. (Or at least what we choose to do with our being here.)

Indeed, no matter how insignificant something may seem to be, this week's portion teaches us that every thing was created and thus must have purpose, and our desire to give our lives meaning really stems from our need to tap into why we are here and connect to the source of life itself: Hashem, who created us.

And of course, part of that meaning is not just that we have our own individual meaning, but that we can connect to a collective that is much bigger than we are whether it be a Jew connecting to the collective soul of the entire Jewish people, or for that matter any human being connecting to the collective soul of his people, nation, or religion. Indeed, some people are able to connect to the collective soul of the entire world.

Thus, we sense that there is a difference between an American killed in a car accident on I-95, and an American killed in Iraq as part of the US Army's battle against terrorism, in defense of freedom who, even in his death, is connecting to the collective of an entire nation.

When Ya'acov leaves this world, he has essentially fulfilled his mission: he has forged a family of twelve sons into the beginnings of a nation that will become the Jewish people. He lives to see the brothers come back together as one, around his bedside, and he succeeds in instructing them on what that means. Only when he has completed this mission, the mission of his life, is he ready to move on. And he gathers his feet onto the bed, perhaps because his journey, his walk, is over, so he can move on. Yet, he is not dead; he is not "over", he rather becomes a part of the larger collective soul of the Jewish people, and remains with us, in who we are and all that we do as a Jewish people to this very day.

Death then, is not an ending but a milestone, a portal, giving all of us the chance to consider dreams realized, and challenges which remain.

And as we read the portion of Bereishit, and contemplate a new year, full of new beginnings, let us take the time as well to reflect on all those individuals and dreams, ideas and past accomplishments that are the foundations on which we can begin, read, and continue, all over again.

Best wishes for a sweet year full of joy and exciting beginnings,

Shabbat Shalom from Jerusalem,

R. Binny Freedman

[1] See commentary Aderes Eliyahu of the Vilna Gaon to Bereishis loc. cit. who likewise explains the pasuk in this way. [2] Pasuk 11. [3] This final section is based on Meshech Chochmah to Bereishis 12:7. [4] Bereishis ibid. Copyright © 2023 Journeys in Torah, All rights reserved. You're receiving this email either because you signed up on the website or you requested to be added. <http://www.journeysintorah.com> Our mailing address is: Journeys in Torah 2/4 Rechov Yitzhok ben Nachum Bayit Vegan 90045 Israel

from: **Michal Horowitz** <contact@michalhorowitz.com>

date: Oct 11, 2023, 11:01 AM

subject: [New post] Bereishis 5784/Operation Swords of Iron

Bereishis 5784/Operation Swords of Iron

By Michal Horowitz on Oct 11, 2023 08:01 am

Bereishis 5784: Creation (Ch.1), Man and Woman (Ch.2), First sin (Ch.3), First murder (Ch.4), The ten generations from Adam to Noach (Ch.5). At the very end of the parsha, the Torah tells us of the corruption of man upon earth.

וַיֹּאמֶר הָיְהּ עַל-עַמּוֹת אֶת-הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶל-לִבּוֹ – and Hashem reconsidered having made man on earth, and He was pained in His heart (keviyachol); And Hashem said: – אַמְתָּה אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר מִזְמַרְתָּ עַד-בָּהָמָה, מִזְמַרְתָּ עַד-עַזְבָּלָתָם: כִּי נַחַתְתִּי, כִּי עֲשִׂיתִ – בְּרָאָתִי מַעַל פָּנֵי קָאָזָה, מִזְמַרְתָּ עַד-בָּהָמָה, עַד-עַזְבָּלָתָם: I will erase man whom I created from upon the face of the earth – from man to animal, to creeping things, and to birds of the sky; for I have reconsidered

My having made them; And Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem. On the words “And He was pained in His heart”, Rashi teaches:
 ויהיעצב אל לו. נתקאבל על אגדון מפשעה קדו, קמו גענצב הפלך על בנו (שם ב, “ט, וו כתני)
 לתרשבות הרים גוי אחד ששלאל את רבי הושען קרחה, אמר לו אין אולם שפחים קהה “ה
 רואה את הפלך? אמר לו כן, אמר לו והא כתיב ונתקעכט אל לפו? אמר לו נלך לך בון זכר
 יונמך? אמר לו כן, אמר לו ומה עשות? אמר לו שמעתי ושמתי ושמתי את הכל, אמר לו ולא קית
 יודע שטוטטו למלות? אמר לו בישעת קדונא קדונא בשעת אבל אבל, אמר לו לך מעשה
 הקב”ה, אף על פי שגלו לפנינו שטוטו לחתוא ולאבדן לא נגע מבלראן בשבליל הצדיקים
 הקדושים לעמד מעם

He mourned over the destruction of His handiwork: And this I have written as an answer to the heretics (who deny that G-d knows the future): A certain non-Jew asked the Tanna R’ Yehoshua b. Karchah a question and said to him, “Do you not admit that Hashem knows the future?” R’ Yehoshua said to him, “Yes (He does know the future).” The non-Jew said, “But it is written, and ‘He was pained in His heart,’ which indicates that G-d did not foresee the outcome of creating man!” R’ Yehoshua answered him, “Has a male child been born to you in your lifetime?” The non-Jew said “Yes.” R’ Yehoshua said to him, “And what did you do (when the child was born)?” He said to him, “I rejoiced, and I made everybody rejoice with me.” R’ Yehoshua said to him, “But did you not know that his destiny is to die (like all of man)?” The non-Jew said to him, “אבל אבל, at a time of joy, we rejoice, and at a time of mourning, we mourn.” Said R’ Yehoshua, “So too HKB”H. Even though it was revealed before Him that man’s destiny is to die, and to suffer destruction, He did not refrain from creating man, for the sake of the tzadikim (righteous) who are destined to arise.

As we face a threat to our treasured and holy nation, Am Yisrael; our beautiful Holy Land, Eretz Yisrael; and our miraculous medinah, Medinat Yisrael, such that has never been seen since the establishment of the State in 1948, let us remember that אבל אבל, at a time of rejoicing, we rejoice, and in a time of mourning, we all mourn. No matter where a Jew lives today, no matter his religious affiliation, we are all in an intense, deep state of national mourning. With over a thousand kedoshim, Jewish neshamos, taken from us; tayer yiddishe kinder, babies and children, women and men in captivity R”L; close to 3,000 injured; soldiers fighting for the State, for us and for their lives; with the country under attack of rockets from North to South; and battling terror infiltration on the northern and southern borders, Hashem yerachem v’yaazor...
ךרכץ ציון אבלות.

Rabbi Aryeh Leibowitz, rav of Beis HaKnesses of North Woodmere, wrote the following to his kehilla earlier this week: “During times of mourning (and there is much to mourn for as over a thousand people have already been murdered), the halacha demands that we curb our social behavior. Times of war are not the time for unnecessary parties, going out to shows and restaurants (order in if you don’t want to cook), or paying attention to silliness such as sports and fantasy teams. Of course, we all need to clear our heads and function as human beings, but we should do so in a way that reflects the sense of that the moment demands. Chazal teach us that **אתה להזדהה דגאולה** are **מלחמות** and we should merit to see the words of the **גביים** come to life as Hashem reveals His master plan.”

On the miracle of the State of Israel, in his Kol Dodi Dofek (presented just eight years after the founding of the Medinah, in 1956), Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt”l, stated, “Let us not forget that the venom of Hitlerian anti-semitism, which made the Jews like the fish of the sea to be preyed upon by all, still infects many in our generation who viewed the horrific spectacle of the gassing of millions with indifference, as an ordinary event not requiring a moment’s thought. The antidote to this deadly poison that envenomed minds and numbed hearts is the readiness of the State of Israel to defend the lives of its sons, its builders. It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh!

“This knock, which we must not ignore, was heard when the gates of the land were opened. A Jew who flees from a hostile country now knows that he can find a secure refuge in the land of his ancestors. This is a new phenomenon in our history. Until now, whenever Jewish communities were expelled from their lands, they had to wander in the wilderness of the

nations, and were not able to find shelter in another land. Because the gates were barred before exiles and wanderers, many Jewish communities were decimated. Now the situation has changed. If a particular people expels the Jewish minority from its midst, the exiles can direct their steps unto Zion, and she, like a compassionate mother, will gather in her children. We have all been witness to Oriental Jewry’s settling in the land of Israel in the past few years. Who knows what might have befallen our brethren in the lands in which they had settled had not the land of Israel brought them by boats and planes to her? Had the State of Israel arisen before Hitler’s Holocaust, hundreds of thousands of Jews might have been saved from the gas chambers and crematoria. The miracle of the State came just a bit late, and as a result of this delay thousands and tens of thousands of Jews were murdered. However, now that the era of divine self-concealment (hester panim) is over, Jews who have been uprooted from their homes can find lodging in the Holy Land. Let us not view this matter lightly! It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh!” (Fate and Destiny, p.34-35)
 May HKB”H have rachamim upon us, k’rachem Av al banim, and may the yeshua (salvation), nechama (comfort), and binyan adei ad (an everlasting and eternal building) be immediately revealed.
על-אללה אני בוכיה, עיני עיני ירקה מים – כי רשות מפני גנום, משביב נפשי; קרי בני שונממים,
כי בבר אויב, הכותבת ברכי, בברכת בשורת טבות ושותות,

Parshat Bereshit: Eat Your Vegetables

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

"Tzelem Elokim": Eat Your Vegetables!

Parashat Bereshit recounts not only the creation of humanity and the rest of the world, but also supplies our most basic ideas about the nature and mission of humanity. Humanity is created with special capabilities and commanded to develop and actualize them in specific ways. The whole world is fresh, totally unspoiled; all potentials await fulfillment. The infant world sparkles with innocence and energy, with the wonder of Creation.

But Creation is really not the only theme of our parasha. Creation is only the beginning; the genesis of the world shares the stage with the genesis and evolution of the relationship between Hashem and humanity.

A BACKGROUND OF FAILURES:

Since we cannot take a detailed look at every event of the parasha, let's just make brief mention of one important event we're not going to look at this time: the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, which forever changes the way people live -- and die. Already moving beyond the theme of Creation, we encounter Hashem as commander ("Thou shalt not eat") and humanity as servant. Without much delay, humanity creates something Hashem had not created: failure. Blighting the beautifully ordered description of the construction of the cosmos, Adam and Eve's sin is humanity's first failure and Hashem's first disappointment (see Bereshit 6:6). This failure changes humanity and changes the world, as the "first family" is ejected from the garden and forced to struggle through life in the more difficult world outside. As this disappointment is the first of many disappointments for Hashem, this failure is the first of many failures for humanity. Many of the stories in the first few parshiot of the Torah are not about Creation, but about disappointment and failure and how they change the course of history by changing Hashem's plan for humanity.

IMAGES OF GOD:

The specific topic we're going to look at this time is the theme of "tzelem Elokim," the idea that humankind is created in the image of Hashem. Our close look at this theme, and the conclusions we draw, should help us understand not only the events of our parasha, but also the development of the theme of all of Sefer Bereshit (Genesis).

"Tzelem Elokim" itself simply means an image or form of Hashem. What is this usually understood to mean? In what way are humans God-like? Some interpretations by mefarshim (traditional commentators):

- 1) Like Hashem, humans have intelligence (Rashi, Rashbam, Radak, Seforno).
- 2) Like Hashem, humans have free will (Seforno).
- 3) As Hashem is a "spiritual" Being, humans have a soul (Ibn Ezra, Radak, Ramban, Seforno).
- 4) As Hashem rules over the universe, humans rule over the lower world (R. Sa'adya Gaon, Hizkuni).
- 5) Like Hashem, humans have the faculty of judgment (Hizkuni).
- 6) Like Hashem, humans have an inherent holiness and dignity (a more modern perspective).

MISSION STATEMENT I:

Although it is always important to see how mefarshim define terms which appear in the Torah, we can often gain additional understanding or a different perspective by examining the Torah directly and sensitively to see if the Torah itself defines the term.

The first time we find the term "tzelem Elokim" is just before the first humans are created:

BERESHIT 1:26-27 --

Hashem said, 'Let us make Man in our image [be-tzalmeinu], in our form; they shall rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, the animal, and all the land, and all that crawls on the land.' Hashem created the man in His image; in the image of Hashem [be-tzelem Elokim] He created him; male and female He created them.

What we have next is a short section with a very clear theme: humanity's mission:

BERESHIT 1:28-30 --

Hashem blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the land and conquer it; rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, and all animals which crawl on land.' Hashem said, 'I have given to you all grasses which produce seeds on the face of the land, and all the trees which produce fruit with seeds -- it is for you to eat, and for the animal of the land, for the bird of the sky, and for that which crawls on the land which has a living soul; all the grassy plants are to eat.' And it was so.

What we have read so far begins with Hashem's plan to create a being in the image of Hashem and ends with this "mission statement," communicated to the being which has been created. The mission contains three charges:

- 1) Emulate Hashem's creativity by procreating.
- 2) Emulate Hashem's mastery of the universe by "conquering" the world and extending mastery over the lower creatures.
- 3) Emulate Hashem by eating the grasses, fruits, and seeds!

The last element of humanity's mission seems fundamentally different than the previous two elements ("One of these things is not like the other one . . ."): What does eating vegetation have to do with the lofty destiny of humanity? And since Hashem obviously does not eat vegetables, how does one emulate Hashem by doing so? For now, let us hold this question; we will return to it later to see how it adds to the tzelem Elokim mission.

In any case, one thing should be clear about tzelem Elokim which may not have been clear before: tzelem Elokim is not a *description* of humanity, it is a *goal* for humanity. We usually think of tzelem Elokim as a description of humanity's basic nature, which entitles humanity to certain privileges ("We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .") and expresses certain capabilities. But the Torah implies that tzelem Elokim is more than simply a description, it is a mission, a command: humanity must *live up to* tzelem Elokim! People are created with the potential to reflect God by achieving the tzelem Elokim missions -- procreation, mastery of the world, and, well, eating vegetables(!) -- but each person must *become* a tzelem Elokim by actualizing this potential.

If tzelem Elokim is a mission, of course, it can be achieved or failed. How well humanity fares in achieving this mission is the major subtext of the Torah from the creation of Adam until the selection of Avraham in Parashat Lekh Lekha.

We will now follow the history of the tzelem Elokim idea through the first generations of humanity's existence to see whether humanity lives up to the mission or not and whether the mission changes over time.

THE FIRST MURDER:

Our first look at how tzelem Elokim plays out in history brings us to the story of the first siblings, Kayyin and Hevel (Cain and Abel). Hevel offers to Hashem a sacrifice of his finest animals; Kayyin offers his finest fruits. Hashem is happy with Hevel's offering but unsatisfied with Kayyin's. The Torah reports that Kayyin is deeply upset and angry at being rejected. Shortly thereafter, man creates again, as Kayyin invents murder by killing his brother Hevel, whose offering had been accepted. Kayyin then attempts to hide the evidence but soon learns that Hashem doesn't miss much:

BERESHIT 4:3-9 --

It happened, after awhile, that Kayyin brought an offering to Hashem from the fruits of the ground. Hevel also brought from the firstborn of his sheep and from their fattest; Hashem turned to Hevel and his offering, but to Kayyin and his offering He did not turn. Kayyin became very angry, and his face fell . . . It happened, when they were in the field, that Kayyin rose up to Hevel his brother and killed him. Hashem said to Kayyin, 'Where is Hevel, your brother? . . . Now, you are cursed from the ground . . . you shall be a wanderer and drifter in the land.'

Kayyin's response to his punishment:

BERESHIT 4:13-15 --

Kayyin said to Hashem, 'My sin is too great to bear! You have driven me today from the face of the land, and I will be hidden from Your face, a wanderer and drifter in the land; anyone who finds me will kill me!' Hashem said to him, 'Therefore, anyone who kills Kayyin will suffer seven times' vengeance.' And Hashem gave Kayyin a sign so that whoever found him would not kill him . . .

MURDER, A FAMILY TRADITION:

We will now look at the continuation of what we've been reading about Kayyin. If you're not paying very careful attention, it seems like a collection of "random" events -- the Torah appears to be reporting "trivia" about Kayyin's post-punishment life. But there is much more here than there might seem at first. Our observations should shed light on the development of the tzelem Elokim theme.

BERESHIT 4:17-19--

Kayyin 'knew' his wife; she conceived and bore Hanokh . . . and to Hanokh was born Eerod; Eerod bore Mehuyael, Mehuyael bore

Metushael, Metushael bore Lemekh. Lemekh took two wives, one named Ada and the other named Tzila

Kayyin has had children, and we hear about his descendants. A nice family story, but what is the Torah trying to tell us?

BERESHIT 4:23-24 --

Lemekh said to his wives, 'Ada and Tzila, hear my voice; wives of Lemekh, hear my speech; for a man I have killed for my wound, and a child for my injury. For Kayyin will be avenged seven-fold, and Lemekh seventy-seven.'

Apparently -- as all of the mefarshim explain -- Lemekh has killed someone. As he recounts the murder to his wives, he implies that although he expects to suffer punishment, as his great-grandfather Kayyin suffered for murder, he prays that Hashem will take seventy-fold revenge on anyone who kills him. He explicitly refers to the murder committed by his forebear Kayyin and to the protection extended by Hashem to Kayyin.

What the Torah tells us next is absolutely crucial:

BERESHIT 4:25-5:1-3 --

Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son; she called his name Shet, 'For Hashem has sent to me another child to replace Hevel, for Kayyin killed him' This is the book of the descendants of Adam. When Hashem created Adam, in the image of Hashem He made him . . . Adam lived thirty and a hundred years, and bore in his image, like his form, and he called his name 'Shet.'

Certainly, the order of this story -- Kayyin's murder of Hevel, then Kayyin's punishment, then Lemekh's murder, then the birth of another son to Adam and Hava -- is not at all random. What connections is the Torah trying to make?

Lemekh the murderer is a descendant of Kayyin, the first murderer. Not only is Lemekh a direct descendant of Kayyin, he even makes explicit reference to his great-grandfather's murderous behavior and hopes that he will benefit from the same protection as (or greater protection than) Kayyin received, despite the punishment he expects. What the Torah may be hinting is that Kayyin and his family do not sufficiently value human life. Kayyin kills his brother Hevel in frustration and jealousy; Lemekh kills an unnamed person in retaliation for a "wound and injury." For Kayyin, murder is an acceptable solution to problems or frustrations, and he passes his values on to his children. Lemekh's murder and his reference to Kayyin's similar crime manifest the moral failure of this family. One generation's failure to understand the value of human life plants murder in the heart of the next generation.

BEGINNING FROM THE BEGINNING AGAIN:

The Torah next tells us that Adam and Hava have another child "because Kayyin killed Hevel." Actually, Adam and Hava are replacing not only Hevel, but both of their sons -- Hevel, because he is dead, and Kayyin, because his murder and his descendants' similar action shows that his behavior was not a freak incident, but a deficiency in values. By having another child, Adam and Hava begin again, attempting to produce an individual who really understands the mission of humanity as achieving the status of tzelem Elokim. By murdering his brother, Kayyin fails this mission (as we will explain). Lemekh's action shows that Kayyin has not learned from his mistake and has not successfully taught his children to respect human life.

This is why the Torah begins the story of humanity's creation "anew" with the birth of Shet, telling the story as if Adam and Hava had had no children until now:

BERESHIT 5:1-3--

This is the book of the descendants of Adam. When Hashem created Adam, in the image of Hashem He made him . . . Adam lived thirty and a hundred years, and bore IN HIS IMAGE, LIKE HIS FORM, and he called his name 'Shet.'

The Torah is trying to communicate that humanity is starting over, beginning from scratch. The first attempt, the one which produced a murderer and his victim, has come to a tragic close with another murder (Lemekh's). Adam and Hava realize that they must start anew, and the Torah makes this explicit by placing the literary structure of a "beginning" at the birth of Shet. The real "descendants" of Adam are only those who maintain "his image . . . his form", the image and form of tzelem Elokim.

But how has Kayyin failed as a tzelem Elokim? Has he not excelled as a conqueror of the earth, a tiller of the ground who brings fruits to Hashem as an offering? Has he not "been fruitful and multiplied," producing descendants to fill the earth? Have his descendants not exercised creativity like that of the Creator, inventing tools and instruments? True, Kayyin has murdered, and true, his great-grandson Lemekh has as well, but how is this a failure as a tzelem Elokim?

MISSION II:

To answer this question, we must look to next week's parasha, where we again (and for the last time) find the term "tzelem Elokim." As the generations pass, humanity sinks deep into evil, filling Hashem's young world with corruption. Disappointed again, Hashem floods the world and drowns His creatures -- all except Noah and those aboard the ark with him. As the Flood ends and Noah and his family emerge from the ark to establish the world once again, Hashem delivers a message to Noah and his family at this point of renewal: a

"new" mission statement for humanity. Comparing it to the first mission statement (1:28-30), which was addressed to Adam and Hava, shows that the two statements are very similar. But there are a few very important differences.

BERESHIT 9:1-2 --

Hashem blessed Noah and his children and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land. Fear of you and fright of you shall be upon all the beasts of the field, and all the birds of the sky, with whatever the ground crawls, and all the fish of the sea; in your hands they are given.'

So far, nothing seems new -- humanity once again is blessed/commanded to procreate and is informed that the animals of the world are given to humanity to rule. But as Hashem continues, the picture of humanity's responsibilities and privileges changes radically:

BERESHIT 9:3-4 --

All crawling things which live, they are for you to eat, as the grassy plants; I have given to you everything. But flesh with the soul -- blood -- do not eat.

Although previously, humanity had been given permission to eat only vegetable matter, now Hashem permits humans to eat animals as well, as long as they do not eat the "soul" -- the blood. But is that all? Can it be that the main difference between the first mission and the second mission is vegetarianism versus omnivorism? When humanity failed as vegetarians and filled the world with corruption and evil, Hashem decided to fix everything by allowing the eating of meat? Certainly not. As we read on, the picture becomes clearer:

BERESHIT 9:3-6 --

All crawling things which live, they are for you to eat, like the grassy plants; I have given to you everything, EXCEPT the flesh with the soul -- blood -- you shall not eat; and EXCEPT that your blood, for your souls, will I demand; from the hand of any beast I will demand it, and from the hand of Man; from the hand of EACH MAN'S BROTHER will I demand the soul of Man. He who spills the blood of Man, by Man will his blood be spilled, for *IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE MADE MAN.*

The animals are promised that Hashem will punish them for killing people, and humanity is warned that people will be punished by execution for killing other people -- since people are created be-tzelem Elokim.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL:

What is the theme of this new mission?

Originally, humanity had been charged with the mission of reflecting Hashem's characteristics. That mission included three different elements:

1) Creativity: humanity was to emulate Hashem as Creator by having children. This mandate of creativity may have also included creativity in general, not merely procreation, but it focused most specifically on procreation.

2) Conquering: humanity was to emulate Hashem as Ruler of Creation by extending control over nature, and over the animals in particular.

3) Eating vegetative matter. The point of this command was not that eating vegetables somehow is an essential part of imitatio Dei (emulating Hashem), but that eating vegetables means *not* killing for food.

This third element -- not killing for food -- was an oblique way of expressing the prohibition of murder. If even animals could not be killed for the 'constructive' purpose of eating, humans certainly could not be killed. Kayyin either never understood this element of the mission or found himself unable to meet its demands. But as a murderer, he renounced his status as tzelem Elokim, for the third element of the mission of tzelem Elokim is to emulate Hashem as a moral being. And the most basic expression of morality is the prohibition of murder.

Eventually, even Shet's descendants fall prey to the same weakness, filling the world with evil and violence, and Hashem decides that the entire world must be destroyed. The fact that immorality is the area of their failure is hinted not only by the Torah's explicit formulations ("For the world is full of violence before them," 6:11 and 6:13), but also by the way the Torah formulates the new mission commanded to Noah and his family as they re-establish the world after the Flood:

BERESHIT 9:5 --

... from the hand of each man's *brother,* will I demand the soul of Man

This is clearly a hint to the first murder, that of Hevel by his brother, and a hint as well that the failure of those destroyed by the Flood was in interpersonal morality, since this mission is delivered to those about to re-found the world on better foundations.

This new mission, which makes the prohibition of murder explicit, is a more clear version of the first mission, which merely hinted at the prohibition. But it is much more than a repetition/elaboration. It also expresses implicit disappointment in humanity: before, humanity had

been forbidden to kill even animals; now, animals may be killed for food. Hashem recognizes that humanity cannot maintain the very high moral standards originally set, and so He compromises, permitting killing of some creatures (animals) for some purposes (food). But the prohibition of eating the blood of these animals seeks to limit humanity's permission to kill; blood represents the life-force, the "soul" (the blood-soul equation is one the Torah makes explicit several times later on), and humanity must respect the sanctity of life and recognize its Maker by not consuming the symbol of that life-force. In other words, humanity has permission to take life for food, but this permission comes along with a blood-prohibition, a reminder that even life that can be taken for some purposes is sacred and must be respected.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT:

Next, this new mission asserts that animals and people will be punished for killing people. The penalty for murder is death. Why? The Torah itself supplies the reason: because man is created be-tzelem Elokim. Usually, we understand this to mean that since humans are created in the image of Hashem, it is a particularly terrible thing to destroy human life. This crime is of such enormity that an animal or person who murders a person must be punished with death.

But perhaps the reason there is a death penalty for humans who kill is not only because the *victim* is created in Hashem's image, and destroying an image of Hashem is a terrible act, but also because the *murderer* is created in Hashem's image! Murder merits the death penalty because it destroys two tzalem Elokim: the victim and the perpetrator. The murderer was charged with the mission of tzalem Elokim, emulating Hashem in exercising moral judgment, but he has failed and renounced that mission. And the mission is not an "optional" one -- it is the entire purpose of humanity's existence, the whole reason people were created, as Hashem makes clear in discussing His plans to create humanity. The punishment for rejecting this mission of tzalem Elokim is therefore death, because Hashem grants Hashem-like potential to humans only on condition that they attempt to reflect His qualities. Humanity does not have two options, one being accepting the mission and the other being rejecting it and becoming an animal. A person who rejects the mission of emulating Hashem cannot continue to exist and profane the image of Hashem.

Tzalem Elokim mandates our becoming creators and conquerors, but it also mandates our behaving morally. It means that we have the potential, unlike animals, to create, to rule, and to be moral. But it does not guarantee that we will develop that potential. Tzalem Elokim is something we can *become,* not something into which we are born.

Shabbat shalom

Parshas Bereishis: Two Versions of the Truth

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION...

Since we are beginning a new cycle of learning, back to the "beginning", it seems appropriate to introduce this shiur with a short statement about the perspective of this series of shiurim and their place within the constellation of Torah study.

In the first story of Man's creation (see below), God declares: "Let us (?) make Man in our (?) Image" (B'resheet 1:26). Besides the theological problems raised by the use of the plural (for instance, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Tanakh generated in the Alexandrian community in the first century BCE, renders this in the singular due to the significant problems raised by "our Image"; see also Rashi *ibid*; note also the fascinating comment of Ramban here), there is a more "anthropological" issue here - what does it mean to be created in the Image of God? Indeed, not only in Chapter 1, but again at the beginning of the "begats" (Chapter 5), the Torah declares that God created Man in His Image. How do we understand this description?

Rashi explains that "image" here refers to the ability to reason. Rav Soloveitchik z"l expands on this theme, building on the context of creation, and defines Man's "Divine Image" as the creative spark; that uniquely human ability to enter an environment, whether intellectual or social, and to devise an innovative way to overcome obstacles which prevent that environment from flourishing. In the intellectual arena, this means the innovative mode of thought known, in circles of Torah study, as "Hiddush". A Hiddush is an explanation which resolves contradictions in the text, which clarifies the conceptual background of various sides of a dispute - in short, a Hiddush is "digging well below the surface" of study in order to unearth the principle which drives the idea of that particular text. The difficulty inherent in any Hiddush is that there is, ultimately, no way to be certain if the Hiddush is "valid"; the ring of truth may be a hollow one, resonating only in the ears of the innovator.

It is our hope that the Hiddushim shared in this shiur, week after week, will resonate with our readership and that they will clarify more than they confound.

I. B'RESHEET - THE "GENESIS" OF A PROBLEM

Following the Torah's recounting - how long did Creation take? When (in that sequence) was Man created? When were the animals created? Where does the creation of Woman fit within this matrix?

Although most people would give singular answers to each of these questions (Creation took six or seven days, depending if you reckon Shabbat; Man was created on the sixth day; the animals were created just before that; Woman was created from Man's rib [sic]), the reality of the Torah's narrative is far more complex.

Not only are there two different stories of Creation (the first story continues from 1:1 until the middle of 2:4; the second continues from there); but, from a purely text-driven read of the information, the accounts are contradictory! In the first story, creation takes six or seven days, Man is created as a complete (single male-female) being at the apex of Creation. In the second story, Creation takes one day, Man is created as a lonely being at the beginning of the process. Woman is formed from Man - and is his "completion" - at the end of this "Creation process". Among the most pronounced differences between the two stories is the Name for God; in the first story, God is exclusively referred to as the generic "Elohim"; whereas in the second story, He is consistently called "Hashem (Y-H-V-H) Elohim".

These differences are among the stronger "arguments" marshalled by the school of "Bible Criticism", which, for the past 300 years, has been at the forefront of secular (and non-Orthodox) study of Tanakh. This school of thought (which is really many different schools, each with its own variation) maintains that the Torah is not the unified Word of Hashem; rather they see it as a patchwork of narratives, legal texts and prophecy/poetry, each produced by a different community of priests and scholars during the 10th-6th centuries BCE, which were woven into the Torah as we know it - sometime around the era of Ezra's leadership (5th c. BCE).

The Bible critics maintain that each of these communities had a different "version" of Creation, a different Name for God etc. - thus explaining the many apparent discrepancies and stylistic variations within the text.

For a myriad of reasons both in the areas of creed and scholarship, we absolutely reject this "Documentary Hypothesis". Our belief is that the entire Torah was given by God to Moshe (ignoring for a moment the problem of the last 8 verses) and that the authorship is not only singular, it is exclusively Divine. These two statements of belief - whether or not they can be reasonably demonstrated (and there is much literature, both medieval and contemporary, coming down on both sides of this question) - are two of the 13 principles enumerated by the Rambam.

Because both intellectual honesty and religious tenet prevent us from positing that the Divine Author presents inconsistent information, how can we explain the "multiple versions" - and apparent contradictions within the text?

II. TWO BASIC APPROACHES

From the perspective of tradition there are several ways to resolve these apparent contradictions. Most of them can be categorized into one of two basic approaches.

APPROACH #1: EACH VERSION COMPLETES THE OTHER

Fundamentally (no pun intended), we could try to "meld" the stories together. Rashi adopts this approach; for instance, in his commentary on the first verse in the Torah, Rashi notes that the first version of Creation uses the name "Elohim" for God - denoting strict justice (a court of law is also called Elohim - see Sh'mot 21:6), whereas the second version includes both the name "Hashem" and "Elohim" - indicating that although God's original intention was to create a world that would operate according to strict justice, He saw that that world could not last, so He integrated compassion (indicated by "Hashem" - see Sh'mot 34:6) into the process.

[We will temporarily suspend discussion of the theological difficulties raised by claiming that God "changed His mind"].

The Gemara in Ketubot (8a) takes a similar approach to the two versions of the creation of Woman - "originally God intended to create them as one being, but in the end He created them as separate individuals".

There are many examples of this approach, which is a distinct thread of exegesis in Rabbinic and medieval commentary. The upshot of this approach is that each version tells "part of the story" - and the "alternate version" completes the picture.

This approach has been adopted by some contemporary authors who attempt to "reconcile" science and Torah (why this attempt may not be necessary and may, indeed, be misleading and harmful, will be addressed in next week's shiur). The thinking goes as follows: Since each version provides only "part" of the information, it stands to reason that we may "synthesize" the versions together in various ways - including those which appear compatible with modern scientific theories about the origin of the universe, age of the earth and origin of the species.

In any case, this approach is both well-known and ubiquitously applied throughout Rabbinic exegesis regarding the Creation story (stories).

For purposes of our discussion, we will introduce another approach, which has its roots in Rabbinic literature and which was adopted by several Rishonim and more recent commentators, including Rabbi Yosef Dov haLevi Soloveitchik zt"l.

APPROACH #2: CHANGING THE FRAME OF REFERENCE

Both the problem - and the various solutions proposed by the proponents of the first approach - are predicated on an understanding of the role of the Torah which is not the only valid one.

III. TWO TYPES OF TRUTH

A brief segue on the nature of "Truth" is in order here:

There are statements which fall under the category of "Mathematical Truth"; for instance, that 7 times 9 equals 63 is not only an uncontested statement; it is also the only acceptable one. In other words, 7 times 9 MUST equal 63; if it equals anything else, something is wrong with the computation. Mathematical Truth is not only consistent, it is also exclusive.

If we maintain that the Torah is speaking the language of "Mathematical Truth", we have no recourse but to satisfy the two sides of the contradiction and either demonstrate that there is no contradiction at all - or to "weave" the information together (as demonstrated above).

There is, however, another type of statement which does not admit to "Mathematical Truth"; we will refer to it as "Ontological Truth" - (the reality about living, growing and dynamic beings). For instance, whereas it would be accurate to say that a certain boy loves to play baseball - that does not tell the full story of the boy. He is also afraid of spiders, excited about his upcoming trip to Washington and has great aptitude in science. Whereas 7 times 9 cannot equal anything but 63, the boy can simultaneously be a baseball fan, a science whiz and arachnaphobic.

As many commentators have pointed out (e.g. see S'foro's introduction to B'resheet, Shadal's introduction to his commentary on the Torah; note also Rashi's second comment on B'resheet), the goal of the Torah is not to present "Mathematical Truths" in the realms of biology, mathematics or "the origin of Man"; rather the Torah is geared to teaching us basic principles of faith, shaping proper attitudes towards the world around us, towards God and fellow humans. In addition - and most critically, the Torah's aim is to build a holy nation that will ultimately teach the basic truths and ethics of the Torah (note D'varim 4:6) to the entire world.

That being the case, we may certainly understand the various versions of creation as relating to different aspects of the world and of Man - and, notably, of Man's relationship with both the world around him and with the Creator.

We can then look at each story not as a "mathematical statement" which is either true or false - and is vulnerable to contradiction from another, equally valid source (such as the next chapter!); rather, we look at each version as a series of "ontological statements", geared to teaching us significant and focal perspectives about who we are and how we should act.

IV. TWO STORIES: HEAVEN AND EARTH; EARTH AND HEAVEN

We may find a clue into the "dual" nature of the Creation narrative via a careful look at the point where the two stories "meet" - immediately after the Shabbat narrative:

"These are the products of the heaven and earth when they were created, On the day when Hashem God made the earth and the heaven"

Note that the first half of this verse is a perfect conclusion to the "first version"; it utilizes the common "Eleh" (these...) concluding formula. Note also that just as the first story began with the creation of "Shamayim va'Aretz" - (Heaven and earth); this half-verse seems to conclude that creation.

The second half begins a new "story" - or another perspective of the same story. "On the day when Hashem God made the EARTH and HEAVEN". Note that the order is reversed - this is a deliberate move on the part of the text to shift the emphasis and the perspective of the story.

Now let's see what the two stories are - which two perspectives of Creation are being presented here.

[Much of this material based on the "Adam I & Adam II" theory of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l - the interested reader is directed to his opus: The Lonely Man of Faith].

V. VERSION #1: THE STORY OF THE WORLD

The first version is, indeed, the story of the creation of the heaven and the earth - in other words, it is the story of the creation of the world from a Divine perspective. It begins with the Heavens, presenting an orderly world structured in an hierarchical manner in which every manner of life has its place (note the refrain of "according to its species" in the third, fifth and sixth days). Man is created as the final, crowning touch of this glorious labor - and is formed "in God's image" in order to be His "agent", as it were, on earth: "...fill the earth and subdue it, having dominion over the fish of the sea..." (1:28). Man is complete, Man is a master over his world and Man needs for nothing. Man here is also not commanded - God blesses him with fertility, but there is no direct relationship between Man and God in this version.

This is truly the story of the world; an orderly world created by God in which Man can be His partner, His agent - but not His "servant". The Name for God which denotes compassion - Hashem - is totally missing from this account, since there is no need for Divine compassion where there is no Divine command and no Divine worship.

VI. VERSION #2: THE STORY OF MAN

There is another side to the story - the story of "the earth and the heavens" - the story from the perspective of Man (God is still "telling" the story - but from Man's point of view).

From the human perspective, everything created serves a human purpose; even the animals can serve as Man's companions (and thus are "created" after him) - but Man is not nearly as complete as the "detached" view would have it. Man is lonely, Man seeks out God as he seeks out meaning in this world of alienation and discord. This is a world where nothing grows because "there is no man to work the land" (2:5). God forms Man and then, around him and for his sake, creates a beautiful world of orchards and rivers. Immediately, the most crucial point in their relationship is realized - God commands Man! Man is no longer lonely, on one level, because he is in relationship with God. From a different perspective, however, he is lonely - because there is no one with whom to share this new life. Unlike the first - "detached" - story, in which everything is assessed as "good" (and, ultimately, "very good"), the first "non-good" thing is introduced - loneliness (2:18). As we follow "Adam II" through his bouts with temptation, guilt, cowardice, etc., we learn more about who he is - and who we are.

The Torah is not telling us two conflicting versions about creation; rather, we are seeing two sides of the same coin. The world is, indeed, an orderly place of hierarchical systems, where Man is the ultimate creature; yet, the world is also a place where Man feels alien and distant, seeking out companionship and meaning in his relationships with fellow humans, with a mate, and with God.

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PARSHAT BREISHIT

How many stories of Creation are there in Parshat Breishit, ONE or TWO? Although this question is often discussed more by Bible critics than yeshiva students, its resolution may carry a significant spiritual message.

In this week's shiur, we discuss the structure of Parshat Breishit, in an attempt to better understand the meaning of the Torah's presentation of the story of Creation. Our analysis will also 'set the stage' for our discussion of the overall theme of Sefer Breishit in the shiurim to follow.

INTRODUCTION

From a literary perspective, it is quite easy to differentiate between two distinct sections in the Torah's account of the story of Creation:

- SECTION I - THE CREATION IN SEVEN DAYS /1:1->2:3
- SECTION II - MAN IN GAN EDEN / 2:4 ->3:24

In our shiur, we will first explain what makes each section unique. Afterward we will discuss how they complement one another.

PEREK ALEPH

SECTION I, better known as PEREK ALEPH, is easily discerned because of its rigid structure, i.e. every day of creation follows a very standard pattern. Each day:

- * Begins with the phrase: "VA'YOMER ELOKIM...", heralding a new stage of creation (see 1:3,6,9,14,20,24);
- * Continues with "VA'YAR ELOKIM... KI TOV" (see 1:4,10,12,18,21,31);
- * Concludes with "VAYHI EREV VAYHI BOKER, YOM..." (see 1:5,8,13,19,23,31).

In fact, one could construct a 'blank form' that would fit just about any day of Creation, that would look something like this:

"va'yomer Elokim" - And God said... _____

[followed by some act of Creation.]

"va'yhi chen" - And so it was

[often followed by some naming process: like
"va'yikra.Elokim... , or some divine 'comment'"]

"va'yar Elokim... ki tov" - And God saw it was good

"va'yhi erek va;yhi boker, yom ___#___"

Even though certain days may vary from this basic format, certainly each day begins with the phrase "va'yomer Elokim...".

This observation allows us to identify the first two psukim of this unit (1:1-2) as its header, for Day One must begin with the first "va'yomer Elokim" (in the third pasuk/ see 1:3 and Rashi on the meaning of the word "Breishit" in his interpretation to 1:1).

We reach a similar conclusion in regard to the 'Seventh Day' (i.e. 2:1-3). Since these psukim describe 'Day Seven', they must be part of this overall Story of Creation; yet because they begin with "va'yachulu..." - and not with "va'yomer Elokim" - they form the conclusion of this unit.

To verify this, note the beautiful parallel between these two 'bookends' (i.e. 1:1-2 and 2:1-3, noting the phrase "shamayim v'aretz" and the verb "bara'"), and how Day Seven 'concludes' that which was introduced in 1:1.

This introduction and conclusion define for us the primary topic of this entire unit - - "briyat ha'shamayim v'ha'aretz" - God's Creation of the Heavens and the Earth. This topic is presented through a daily progression of God's creations that span over six days.

With this general framework defined, we can now begin our

analysis of the progression of Creation from one day to the next. We will pay attention to how each day either follows, or slightly varies from the standard format discussed above. [For example, the fact that day two does not include the phrase "va'yar Elokim ki tov" should be significant.]

A DAILY "CHIDUSH"

As we mentioned above, within this unit, the phrase "va'yomer Elokim" begins each day, and is always followed by an act God's Creation - or at least some type of "chidush" [i.e. something new, that didn't exist the day before].

After the execution each act of Creation, we may find 'peripheral' comments such as God giving names or duties to what He just created. However, we will show how the next "chidush" of Creation doesn't take place without an additional "va'yomer Elokim"!

We should also point out that in Days Three and Six we find our basic form repeated twice, i.e. the phrase "va'yomer Elokim" appears twice on each of these days, and each time followed by a distinct act of Creation, followed by the evaluation of - "va'yar Elokim ki tov". This suggests that each of these days will contain two acts of Creation. [The deeper meaning of this will be discussed as we continue.]

Therefore, our analysis begins by identifying what was the precise "chidush" of each day. Then, we will discuss the 'peripheral comments' of each day, showing how they relate to that "chidush".

DAY ONE (1:3- 5)

God's first act of creation (i.e. what follows the first "va'yomer Elokim") was making "OR" - or what we call 'light'.

This creation is followed by a 'naming process' where God calls the light - 'Day', and the darkness (the lack of light) is called 'Night'.

DAY TWO (1:6-8)

God makes the "rakiya" - whose function is to divide between the 'water above' and the 'water below'.

Then, God names these 'waters above' - "shamayim" [Heavens]. Note that the 'waters below' are not named until Day Three. Note as well that this is only time when God's creation is not followed by the phrase "va'yar Elokim ki tov". Hence, it appears that something on this day is either 'not so good' or at least incomplete. [We'll return to this observation later in the shiur.]

DAY THREE (1:9-12)

* Stage One: (i.e. the first "va'yomer Elokim").

Gods makes the "yabasha" [dry land].

Then God names this 'dry land - ARETZ [Earth?] and the remaining "mayim" - YAMIM [Seas].

Followed by God's positive evaluation: "va'yar Elokim ki tov"

* Stage Two (i.e. the second "va'yomer Elokim" / 1:11-12)

God creates what we call 'vegetation', i.e. all the various species of vegetables and fruit trees. Note how these psukim emphasize precisely what makes the 'plant kingdom' unique - i.e. how these species contain seeds that will produce the next generation - e.g. "esev mazria zera" and "etz pri oseh pri".

Note that God no longer gives 'names' to what He created. However, we still find the standard positive evaluation "va'yar Elokim ki tov". [You were probably aware that "ki tov" is mentioned twice in Day Three, but you probably weren't aware that it was because it contains two "va'yomer Elokim's"!]

A QUANTUM LEAP

Note the 'quantum leap' that takes place in stage Two on Day Three. Up until Stage Two, everything that God had created was 'inanimate' (non-living). From this point on, living things are created. [Keep this in mind, as we will uncover a similar 'quantum leap' when we discuss the progression from Stage One to Two in Day Six!, i.e. when we jump from animal to man.]

This may explain why Stage One of Day Three is the last time that we find God giving names. It seems as though God gave names only to His 'non-living' creations.

[In chapter two, we will see how it becomes man's job to give

names to other living things (see 2:19), and maybe even to God Himself! (see 4:26)!

Furthermore, note the 'separation process' that emerges as God created "shamayim v'aretz". In the introduction, we find "mayim" - with "ruach Elokim" [God's spirit?] hovering over it (see 1:2). Then, in Day Two, God takes this "mayim" 'solution' and separates it ["va'yavdel"] between the "mayim" 'above' and 'below' the "rakiya". The 'water above' becomes "SHAMAYIM", but the 'water below' needs further separation, which only takes place on Day Three - when the remaining 'solution' separates between the "ARETZ" [Land] and the "YAMIM" [Seas].

Technically speaking, this is how God created "shamayim v'aretz". [The creation of the remaining "v'kol tzvaam" - and all their hosts (see 2:1) - takes place from this point and onward.]

DAY FOUR (1:14-19)

God creates the "meorot", i.e. the sun, moon and stars.

This time however, note how God explains the function of His new creations (instead of giving names). For example, "va'hayu l'otot u'moadim" - and they shall be for signs and appointed times; and later - "l'ha'ir al ha'aretz" - to give light on the land (see 1:14-15). And finally: "l'mshol ba'yom u'valayala" - to rule over day and night (1:18). [Note as well how this day relates back to Day One.]

DAY FIVE (1:20-23)

On this day, we find yet another 'quantum leap', as God begins His creation of the 'animal kingdom' (i.e. in contrast to the 'vegetation' created on day three). God creates all living things that creep in the water or fly in the sky (i.e. fish and fowl).

Even though this day follows the standard 'form' (discussed above), we do find two very important additions.

1. The verb "bara" is used to describe how God creates this animal kingdom: "va'yivrah Elokim et ha'tananim ha'gedolim v'et kol nefesh ha'chaya..." (1:21). Note how this is the first usage of this verb since the first pasuk of "breishit bara..." (1:1)! The Torah's use of the verb "bara" specifically at this point may reflect this 'quantum leap' to the animal kingdom in this critical stage of the Creation.
2. A 'blessing' is given (for the first time) to these fish and fowl after their creation: "va'yvarech otam Elokim laymor - pru ur'vu..." - that they should be fruitful and multiply and fill the seas and skies. Note how this blessing relates to the very essence of the difference between the 'plant kingdom' and the 'animal kingdom'. Whereas self produced seeds allow vegetation to reproduce itself, the animal kingdom requires mating for reproduction to take place, and hence the need for God's blessing of "pru u'rvu" to keep each species alive.

DAY SIX (1:24-31)

Here again, like in Day Three, we find two stages of Creation, each beginning with the phrase "va'yomer Elokim, with yet another 'quantum leap' in between:

* Stage One (1:24-25)

God creates the living things that roam on the land, i.e. the animals. There is really nothing special about this stage, other than the fact that God found it necessary to create them 'independently' on the first stage of Day Six, instead of including them with His creation of the rest of the animal kingdom (i.e. with the fish and the fowl) in Day Five.

In fact, we find an interesting parallel between both days that contain two stages (i.e. days Three and Six). Just as Stage One of Day Three (separating the Earth from the 'water below') completed a process that God had begun in Day Two, so too Stage One of Day Six (the animals) completed a process that God began in Day Five!

* Stage Two (1:26-31)

God creates MAN - "b'tzelem Elokim"!

Note how many special words and phrases (many of which we encountered before) accompany God's creation of man:

First of all, we find once again the use of the verb "bara" to

describe this act of creation, suggesting that the progression from animal to man may be considered no less a 'quantum leap' than the progression from vegetation to animal.

Secondly, God appears to 'consult' with others (even though it is not clear who they are) before creating man ("naaseh adam b'tzalmeinu...").

Here again, we find not only an act of creation, but also a 'statement the purpose' for this creation - i.e. to be master over all of God's earlier creations:

"v'yirdu b'dgat ha'yam u'b'of ha'shamayim..." – Be fruitful and multiply and be master over the fish of the seas and the fowl in the heavens and the animals and all the land, and everything that creeps on the land." (see 1:26).

Thus, it appears that man is not only God's last Creation, but also His most sophisticated creation, responsible to rule over all other creations 'below the heavens'.

This explains we find yet another blessing (following this act of creation / similar to the blessing on Day Five). This blessing to man includes not only fertility, but also relates to his potential to exert dominion over all that Elokim had created. ["pru u'rvu v'kivshuha, u'rdu b'dgat ha'yam..." / see 1:28, compare with 1:26)

It should be noted that we find one final section, that also begins with the phrase "va'yomer Elokim" (see 1:29), but quite different than all the earlier ones, as this statement does not introduce an act of Creation, but rather the administration of food. In a nutshell, in these psukim God allows the animal kingdom to consume the plant kingdom. The green grass is given for the animals (to graze upon), while man receives the 'added privilege' of eating the fruit of the trees (see 1:29-30).

SOMETHING SPECIAL

As you surely must have realized, all of these 'variances' from the 'standard format' in regard to God's creation of man emphasize that there must be something very special about man's creation, and hence his purpose. But this should not surprise us, for that is precisely what we should expect from a book of prophecy, a divine message to man to help him understand his relationship with God, and the purpose for his existence.

All of these special points about man's creation should be important, but before we discuss their significance, we must take into consideration one more observation concerning the progression of Creation during these six days.

A PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Let's summarize our conclusions thus far concerning what was created on each day (and each statement of "va'yomer Elokim..."):

DAY	GOD CREATED...
==	=====
I.	"OR" = LIGHT
II.	"RAKIYA" - separating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. the MAYIM above [=SHAMAYIM], and B. the MAYIM below [=YAMIM].
IIIa.	"YABASHA", called the ARETZ (the Land) -
IIIb.	Vegetation (on that ARETZ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. seed-bearing plants / "esev mazria zera" B. fruit-bearing trees / "etz pri oseh pri"
IV.	LIGHTS in the SHAMAYIM (sun, moon, stars etc.)
V.	LIVING CREATURES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. birds in the sky [=RAKIYA SHAMAYIM] B. fish in the sea [=MAYIM]
VIa.	LIVING CREATURES who live on the ARETZ (land) animals - all forms
VIb.	MAN - b'tzelem Elokim, blessed by God to dominate all other living creatures
Then, God assigns the appropriate food for these living creatures:	
1. Man - can eat vegetation and fruit (see 1:29)	
2. Animals - can eat only vegetation/grass - (see 1:30)	
VII.	SHABBAT - God rested, as His Creation was complete.

Now, let's turn our list into a table.
If we line up the first three days against the last three days, we find a rather amazing parallel:

DAYS 1-3	DAYS 4-6
I. LIGHT	IV. LIGHTS in the heavens
II. RAKIYA - dividing: SHAMAYIM (above) MAYIM (below the sea)	V. Living things: Birds in the SHAMAYIM Fish in MAYIM
III. ARETZ (land) Seed bearing plants Fruit bearing trees	VI. Animals & Man on the ARETZ Plants to be eaten by the Animals Fruit of trees, to be eaten by Man

Note how this parallel reflects our discussion above concerning the internal progression of these six days of Creation; and our observation that from Day Four and onward, God not only creates, but He also states the purpose of His creations.

It also shows how the last three days 'fill in' the potential for what God created in the first three days. Basically, from day four and onward, nature 'goes into motion', as we find 'movement' both in the Heavens above and in the Earth below.

In summary, when these six days are complete, what we call 'nature' has gone into motion.

DIVINE EVOLUTION

If we understand the phrase "tohu va'vahu" in the introductory section (see 1:2) as total chaos, then from this primordial state - six days later, we find a beautifully structured universe containing all of the various forms of life that we are familiar with; including plants, animals, and man.

Note that the Torah emphasizes that each form of life is created in a manner that guarantees its survival, i.e. its ability to reproduce:

- a. plants: "esev mazria zera" - seed-bearing vegetation
"etz pri oseh pri" - fruit-bearing trees (1:11-12)
- b. fish and fowl: "pru u'rvu" - be fruitful & multiply (1:22)
- c. Man: "pru u'rvu..." - be fruitful & multiply (1:28)

One could summarize and simply state that the end result of this creation process is what we call NATURE - in other words - the exact opposite of TOHU VA'VAHU.

In this manner, PEREK ALEPH describes God's creation of nature, i.e. the entire material universe and its phenomena.

Even though 'nature' itself remains dynamic, with living things constantly changing and reproducing, its basic framework remains constant - for after "va'ychulu" (2:1), nothing 'new' will be created, and certainly, nothing more advanced or sophisticated as man.

This established, we must now ask ourselves the more fundamental question, which is - what can we learn from the unique manner by which the Torah tells over the story of Creation? Is it recorded for the sake of our curiosity, simply to let us know 'how it all happened' - or does it carry a prophetic message - for any human being contemplating the purpose of the world that surrounds him!

ONE GOD, OR MANY?

Certainly, one primary message that emerges from this presentation is that the creation of nature, with all its complexities and wonders, was a willful act of GOD. Hence, by keeping Shabbat, resting on the seventh day, as God did, we assert our belief that God is the power the created nature (and continues to oversee it).

This analysis can also help us appreciate why the Torah uses the name -Elokim - to describe God throughout this entire chapter. As Ramban explains (toward the end of his commentary on 1:1), the Hebrew word "el" implies someone with power (or strength) and in control. Therefore, "shem ELOKIM" implies the master of **all** of the many forces of nature.

[This can explain why God's Name is in the plural form- for He is all of the powers / see also Rav Yehuda ha'Levi, in Sefer Kuzari, beginning of Book Four.]

This understanding can also help us appreciate the Torah's use

of the verb "bara" in PEREK ALEPH. Note how the THREE active uses of the verb "bara" in PEREK ALEPH reflect each level of sophistication in Creation, i.e. "tzomeyach" [plant kingdom], "chai" [animal kingdom] and "m'daber" [man]. This also reflects the three 'quantum leaps' that we discussed in the evolutionary development of nature during these six days.

* STEP ONE - All matter and plants -

"Breishit BARA Elokim et ha'SHAMAYIM v'et ha'ARETZ" (1:1)

This includes everything in the SHAMAYIM and on the ARETZ, i.e. the creation of all "domem" (inanimate objects) and "tzomeyach" (plants). Note that this takes place during the first FOUR days of Creation.

* STEP TWO - The animal kingdom

"va'YIVRA Elokim - and God created the TANINIM and all living creatures... by their species" (1:21)

This includes the birds, fish, animals, and beasts etc. which are created on the fifth and sixth days.

* STEP THREE - Man

"va'YIVRA Elokim et ha'ADAM..." (1:27)

The creation of man b'tzelem Elokim, in God's image.

Now we must ponder what may be the Torah's message in telling man that the creation of nature was a willful act of God?

In his daily life, man constantly encounters a relationship with nature, i.e. with his surroundings and environment. Man does not need the Torah to inform him that nature exists; it stares him in the face every day. As man cannot avoid nature, he must constantly contemplate it, and struggle with it.

Without the Torah's message, one could easily conclude that nature is the manifestation of many gods - a rain god, a sun god, a fertility god, war gods, etc. - as ancient man believed. Nature was attributed to a pantheon of gods, often warring with one another.

In contrast, modern man usually arrives at quite the opposite conclusion -- that nature just exists, and doesn't relate to any form of god at all.

One could suggest that Chumash begins with story of Creation, for man's relationship with God is based on his recognition that nature is indeed the act of one God. He created the universe for a purpose, and continues to oversee it.

But how does this relate to man himself?

MAN - IN PEREK ALEPH

In Perek Aleph, man emerges not only as the climax of the creation process, but also as its MASTER:

"And God blessed man saying: Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and MASTER it, and RULE the fish of the sea, and the birds in the sky, and the living things that creep on the earth..." (1:28).

Note that this is God's BLESSING to man, and NOT a commandment! One could consider this 'blessing' almost as a definition of man's very nature. Just as it is 'natural' for vegetation to grow ["esev mazria zera"], and for all living things to reproduce ["pru u'rvu"], it is also 'natural' for man to dominate his environment; it becomes his natural instinct.

The Torah's use of the verb "bara" at each major stage of creation, and then in its description of God's creation of man - may shed light on this topic. When contemplating nature and his relationship with the animal kingdom, man might easily conclude that he is simply just another part of the animal kingdom. He may be more advanced or developed than the 'average monkey', but biologically he is no different. The Torah's use of the verb "bara" to describe God's creation of man informs us that man is a completely new category of creation. He is created "b'tzelem Elokim", in the image of God, i.e. he possesses a spiritual potential, unlike any other form of nature.

[See the Rambam in the very beginning of Moreh N'vuchim (I.1), where he defines "tzelem Elokim" as the characteristic of man that differentiates him from animal.]

In other words, man's creation in a separate stage of Day Six, and the use of the verb "bara", and his special blessing etc. all come to impress upon man that he is indeed a 'quantum leap' above all other creations. He should not view himself as just the most sophisticated animal of the universe, but rather as a Godly creation.

Perek Aleph teaches man to recognize that his very nature to dominate all other living things is also an act of God's creation.

However, man must also ask himself, "Towards what purpose?" Did God simply create man, or does He continue to have a relationship with His creation? Does the fate of mankind remain in God's control; does there remain a connection between man's deeds and God's "hashgacha" (providence) over him?

The answer to this question begins in PEREK BET - the story of Gan Eden, and will continue through the rest of Chumash!

PEREK BET (2:4-3:24)

PEREK BET presents what appears to be conflicting account of the story of Creation. As your review chapter two, note how:

- 1) Nothing can grow before God creates man (see 2:5), therefore:
- 2) God creates man FIRST (2:6-7), then:
- 3) God plants a garden for man, vegetation develops (2:8-14);
- 4) God gives man the job to work and guard this garden (2:15);
- 5) God commands man re: what he can/cannot eat (2:16-17);
- 6) God creates animals for the sake of man (2:18-20)
- 7) God creates a wife for man, from his own rib (2:21-25).

Clearly, the **order** of creation is very different. In PEREK BET we find that man is created FIRST, and everything afterward (i.e. the plants and the animals) are created FOR him. In contrast to perek Aleph where man was God's final Creation - the most sophisticated - and blessed to exert his dominion over the entire animal kingdom; in Perek Bet we see how man is simply a servant of God, tending to His Garden (see 2:15-16), and searching for companionship (see 2:18-25). In perek Aleph, he emerged as 'ruler', almost like a god himself ("b'tzelem Elokim"); in perek Bet he is a servant.

In addition, there are several other obvious differences between these two sections:

- * Throughout this section, God's Name is no longer simply ELOKIM, rather the name HASHEM ELOKIM (better known as "shem Havaya").
- * In contrast to the consistent use of verb "bara" (creation from nothing) in Perek Aleph, Perek Bet uses the verb "ya'tzar" (creation from something/ see 2:7,19).

Although it is possible to reconcile these apparent contradictions (as many commentators do), the question remains - Why does the Torah present these two accounts in a manner that (at least) appears to be conflicting?

We obviously cannot accept the claim of the Bible critics that these two sections reflect two conflicting ancient traditions. Our belief is that the entire Torah was given by God at Har Sinai - and hence stems from one source. Therefore, we must conclude that this special manner of presentation is intentional and should carry a prophetic message. For this reason, our study of Sefer Breishit will focus more so on how the Torah's 'stories' of Creation explain the nature of man's relationship with God, and less so on how to resolve the 'technical' problems to determine what events actually took place and when.

Two renowned Torah scholars of the 20th century have discussed this issue of the two creation stories at length. The analytical aspect, the approach of "shtei bechinot" (two perspectives), has been exhausted by Rabbi Mordechai Breuer in his book Pirkei Breishit. The philosophical implications have been discussed by Rav Soloveichik ZT"l in his article 'The Lonely Man of Faith' (re: Adam I & Adam II).

It is beyond the scope of this shiur to summarize these two approaches (it is recommended that you read them). Instead, we will simply conduct a basic analysis of PEREK ALEPH & PEREK BET and offer some thoughts with regard to its significance. Hopefully it will provide a elementary background for those who wish to pursue this topic in greater depth.

With this in mind, we begin our analysis in an attempt to find the primary message of each of these two sections. We begin with a review of our conclusions regarding Perek Aleph.

PEREK ALEPH - THE CREATION OF NATURE

Nature - the entire material universe and its phenomena ["ha'shamayim v'haretz v'chol tzvaam"] - was the end result of the Seven Days of Creation. Without the Torah's message, man may logically conclude that the universe that surrounds him is controlled by various different powers, each controlling their own realm (or what ancient man understood as a pantheon of gods).

Chumash begins by informing us that nature itself, with all its complexities and wonders, was a willful act of the 'one God' - who continues to oversee His creations. [Hence the name -Elokim - (plural) all of the powers of nature.]

However, if there is one phenomenon in nature that appears to contradict this conclusion of unity, it is the very existence of "shamayim" [Heaven] and "aretz" [Earth]. Two totally different realms, with almost not contact between them, separated by the "rakiya"! This observation may explain why there was 'nothing good' about Day Two, when God made the "rakiya", for it was this very first division that leaves us with the impression that there must be 'many gods', and not one.

This may also explain why the entire story of Creation begins with the statement that Elokim made [both] "shamayim v'aretz" (see 1:1), and concludes with a very similar statement (see 2:1 & 2:4).

[Note as well See Breishit 14:19-22 & 24:3. Note as well Devarim 31:28 & 32:1. See also Ibn Ezra on Devarim 30:19 (his second pirush on that pasuk)!]

One could suggest that this may be one the primary messages of the Torah's opening story of Creation - that the apparent 'duality' of "shamayim v'aretz" is indeed the act of one God. Hence, the only aspect of Creation that could not be defined a 'good' was the creation of the "rakiya" which divides them. Later on, it will becomes man's challenge to find the connection between "shamayim v'aretz"!

PEREK BET - MAN IN GAN EDEN

Perek Bet presents the story of creation from a totally different perspective. Although it opens with a pasuk that connects these two stories (2:4), it continues by describing man in an environment that is totally different than that of Perek Aleph. Note how man is the focal point of the entire creation process in Perek Bet, as almost every act taken by God is for the sake of man:

- * No vegetation can grow before man is created (2:5)
- * God plants a special garden for man to live in (2:8)
- * God 'employs' man to 'work in his garden' (2:15)
- * God creates the animals in an attempt to find him a companion (2:19/ compare with 2:7!)
- * God creates a wife for man (2:21-23)

In contrast to Perek Aleph, where man's job is to be dominant over God's creation, in Perek Bet man must be obedient and work for God, taking care of the Garden:

"And God took man and placed him in Gan Eden - L'OVDAH u'ISHOMRAH - to work in it and guard it." (2:15)

Most significantly, in PEREK BET man enters into a relationship with God that contains REWARD and PUNISHMENT, i.e. he is now responsible for his actions. For the first time in Chumash, we find that God COMMANDS man:

"And Hashem Elokim commanded man saying: From all the trees of the Garden YOU MAY EAT, but from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad YOU MAY NOT EAT, for on the day you eat from it YOU WILL SURELY DIE..." (2:16-17)

This special relationship between man and God in Gan Eden, is paradigmatic of other relationships between man and God found later on in Chumash (e.g. in the Mishkan).

God's Name in perek Bet - HASHEM ELOKIM (better known as "shem HAVAYA") - reflects this very concept. The shem HAVAYA comes from the shoresh (root) - "l'hiyot" (to be, i.e. to be present). This Name stresses that Gan Eden is an environment in which man

can recognize God's **presence**, thus enabling the possibility of a relationship.

Should man obey God, he can remain in the Garden, enjoying a close relationship with God. However, should he disobey, he is to die. In the next chapter, this 'death sentence' is translated into man's banishment from Gan Eden. In biblical terms, becoming distanced from God is tantamount to death. [See Devarim 30:15-20.]

In the Gan Eden environment, man is confronted with a conflict between his "taava" (desire) and his obligation to obey God. The "nachash" [serpent], recognizing this weakness, challenges man to question the very existence of this Divine relationship (3:1-4). When man succumbs to his desires and disobeys God, he is banished from the Garden.

Whether or not man can return to this ideal environment will later emerge as an important biblical theme.

A DUAL EXISTENCE

From PEREK ALEPH, we learn that God is indeed the Creator of nature, yet that recognition does not necessarily imply that man can develop a personal relationship with Him. The environment detailed in PEREK BET, although described in physical terms, is of a more spiritual nature - for God has created everything specifically for man. However, in return he must obey God in order to enjoy this special relationship. In this environment, the fate of man is a direct function of his deeds.

So which story of Creation is 'correct', PEREK ALEPH or PEREK BET? As you probably have guessed - both, for in daily life man finds himself involved in both a physical and spiritual environment.

Man definitely exists in a physical world in which he must confront nature and find his purpose within its framework (PEREK ALEPH). There, he must struggle with nature in order to survive; yet he must realize that God Himself is the master over all of these Creations. However, at the same time, man also exists in a spiritual environment that allows him to develop a relationship with his Creator (PEREK BET). In it, he can find spiritual life by following God's commandments while striving towards perfection. Should he not recognize the existence of this potential, he defaults to 'spiritual death' - man's greatest punishment.

Why does the Torah begin with this 'double' story of Creation? We need only to quote the Ramban (in response to this question, which is raised by the first Rashi of Chumash):

"There is a great need to begin the Torah with the story of Creation, for it is the "shoresh ha'eminah", the very root of our belief in God."

Understanding man's potential to develop a relationship with God on the spiritual level, while recognizing the purpose of his placement in a physical world as well, should be the first topic of Sefer Breishit, for it will emerge as a primary theme of the entire Torah.

shabbat shalom,
menachem