

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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may 5787 bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

As we start a new cycle of reading the Torah, how is a Jew or even non-Jew to understand the Torah? One extreme position is to maintain that everything in the Torah is truth and that we are to accept all statements as literally true. William Jennings Bryan took this position in his debate with Clarence Darrow in the Scopes ("monkey") trial in Dayton, TN in 1925. The opposite extreme (Darrow) is that many statements in the Bible are primitive superstitions of the ancient world.

A more realistic Jewish view is that the Torah is a Divine model on how to live a moral life, not a history book, and that the topics in the Torah cover issues relating to how God wants humans to live. The Torah does not cover all aspects of history, because some historical events are irrelevant to how to live a proper life.

Parshat Bereishit opens with a discussion of week one. The Torah says, Yom Echad, not Yom Rishon. The opening verses discuss day one, not the first day. Day one relevant to what humans must know leads to seven days of lessons. The opening of the Torah is consistent with there being previous days or a period before the discussion in the Torah. The position in the Torah is that pre-history, what happened before day one, does not have lessons for humans on how to live a moral, Torah life.

The prevailing view in science is that the world started with a "big bang." What was around before the big bang? How did the pre-existing bodies, galaxies, etc. come to be? I do not know how scientists answer this question, but the ultimate question is what was the original source from which everything led to what we know (or think that we know) about the world as it is today. The Jewish answer is that an intelligent being, what we call God, created the world and everything in it. I am unaware of a competing or superior theory from science. Even so, any acceptable theory must solve the issue of an ultimate beginning. The Jewish view is that the amazing way that the world works could only have originated with a brilliant mind – and we say that the origin comes from God.

The Torah informs us how to live in a world that God created for humans and other life forms. The presentation covers what we need to know from God's perspective, for the perspective of humans. What is a day? For humans, a day is one spinning of earth to get back to the same place where it started – what we define as 24 hours. From God's perspective, a day need not have the same meaning. Yom echad may cover millions of years of evolutions – to God, a million years might seem like a moment, and many millions of years might seem like a day. Keeping in mind the difference between God's perspective and human perspective can reconcile chapter one with scientific knowledge. While science focuses on the details of evolution, God's perspective may focus on a broad outline that leaves the details out of the message that God wants to present to humans. A similar thinking explains why the Torah does not discuss dinosaurs. If dinosaurs are not important to the message that God wants to present to humans in His Torah, then there is no reason for the Torah to mention dinosaurs.

As we go through the Torah, my focus will sometimes be on God's perspective and other times on a human perspective. How can such a relatively small volume present such a rich, unified guide to living a proper life? Rabbi David Fohrman and his fellow scholars at Alephbeta.org provide a framework to understand the relations that tie various topics in the Torah across the pages. We read Rabbi Yishmael's 13 rules for understanding linkages across the Torah (just before the Kaddish de Rabbinan in the morning service). These rules explain that key words in one place in the Torah, when they reappear, have the same meaning in both places, and each appearance explains the meaning in both places. With Rabbi Yishmael's 13 rules, we have a process to deepen our understanding of the meaning of words in the Torah. This methodology leads to a rich understanding, the basis of much of the commentary that Torah scholars present from week to week. With the same process, common words elsewhere in Tanach (later sections of holy writings), including in psalms, add to the process. This methodology has created a rich body of understanding of Jewish theology. Hopefully I can present some of this learning over the course of the year. Writings of scholars that I follow and present each week carry this process much further.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

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. 2026 has been an especially difficult year for AlephBeta.org, so please consider donating now.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, 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.

Haftarat Machar Chodesh: The Waxing and Waning of God's Presence

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander

President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone 5787 (2026)

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftarah this week in loving memory of Dr. Norman Javitt, z"l.

This week, as Rosh Chodesh falls on a Sunday, we will read the haftara of machar chodesh, which opens with the words: "Tomorrow is the new month" (I Samuel 20:18). At first glance, the reference to the new moon seems incidental, a plot device that frames Yonatan's confrontation with Shaul over his friend David. Yet the haftarah invites us to see beyond this detail. The significance lies not simply in mentioning tomorrow's new moon, but in what the moon — and its rhythms — reveals about the relationship between God and the people of Israel.

The connection between the moon and Israel is woven throughout our tradition. The moon is always present in the heavens, though we do not always perceive its fullness or even glimpse it at all. It waxes and wanes in a steady, ancient rhythm. This rhythm offers a profound image for the Jewish experience across history and into the present. Like the moon, God's presence endures, providing spiritual light to our souls just as the sun illuminates the moon. We draw our strength and direction from that inexhaustible Source. And yet, there are seasons in our history and our personal lives when that light seems hidden from us, when darkness appears to prevail, when God's providence is no longer visible to our eyes.

The haftarah itself reflects this pattern through the life of David. We encounter him at a moment of acute vulnerability and danger. He is pursued by Sha'ul, whose instability and paranoia drive him to turn on his former protege and hunt him relentlessly across the desert. David's safety — indeed, his very survival — depends on forces entirely beyond his control. He must hide, flee, and depend on the mercy of others. His life at this point is at a nadir from which recovery seems unlikely.

And yet, we know this moment does not define David's entire life. In time, his circumstances transform completely, and he emerges from hiding to accomplish extraordinary things: composing the Psalms, waging victorious battles against Israel's enemies, unifying the fractured kingdom, and establishing Jerusalem as its center. Though his life remains plagued with conflict and adversity, he rises and perseveres. David's journey is one of waxing and waning, of descent followed by ascent, of darkness giving way to light.

Through David, the haftarah teaches that this rhythm is not incidental. It is not a failure of faith or a sign of abandonment. Rather, it is the very pattern through which the relationship between God and the Jewish people unfolds and develops through history.

This profound insight finds its fullest expression in the Kiddush Levana, the blessing we recite each month to sanctify the new moon. We declare: Shehem atidim lehitchadesh kemotah — "they are destined to be reborn like the moon" (Sanhedrin 42a). In the same breath, we proclaim: David melekh Yisrael chai vekayam — "David, king of Israel, lives and endures." The pairing of these two affirmations is not coincidental; it is theologically essential. David embodies the lived experience of the Jewish people in their covenant relationship with the Almighty. As David's life rises and falls, so too does ours. There are times when we must flee, when we must hide, when we must endure darkness without clarity or comfort. There are moments of Jewish history when our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, stand on the frontlines of battle, are held hostage in enemy hands, or are destroyed in the depths of human evil — from Auschwitz to Treblinka. And yet, the promise of Kiddush Levana remains: God has not forsaken us.

This is not a promise that darkness will disappear. It is a far deeper assurance: that even when light is hidden, when our vision falters, when we cannot perceive God's presence, we are not abandoned. The moon wanes, but it returns. David flees, but he rises. The Jewish people pass through cycles of struggle, concealment and renewal, but we are promised redemption.

For our time, this teaching carries particular urgency. We are living through a period that demands we recognize these rhythms in our own reality — in the story of our people, in the story of the land of Israel, and in our individual spiritual journeys. The haftarah's account of David's flight and hiding is not a story of abandonment, but a profound teaching about our enduring covenant. When we bless the new moon and proclaim David melekh Yisrael chai vekayam, we are affirming that we understand these cycles, that we accept seasons of light and shadow, and that we trust — with the certainty of the moon's return — that dawn follows even the darkest night.

Shabbat Shalom.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone.

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-machar-chodesh-rabbi-brander-5787/>

Inheriting Moral Instincts: How Choices Become a Legacy

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander

President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone 5787 (2026)

[Ed. note: I am reprinting Rabbi Brander's moving blog from the Jerusalem Post for Simchat Torah because of its importance and because it fits in with the anniversary of the horrors of October 7, 2023, which we relived earlier this week. The loss of Aner Elyakim Shapira three years ago is a tragic loss for all Jews.]

Some legacies are transmitted through words. Others are transmitted through the way a person responds at the most demanding moments of life. Those moments become family stories, and family stories can become something more: a moral inheritance.

Rabbi Moshe Shapira was a central Religious Zionist leader and a signer of Israel's Declaration of Independence. In October 1957, while serving as Minister of Religions and Minister of Welfare, he was sitting in the Knesset plenum when 26-year-old Moshe Dwek threw a hand grenade from the visitors' gallery toward the government ministers' table.

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Golda Meir were wounded, and Transportation Minister Moshe Carmel suffered a broken arm. Rabbi Shapira was the most seriously injured; shrapnel penetrated his abdomen and head, and he was rushed to Hadassah Hospital in grave condition.

Israel's Chief Rabbis, Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog and Yitzhak Nissim, called on the public to pray for Shapira, adding the name Haim — "life" — to his name: Haim Moshe ben Shoshana Rosa. After five operations and a long rehabilitation, he returned to public life, from then on known as Rabbi Haim-Moshe Shapira.

But the most revealing part of the story came nearly a year later.

On the eve of Yom Kippur, Dwek wrote to Rabbi Shapira from prison. Conscious that sins against another person cannot be erased without seeking forgiveness, he asked the man he had nearly killed to forgive him.

Shapira made a careful distinction. For the injury inflicted upon him personally, he could grant forgiveness. But Dwek had also committed crimes against others, against the Knesset, and against the State. Those offenses were not his to forgive, Shapira explained. Personal forgiveness does not erase public accountability. Mercy does not abolish justice. But what belonged to him, he released.

That distinction reflects one of Judaism's deepest forms of moral clarity.

It also frames the dialectic between Yom Kippur and Sukkot. Yom Kippur is the day of inner reckoning and moral repair, yet only days later we enter the sukkah, a deliberately fragile structure that reminds us that no system of walls or power can guarantee security. What ultimately sustains a society is not only the strength of its institutions, but the character of those who inhabit them: the values they carry, and the responsibility they assume for one another.

Sixty-six years later, another member of the Shapira family confronted a grenade.

On October 7, 2023, Aner Elyakim Shapira, Haim-Moshe Shapira's great-grandson, was among those fleeing the Nova massacre. He and others crowded into a roadside shelter near Re'im as Hamas terrorists attacked. As they threw grenades inside, Aner stood at the entrance, repeatedly catching them and hurling them back outside, saving those behind him — until one exploded and killed him.

The historical echo is difficult to absorb: a great-grandfather nearly killed by a grenade; a great-grandson killed while shielding others from them.

But the connection between these stories is not the object itself. Rather, it is a common moral world that made both responses possible.

A straight line runs from one generation to the next — not because courage or compassion are inherited mechanically, and not because children repeat the lives of their parents — but because moral choices shape an atmosphere. They form instincts of the soul. Children, grandchildren and students absorb more than what we teach. They absorb what we embody under pressure: what we forgive, what we defend, and what we are willing to risk for others.

Rabbi Shapira faced a man who tried to kill him, and refused to be ruled by hatred. Aner Shapira faced terrorists trying to murder those around him and chose, instinctively, to place himself between danger and life. One protected his soul from vengeance; the other protected human lives with his body.

Neither moment was rehearsed. Character speaks most clearly when there is no time to think. That is why moral education is never only textual. It is atmospheric. It is what children see when adults are wounded, tested, afraid. They learn what dignity looks like when our values cost us something.

We cannot know which moments will remain in memory, but we should never underestimate the reach of an act of selflessness, restraint, courage, or sacrifice. These are not isolated gestures; they become part of what a family, a community, and a people can be.

We cannot always choose what enters our lives. We can choose what we leave behind. We can choose whether pain produces bitterness or compassion; whether fear produces paralysis or courage; whether injury closes the hearts or enlarges it.

On Simchat Torah, I will dance with the memory of Aner Shapira close to my heart. To me, Aner was a walking Sefer Torah, because in the decisive moment, he embodied one of Torah's deepest demands: to love life enough to risk one's own for the sake of another.

https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/32/messages/AAHxiQDs4hizVfLn6EYoInq3Ebd?.src=ym&reason=n8_norrin

Dvar Torah: Bereishis: Proof that G-d Exists

by Rabbi Label Lam © 1996 *

"In the beginning, G-d Created the Heavens and the earth." [1:1]

Right? Wrong! "In the beginning of G-d's Creation of Heaven and earth; the earth was in an unformed state (Tohu Vavohu)..." See Rashi.

In a recent discussion on the Internet, this change of language led to quite a bit of confusion. Someone asked essentially the following question: since according to Rashi the account of Creation begins after the earth was already "Tohu Vavohu," does this mean that Rashi believed that G-d did not create "Tohu Vavohu?"

Of course not ("Heaven forbid!"). From Rashi, the Ramban [Nachmanides], and Ibn Ezra, we see that only the Torah – quite deliberately – does not provide a full chronological history of the very beginning of Creation. The Sifsei Chachamim explains [note Kaf] that the Torah "wishes to explain only what came into existence following the creation of Heaven and Earth..." But Heaven and Earth were created, even from null to "Tohu Vavohu" – the Greek idea of matter existing before G-d created it is simply never entertained.

This leads us to a larger issue. In our classes, we study works by many traditional scholars, and deliver Divrei Torah on the parsha using a variety of traditional sources. Behind the diverse opinions and outlooks, it becomes obvious that these scholars share a common thread of underlying beliefs. The truth is that traditional Jewish philosophy has a strikingly clear set of parameters, an awareness of which can help those who want to study further on their own.

While it is true that the Talmud is filled with one debate after another, it is also true that the debates only occur within these firm guidelines. The concept of a G-d who created the universe from scratch is part of that core. The Ramban says: "Isn't there a great need to begin with Creation? Because this is the root of our beliefs, and one who does not believe this, and believes that the universe existed for all eternity, denies the fundamentals and has no Torah... but the answer is that the work of Creation involves deep concepts which cannot be understood from the verses..." Thus he explains why the Medrash asserts that the Torah could have really started later on (save for certain other reasons, see there), says something perfectly in accordance with modern science ("There was a Big Bang. We don't know why or how."), and also underlines this fundamental concept. The Rambam [Maimonides] begins his Mishnah Torah, his compendium of Jewish law, by saying that "The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there exists a 'First Being,' and He brings into existence all that exists [lit. all that is found]; and all that exists, from heaven to earth and all in between, does not exist except through the steadfastness of He who makes it exist." [Mada 1:1] He offers much the same words as the first of his 13 Fundamental principles of Jewish belief, as detailed in his commentary to Mishnah Sanhedrin Chapter 10.

Against the backdrop of such definite statements, it is almost inconceivable that any traditional scholar (such as Rashi) could argue against Creation Ex Nihilo!

The scholars of the Talmud and beyond certainly knew that alternative philosophies existed – one merely need read of the encounters with Greeks and Romans, the Moreh Nevuchim, and the Kuzari. Certainly, a system designed to promote asking the most penetrating, challenging, and thoughtful questions cannot simply set up blinders to prevent thinking about fundamental issues. Nonetheless, none of these encounters and debates made their way into the Halachic literature (save into the laws of idolatry!) because at the end of the day, these perspectives are totally foreign to that which our tradition claims to have acquired at Mt. Sinai.

To take the most obvious example: is it possible for a Talmudic scholar, who questions everything, to fail to examine the very existence of G-d? No. Several years ago, I heard a leading sage in Jerusalem require a group of students to examine the existence of G-d in their own minds until they came up with no fewer than five satisfactory proofs that G-d exists. And yet, of course, this is hardly a subject of debate – the Rabbis clearly felt that they had the proofs.

For anyone interested in a serious study of these underlying concepts, I would recommend the Rambam's 13 principles. They are available in print (translated and explained in several languages), on the Internet, and – we hope to provide them shortly on our site, with explanations and elaboration as necessary. We hope that a description of these “parameters of Jewish tradition” will help readers to better understand traditional perspectives and sources.

* I am repeating this column, which I used four years ago, because it fits in with my message as we start a new Torah cycle.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/lifeline-5757-bereishis/>

Anti-Semitism: A focus on Evil:

The Anti-Semitic Cancer at UC Berkeley Law *

By Thomas D. Elias **

[Ed. note: I am reprinting this article, which I reprinted from the original 4 years ago, a year before the horrors of October 7, 2023. If anything, the evils of anti-Semitism have gotten worse in the past 4 years. One change, however, is that the current administration has been fighting active discrimination against Jews and other groups in education, so conditions at many universities may now be better. Even so, anti-Semitism throughout the world, in the U.S. and many other countries, seems to me to be much worse.]

When cancer appears in almost any person, virtually no one puts up with it for long even if it affects “only” 9 percent of their body. Almost everyone acts quickly to cut it out or stop it in its tracks. Why? Because cancers often metastasize and spread.

So why, when almost all college and university officials would agree that open discrimination in their schools and colleges amounts to academic cancer, does the UC Berkeley School of Law put up with an obvious case? And why don't campus officials even mention the UC Regents' ban on anti-Semitism at all their campuses?

While they deny being anti-Semitic, some Berkeley Law student groups have essentially set themselves up as “Jew-free” zones, as one newspaper termed it. If they singled out anyone but Jews, their actions would be denounced roundly by liberals and progressives as threats to free speech, discipline to follow.

Not that anti-Semitism is new to UC campuses, especially Berkeley, where 10 years ago, Palestinian students set up roadblocks near the landmark Sather Gate, stopping and harassing anyone they thought might be a Jew. Those students went unpunished.

So far, nine law student groups now have bylaws banning speakers who support Israel or Zionism, the concept that Jews are entitled to sovereignty in their historic homeland. Under the last four presidents, the United States government has defined this as anti-Semitism.

Among others, the groups include Women of Berkeley Law, Asian Pacific American Law Students, Law Students of African Descent and the Queer Caucus.

Berkeley Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, a self-described “progressive Zionist,” wrote after the group actions were exposed that he would be excluded under the rule, along with 90 percent of the school’s Jewish students.

This rule was suggested by the Law Students for Justice in Palestine. Ironically, while Palestinians enjoy self-government in Gaza and the West Bank areas adjacent to Israel, they bring little justice, with killing and torture commonplace for persons who oppose dictatorial regimes there.

Chemerinsky says “only a handful of student groups (nine) out of over 100 at Berkeley Law did this.”

Chemerinsky, previously the founding dean of the UC Irvine Law School, noted that the groups “have free speech rights, including to express messages that I and others might find offensive.”

In the context of polls showing the vast majority of American Jews (81 percent in one recent survey), believe it’s important to care about Israel, Chemerinsky wrote that “excluding speakers on the basis of their viewpoint is inconsistent with our commitment to free speech.”

But he’s done nothing about it. That’s also what other California public universities do about on-campus anti-Semitism: very little or nothing. When Palestinian students disrupted speeches by Israelis at the Irvine campus, they were not expelled. When student governments like UCLA’s tried to keep Jewish elected student officials from voting in their meetings strictly because they are Jews, no one was thrown out, even though those actions caused some Jewish students to transfer or hide their identities for fear of physical attacks.

So far, Chemerinsky has not even chastised the groups which adopted the no-Zionists policy, instead writing that no group has yet acted on it. Berkeley Chancellor Carol Christ, called the groups’ new rule “regrettable,” but wrote that “there is no legal basis for sanctioning, defunding or deregistering” those clubs. Does this mean the Regents who employ her adopted an illegal rule against anti-Semitism?

Would Chemerinsky or Christ be so passive if these were far-right anti-Semites like the Oath Keepers or Proud Boys? Do leftist anti-Semites get a pass?

There is little doubt the student groups are now part of the new anti-Semitic movement that substitutes the term “anti-Zionist” for “anti-Semitic” when they push hatred of Jews.

That same movement this month papered parts of San Marino and Pasadena on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur with flagrantly false and anti-Jewish flyers.

It’s no wonder some Jewish students on UC campuses feel compelled to hide a major part of their identity. Which ought to lead the regents who nominally run UC to put some teeth in their anti-Semitism ban. For history repeatedly shows that when authorities leave anti-Semites unchecked, they often turn violent or murderous.

<http://www.californiafocus.net/> (November 1, 2022).

* [Ed. Note: Anti-Semitism is a manifestation of pure evil. A review of early chapters of Sefer Bereishis demonstrates that evil existed almost from the beginning of humans. For this reason, this reminder of evil in our times fits in with this and any subsequent parsha.]

** Thomas D. Elias, who wrote a syndicated column for various magazines for more than 50 years, passed away at his home in Santa Monica on January 4, 2026.

Breishit: A Story of Growing Up

By Rabbi Dov Linzer

Rosh Yeshiva, 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,” Nechama 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!

From my archives.

Insights from Chassidic Tradition

Beginning Again: The Torah We Have Yet to Hear

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

For many years, my wife and I spent summers in Israel with our two boys. On the way, we would stop in a different European country for a short family vacation.

One year we chose Berlin. Our boys were four and six at the time. While the younger one could not yet appreciate the historical weight of the visit, his older brother was beginning to grasp its significance.

Of all the sites we visited, the remnants of the Berlin Wall made the greatest impression on him. He was intensely curious about its history and eventual demolition, and we shared an age-appropriate account.

Soon it became clear how deeply the story had affected him: he kept asking us to tell it again. We obliged, preserving the basics but adding something each time: a new detail, a different angle, perhaps a bit more color. By the time we left Berlin, we must have told him the story thirty times.

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

As we embark on another cycle of Torah reading, it is hard to avoid a sense of *déjà vu*. Again we are going to read about creation, the flood, and the lives of our patriarchs and matriarchs? Don't we know these stories 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 understood that one can hear the same story many times and still find each telling illuminating and enlivening.

If that is true of stories in general, how much more so of the Torah, whose words we return to every year.

As I have mentioned before, **the students of the Ba'al Shem Tov teach that Mattan Torah was not a one-time occurrence. It happens anew whenever we read from the Torah. Kri'at HaTorah carries within it something of the encounter at Sinai. Consequently, we encounter a "new" Torah every year, week after week.** [emphasis added]

The words given at Har Sinai are eternal; our encounter with them is renewed. Certain narratives and mitzvot spoke deeply to us last year, while others remained distant. This year, those same passages may speak differently. A story that once seemed remote may suddenly address the very questions with which we are struggling.

The Rambam, commenting on the final Mishnah in Makkot, explains that the abundance of mitzvot gives each person an opportunity to fulfill at least one wholly *lishmah*, without an ulterior motive. That abundance also invites us to consider the different ways we find our place within Torah.

We will not experience every mitzvah with equal intensity at every moment. We remain bound by them all, but some become particularly sustaining expressions of our avodat Hashem, deepening our closeness to God.

The Torah's narratives offer a parallel abundance. Their richness allows us to discover, at different moments in our lives, dimensions of God's words the meaning of which we could not previously apprehend. Sometimes it is precisely our longstanding intimacy with a text that allows us to hear what we could not hear before.

This Shabbat, therefore, when the *ba'al kri'ah* chants the opening verses of Parshat Bereishit, allow yourself to encounter the Torah anew, to experience a personal Mattan Torah. Perhaps you will discover something that was not there, for you, last year.

Even if it eluded you in years past, even if these passages did not seem to speak directly to you, listen again. Perhaps this year a familiar word will disclose an unfamiliar depth, or a note in the biblical symphony will suddenly resonate, entering your soul and awakening something within it.

Allowing yourself to hear these stories anew may reveal *הרותב וקלח*, the portion of Torah uniquely entrusted to you. This is more than finding a passage that speaks to your circumstances. It is also discovering what your encounter with Torah can bring into the world: an understanding that emerges through your particular life and the spiritual work it asks of you.

If you do not open yourself to discovering that portion, it may never come to light, leaving all of us deprived of something only you can disclose. A Sefer Torah is invalid if even a single letter is missing. Metaphorically, you may be entrusted with a letter whose place in our shared Torah has yet to be revealed. Discovering it is therefore both a personal spiritual task and a responsibility to Klal Yisrael, whose shared portion in Torah is enriched by what each of us brings to light.

There is good reason to expect that we will notice something new. Since we last heard these stories, we have grown, but we have also borne another year of life's sorrows and wrestled with questions that do not yield easy answers. Our relationship with God has acquired another year of history as well. God does not change, but His relationship with us continues to unfold within our lives. We return to the same words carrying more of life's weight, and a deeper longing to hear what God asks of us and offers us within it.

For myself, I look forward to discovering what these familiar stories and mitzvot will disclose this year, and what I will hear that I could not hear before.

I am curious. You should be curious too.

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2026/10/beginning-again-the-torah-we-have-yet-to-hear/>

Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Bereishith

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"When Enoch had lived 65 years, he begot Methuselah. After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked (vayit-halekh) with God 300 years; and he begot sons and daughters. All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. Enoch walked (vayit-halekh) with God; then he was no more, for God took him" (Bereishith 5:21-24).

In the midst of a routine listing of births and deaths, the Torah includes these unusual verses relating to Enoch. He is singled out as one who walked with God.

It is often pointed out that translations do not always capture the meaning of the original. This is true in the verses about Enoch. The English translation simply states that Enoch walked with God. But the Hebrew word, *vayit-halekh*, is in the reflexive "*hitpa'el*" form. It means more than just walking. It comes closer to "*walking with purpose*," or "*walking in righteousness*." Or even closer to "*drawing God into himself*." *Vayit-halekh* has the connotation of process. Enoch didn't merely think of God or worship God; he was constantly striving for relationship with God.

The verb form *hit'halekh* is also used once in connection with Noah, a pure, righteous man who walked with God. This is great praise for Noah; but in Enoch's case, this verb form is used twice! The Torah is clearly underscoring a unique and praiseworthy quality of Enoch. Even his death is recorded mysteriously: "*he was no more, for God took him*." The Torah is indicating that Enoch was so absorbed in a Godly life that his death seemed to be a natural translation into God's spiritual domain.

While various interpretations and legends have arisen about Enoch, **the basic teaching is that Godliness/religion is a process.** Ideally, one does not “have” religion as though it is a fixed set of beliefs and rules; rather, one’s **religiosity is a constantly developing phenomenon.** Religion is not “having” but “striving.” God is not “proven” but “experienced.” One “knows God” not by philosophizing about God but by living a Godly life, literally “drawing God into oneself.” [emphasis added]

In opening his Mishneh Torah, Maimonides teaches that *“The foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a First Being who brings into being all that exists.”* In his *Guide of the Perplexed* (3:54) he spells out what “knowing” God entails. Human perfection depends on the level of one’s apprehension of God. But this apprehension is manifested in a living relationship with God. *“The way of life of such an individual, after one has achieved this apprehension, will always have in view loving-kindness, righteousness and judgment, through assimilation to His actions, may He be exalted.”*

When the Torah states twice that Enoch walked with God (*vayit-halekh*), it thereby emphasizes that **Enoch not only “apprehended” God, but that he actively pursued a Godly life above and beyond others of his times. Enoch set a standard to which all humans should aspire.** [emphasis added]

If someone asked Enoch if he was religious, he would have answered: *“I am striving to be.”* When someone asks us: are you religious? The answer should be, like Enoch’s: *“I am striving to be.”*

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Does God Attend Daily Minyan?

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The famous Hasidic Kotzker Rebbe commented that God comes where God is invited. In principle, God should be invited to every daily minyan in every synagogue throughout the world. Each worshiper should feel the presence of God when praying. The services should be conducted with love, devotion, piety...with a genuine desire to experience the Divine.

Very fortunate are those who attend daily minyan and who indeed invite God’s presence...and feel God’s presence. The spiritual uplift of sincere prayer is of inestimable value.

Regrettably, the daily minyan experience isn’t always like this ideal model. Prayers are often recited quickly, by rote, without evoking much religious emotion. In some synagogues, even the rabbis don’t attend daily services regularly; and when they do show up, it’s usually late. And then rather than immerse in prayers, they are busy chatting or joking with congregants.

Some attend daily minyan because that’s what Jews are supposed to do. It’s part of their daily routine and is important to them. They are pleased to participate in services, chat with fellow congregants, maybe even have some refreshments after prayers. But whether God is at the center of their concern is a moot point. For many, they sincerely pray to God. For others, God isn’t even on their minds!

Some years ago, my dear and respected friend, Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo, wrote an article about the “relocation” of God. Here is an excerpt from that article.

"Synagogues – whether Orthodox, Conservative or Reform – are no longer His primary residence. Surely some of the worshippers are pious people who try to communicate with their Creator, but overall, the majority of these places have become religiously sterile and spiritually empty. So God is moving to unconventional minyanim and places such as Israeli cafes, debating clubs, community centers, unaffiliated religious gatherings, and atypical batei midrash. The reason is obvious. In some of those places people are actually looking for Him. And that is what He loves; not those who have already found Him and take Him for granted."

While I believe Rabbi Cardozo's contention is over-stated, it contains deep truth. God has not abandoned synagogues that aspire to holiness, that raise our spirits and nourish our souls. God has not given up on the many pious Jews who sincerely pray in their daily minyanim. But Rabbi Cardozo touches on a serious dilemma...**where synagogues don't seem to be inviting God's presence, don't convey a sense of religious yearning and solemnity. If God isn't experienced in the daily minyan, it means God isn't really invited. And if God isn't invited, daily minyan loses its raison d'être.** [emphasis added]

The daily minyan, for many, is a spiritual anchor of their lives. They pray quietly, meditatively. They avoid chatter or frivolity in the sanctuary. They conduct themselves as though they are in the presence of God. *Ashrei Yoshevei Veitekha*...happy are those who dwell in Your house...a house where You are not only invited but are the Host.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Ready or Not

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

Rabbi Rhine dedicates his Dvar Torah this week as a Z'chus for a Refuah Shelaima for

Ahron ben Chana Chaya

One of the first wisdoms we teach our children is that the Torah is not a history book. It is a book of lessons. The Torah begins at "Bereishis – the beginning," not because it is a history book but because the Teacher decided that is the best place to start. Since it is a book of lessons, it is exceptionally important to make sure that we are learning the correct lesson.

For example, one of the tragic stories related in this week's parsha is that of Kayin. Kayin was jealous of his brother Hevel; Hashem accepted Hevel's offering and not Kayin's. The Torah describes Kayin as becoming very angry (Bereishis 4:5). Hashem engaged Kayin and informed him that he was being affected by the *Yetzer Horah*, badness. Yet, Kayin was not able to get ahold of himself, and he killed his brother.

After Hashem rebuked and judged Kayin, Kayin expresses well what he believed was the great lesson of the tragedy. Kayin named his child, "*Chanoch*," and he built cities under the banner of the same name, "*Chanoch*." The Kisav V'Hakabbala explains that Kayin understood the lesson to be that the tragedy occurred because he did not have Chinuch – education –

as to how to deal with another person and how to deal with his own emotions. Kayin did not believe that intense separations and boundaries were necessary to prevent tragedy. He felt people could and should live together in cities, coexisting in harmony. The key to achieving that was proper Chinuch – education.

But not everyone learned the same lesson.

A few generations later, when Noach and his sons emerged from the Teiva, Cham damaged his father to ensure that he would not have more children. Cham's reasoning was, *"The world started with just two children, Kayin and Hevel, and one killed the other because it wasn't a big enough world for both of them. My father already has three sons. How could he consider having another one?!"* **Cham's reasoning is because he drew the wrong lesson from the story of Kayin's tragedy.** Instead of trying for a better outcome through good education— and building cities as Kayin did to symbolize that we can live together— Cham incredulously exclaimed that tragedy is inevitable if we live together. Cham learned the wrong lesson. [emphasis added]

Another example of people learning the wrong lesson is presented in the story of Noach and the generation that followed him. After the world was destroyed in the Mabul, a generation gathered to build a great tower. The purpose of the tower was that somehow through this tower, humanity would be able to protect itself against G-d. Instead of being awed by the story of divine retribution, the people decided to interpret the story of the great flood as a scientific occurrence that would repeat itself every 1,656 years. (Rashi 11:1) The function of the great tower is a bit mysterious. Was it to protect themselves from a flood or to ascend to heaven to wage war with G-d? Either way, the people were totally missing the lesson. **The lesson of the Mabul was meant to be that living a righteous life does matter and we are answerable to G-d. Instead, they turned the story into a scientific phenomenon or into an opportunity to strategize against G-d and the purpose of creation.** [emphasis added]

Just over a week ago, a wondrous incident occurred as a modern example for us to strive to learn the correct lesson. A Fly Dubai plane carrying over 170 passengers was in crisis when the terrorist copilot attacked the pilot, took control of the plane, and tried to end the flight in tragedy. The pilot managed to open the door to the cockpit, which alerted the passengers to the crisis and allowed them to enter the cockpit, overpower the terrorist, stabilize the plane and land it safely. Among those recognized for his courage and heroism was **Yaniv Hayun**, a passenger on the plane who was relaxing with his shoes off when he heard the cry, "Stabbing!" Without taking any time to put on his shoes or to prepare himself for what he was about to encounter, he raced to the cockpit in time to wrestle the terrorist out of the cockpit and to gently stabilize the plane. When asked how he knew what to do to stabilize the plane, he replied that he had watched TV shows simulating various crisis situations, so he knew what to do. Seconds after he stabilized the plane, a trained pilot who was on board informed him, *"I'll take it from here."*

The story resonated greatly in the media. Even the most levelheaded analysts couldn't help but marvel at the bizarre and fortuitous developments that took the plane and its passengers from total crisis — a plane plunging thousands of feet and heading for disaster in a matter of minutes — to a relatively stable situation of a trained pilot who happened to be on the plane, taking charge and landing the plane safely.

There are many lessons to be learned from the incident. One of the lessons, I will bravely assert, not to be learned, is that we should watch more TV so that we too can be heroes.

The first lesson, I believe we learn, is that Hashem is with us and can save and protect us even in the most unlikely and unhelpful of moments. This is a lesson that we can carry with us in our Tefilla and in our attitude in a very personal way. [emphasis added]

The second lesson is even more personal. Sometimes we delay doing good things because we don't think we are quite ready. The image of Yaniv heading for the cockpit with urgency, in his socks, is the sense we all can have when we consider the mitzva opportunities of our generation. We could continue to relax with our shoes off. We could hear the call and decide to find our shoes and wait for just the right moment to proceed. Or we can recognize urgency and decide to act as best we can.

The needs and opportunities of our time are great. Fortunate is the person who senses the urgency and says, "Ready or not, here I come." Fortunate is the person who does his or her best to intervene and then hears the words of the Master Pilot saying, "Well done. I'll take it from here." [emphasis added]

For Family Discussion:

– Kayin's lesson was that the right Chinuch/education can change the outcome. What's an area where better training or preparation would help us handle a situation well?

– The pilot says, "I'll take it from here." What does it mean to do our best and trust that Hashem will take it from there? Where in our lives do we need that?

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Parshas Bereishis by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

Bereishis is perhaps the most cryptic and difficult parsha to comprehend in any meaningful way. Beginning with the repeated overview and outline of the creation, it requires careful study of the commentaries and our traditions to glean any lessons even on a basic level.

One area that is particularly perplexing is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. From a simple reading of the Chumash, it would seem that Adam and Chava were created without this knowledge. What was the human being without the knowledge of good and evil? We were created to choose between good and evil, to use our free will to elevate G-d's world and bring G-dliness into the world. How can we possibly achieve that goal if we do not know the difference between good and evil? What's more, why would G-d forbid us from attaining that knowledge? Who would keep the Torah if human beings would not know the difference between good and evil? What purpose would this initial creation of mankind have served?

Rabbeinu Bechaye (Bereishis 3:5) explains that the knowledge we are referring to is the understanding of the difference between living life for G-dliness versus living for passions and desires. It is the understanding that when one lives for desires and passions, those desires and passions have the ability to sway us and lead us astray. This was the knowledge that they lacked, because they had never experienced it. [emphasis added]

Adam and Chava certainly knew the difference between good and evil. They were purely intellectual beings, with a depth of clarity and understanding of G-dliness and all that is good and just. What they lacked was this knowledge of just how different good and evil are. As purely intellectual beings, their lives and all of their decisions were focused only on G-dliness. Even their passions and desires were seen and used only as tools to serve G-d. They had never experienced or even considered passions and desires as a purpose unto themselves. Never having lived for passion – even for a moment of their existence – they did not understand how the passions and desires can sway one's mind and lead one astray.

It was for this reason that G-d forbade them to eat from the tree. **So long as they did not eat from the tree, evil remained only an external concept, but not something that would ever be a part of their own lives. Once they ate from the tree, their perspective would drastically and devastatingly change. They would now see passions and desires as an end, as well as a means. The challenge to choose good over evil would be much more difficult.** They would understand through painful personal experience just how different good and evil are. They would see the difference between a moment of G-dliness and a moment of passion. They would know of the dangerous power of passion and desire

to cloud one's judgement and lead one astray. [emphasis added]

Rabbeinu Bachye notes (ibid. 3:6) that this devastating force of passions and desires can apply even when the passions and desires are being used for good. The Torah tells us that Chava was swayed to eat from the tree because it was "good to eat, and tempting for the eyes and desirous for becoming wise." **Chava's desire for the Tree of Knowledge was as a means to become wise. She desired a greater knowledge and understanding of G-d's world and of the great privilege of serving G-d and the beauty of G-dliness. Yet, that very desire led her to violate G-d's will and choose passion over G-dliness. Even healthy and proper passions can lead one astray and bring about devastating consequences.** [emphasis added]

Now that the tree was eaten from, we have those passions and desires to reckon with. We know only too well, the difference between a path of goodness and a path of evil and how far off course the path of evil can go. As we begin learning the Torah again, we need to remember that **even passion for good can lead one astray. We must always think and rethink before we act.** No matter how just our cause may be. [emphasis added]

From my archives.

* Rav at Sha'arei Tefilla and the co-founder of the RI Torah Network in Providence, Rhode Island. For several years, Rabbi Singer was the Rabbi at Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer's recent Devrei Torah normally come as podcasts rather than texts.

The Serpent in the Bible

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

[Ed.: Rabbi Ovadia opens his analysis of Tanach with an extensive introduction of the beginning of the Torah. This material is too detailed and extensive for me to present all of it here. I have selected his discussion of the meaning of the snake or serpent in Tanach to present this week. Hopefully I shall have opportunities to delve into his analysis more in future postings.]

One very striking feature of the serpent in the Bible is the abundance of synonyms it has (7) surpasses even those of the lion (5). It seems that the abundance of names for the serpent suggests that it was a feared and revered creature in Biblical lands and times. Most probably the fear was a result of the nature of the snake's attack as unanticipated and incurable. The serpent is therefore associated in the Bible with sudden or mysterious, hidden death. The serpent is also mentioned in relation to sound, either the sound it makes or the sounds people make to charm it. The sound and voice are also related to the characterization of the serpent as a gossip monger. In several places there is a connection to babies and suckling. The snake is also described as flying, especially as Saraf = Seraph [Isa. 14:29, 30:6], which links it to the angels that are also being called by that term. In this regard especially important is the appearance of a Seraph in Isaiah [6:6-7] as one who expiates for sins related to the lips and the mouth.

Another term for angels – Cherub – appears in the story of the Tree of Knowledge as the guardian of the path, and I shall examine this connection later. Then the serpent is also singled out as a significant element in creation [Job 26:13]. Following are the verses which describe the above mentioned traits.

Fear; sudden or hidden death:

Dan shall be a serpent by the road, a viper by the path that bites the horse's heels so that his rider is thrown backwards. [Gen.49:17]

...A man ... should lean his hand on the wall and be bitten by the snake. [Amos 5:19]

And if they conceal themselves from My sight at the bottom of the sea there I will command the serpent to bite them. [ibid. 9:3]

You need not fear the terror by night... you will tread on cubs and vipers... [Psalms 91:5-13]

He who breaches a stone fence will be bitten by a snake. [Eccl. 10:8]

Serpent and sound:

Serpents... adders that cannot be charmed. [Jer. 8:17]

Her voice will go forward like that of a snake (my trans). [ibid. 46:22]

...let them put hand to mouth, let their ear be deafened, let them lick dust like snakes, like crawling things on the ground. [Micah 7:17]

Their venom is like that of a snake, a deaf viper that stops its ears. [Psalms 58:4]

Serpent and gossip; evil tongue; duplicity

They rely on emptiness and speak falsehood... they hatch adder's eggs... [Isa. 59:4-5]

They sharpen their tongues like serpents... [Psalms 140:4]

...it bites like a snake, it spits like a basilisk.... Your heart will speak distorted things (duplicity). [Prov. 23:32]

...evil his sweet to his taste, he conceals it under his tongue... he sucks the poison of asps... [Job 20:12-14]

If the snake bites because no spell was uttered, there is no advantage to the charmer (lit. the owner of tongue). [Eccl. 10:11]

Serpent and babies; suckling; birth

A babe shall play over a viper's hole and an infant pass his hand over an adder's den. [Isa. 11:8]

I have kept silent far to long now I will scream like a woman in labor I will pant and I will gasp (the Hebrew term used here is a synonym for a snake, most probably because of the hissing sounds and the heavy breathing of a woman in labor) [Isa. 42:14]

...the liars go astray from the womb, their venom is like that of a snake... [Psalms 58:4]

...he sucks the poison of asps... [Job 20:12-14]

Secondary link between serpent and birth

Another surprising association of the serpent with delivery is found by analysis of the root אִנ, this root can be found in reference to the serpent as well as to the process of giving birth:

The word meaning the snake's underbelly, appears only twice in the Bible [Gen. 3:14, Lev. 11:42]. But in three other places we find the same root in connection with birth giving:

Writhe and scream: Fair Zion, like a woman in travail. [Micah 4:10]

You drew me from the womb, made me secure at my mother's breast. [Psalms 22:10]

...when it gushed forth out of the womb. [Job 38:8]

Serpent and birth in Rabbinical tradition:

In referring to the verse in Job [39:1]: "Do you know the season when the mountain goats give birth? Can you mark the time when the hinds calve?" the Talmud [TB, Bava Batra 16:2] brings the following Midrash: "This gazelle has a narrow womb, when it is about to give birth I send her a serpent that bites her there and then the womb expands and it gives birth."

Another link between the snake and the first woman, the mother of all, is that the woman's name, חַוָּה in Hebrew, is close to the Aramaic חַוָּה which means snake. This relationship is actually pointed out by the Zohar [Zohar Hadash, Vol 1., Gen. 32:1].

We see that there is a chain of associations that connects the snake to a tempting force expressed by the tongue and also the destructive power of the tongue to bring evil and death. The serpent is also the cause of a sudden, unexpected death. Unexpected or unpreventable death is also related to childbirth which is associated in several places with the snake.

[Rabbi Ovadia then uses his research into meanings of the snake to help understand the meaning of the Tree of Knowledge. I may continue this analysis at another time.]

Shabbat Shalom.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Note: Rabbi Ovadia posted this Dvar Torah for Ki Tetze in 2014, but it fits perfectly for Mincha on Yom Kippur.

* Senior Rabbi, Congregation Ramath Orah (New York, NY); Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Previously, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

It was such an amazing Chagim with all of you here, filled with so much happiness, celebration, and incredible energy. We had such great turnouts for our services and for the many, many events throughout the Chagim. It was such a beautiful way to start our year together. And now, we begin again.

This Shabbat, we start the Torah from the very beginning. We return to Bereishit, learning our story from the earliest days, from the creation of the world. We get to hear our story. In my opinion, Bereishit is the most fascinating book of the Torah. It tells us all that was, and in many ways, all that will be. If you learn history well, you can see that everything is hidden there.

Bereishit is Judaism as a family, while Shemot is Judaism as a nation. Before we become a nation, we first learn about the family, the people, and the deep connections that bind us together. And the story of creation itself is not there simply to tell us how God created the world. It is there to teach us that because God created the world, we owe Him a debt that we can never repay. It teaches us *hakarat hatov*, the importance of recognizing the good and showing gratitude. And that is a beautiful message to take with us into Shabbat Bereishit.

This Shabbat, we will have two special Kiddushim. On Friday night, we will have a Kiddush in honour of Dean the Habo Shaliach, many of whom you have met at our 7 October memorial, where he helped run the event together with Darya and did an amazing job. Please come and give him a warm welcome. And on Shabbat morning, we will have our Bereishit Kiddush in honour of our Board. Please come and show your gratitude to the people who make sure that everything keeps running in our community, for all that they do publicly and, perhaps even more importantly, for all the work they do behind the scenes. We will also have a very special goodbye to our President and Chairperson, Steve De Jong, who is finishing his presidency after years of endless work and dedication to our community.

As we begin Bereishit, let us remember the lesson of the first chapters of the Torah: *hakarat hatov*. To recognize the good. To appreciate those who give. And to show our gratitude. Come this Shabbat, celebrate the beginning of our Torah, and come show gratitude to those who are constantly giving to build and strengthen our community.

B'ahavat Yisrael,
Rabbi Netanel

[Ed.:] On Simchat Torah, the shlichim, Roni and Ariel, Tomer and Arbel HaCohen, said good-bye to the shul after three special years in Auckland, as they return home to Israel. Roni and Ariel left Israel for New Zealand on October 8, 2023 – almost immediately after one of the worst days in the history of our people – and quickly became a part of the AHC community. I'll write about the new shlich when he starts posting.

Rabbi Netanel

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is now Rabbi of the ACT Jewish Community in Canberra, the capitol city of Australia. I hope to be able to include his Torah insights soon.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

Rav Kook Torah

Breishit: Cherishing Troubles

[Ed. note: I am writing on October 8, 2026. After the moving experience of the third anniversary of the horrors of October 7, 2023, and the resulting long period of tzuras, this message from Rav Kook seems particularly appropriate.]

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.
[emphasis added]

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 that 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.)

<https://ravkooktorah.org/breishit-76>

Bereishit: The Art of Listening (5776. 5783)

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

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.

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]

Footnotes:

[1] Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 1:2.

[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.

Around the Shabbat Table

1. Can you think of some examples of Jews in history who demonstrated how Judaism is a guilt culture, not a shame culture?
2. In what way is listening an important Jewish value?
3. What lessons can you learn for your life from the difference between shame and guilt?

Because Likutei Divrei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, among other compilations, reprint columns by Rabbi Sacks for the current and last year, I select a different Dvar Torah from a different year.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bereishit/the-art-of-listening/>

The Rebbe Unravels the Enoch Enigma for a Schoolgirl

By Menachem Posner *

In the sparse, early chapters of Genesis, among the long lifespans and genealogical lists, we encounter a brief but mysterious verse about a man named Chanoch (Enoch), seventh generation from Adam:

*And Chanoch walked with G d; and he was no more, for G d had taken him.*¹

What does it mean that he “walked with G d”? And most intriguingly, what is the meaning of “G d had taken him”?

Rashi, drawing from the Talmud, notes that the verse does not say “and he died,” as it does for everyone else it lists. This, along with the words “and he was no more,” implies that Chanoch did not experience a natural death. Instead, Rashi explains:

*G d took him: He was taken from the world before his time. And why did He take him? “For G d had taken him” — because he was likely to sin and return to his foolish ways. Therefore, G d hurried and took him from the world while he was still righteous.*²

A young girl, after learning this Rashi in school, wrote to the Rebbe with a series of questions:

If G d took Chanoch early to prevent him from sinning, where was his free will? Doesn't every person have the ability to choose good over evil until their last day?

Surely there were others who could have benefited by being taken by G d before being tempted to sin. Why was Chanoch singled out for this unique intervention?

Her teacher had explained that Chanoch was taken to become the angel Metatron.³ If he was so vulnerable to sin, how could he achieve such a sublime, angelic state?

In his reply,⁴ the Rebbe acknowledged the depth of her inquiry and offered one of many possible explanations.

The Rebbe began by explaining that a human being is a composite of two utterly different elements: a physical body (*guf*)

and a G dly soul (*neshamah*). Often, these two are in conflict. The soul yearns for spirituality, while the body is drawn to physicality.

Chanoch, the Rebbe explained, possessed an exceptionally lofty and powerful soul — he was a true tzaddik (righteous person). His body, however, was of a particularly low and coarse nature, perhaps even more so than the average person. This created an intense and constant internal struggle. His great soul was housed in a vessel that was naturally inclined towards the mundane and the material.

This battle was fought in an especially challenging environment. Before the Giving of the Torah, the Rebbe noted, the world lacked the spiritual infrastructure to easily refine physicality. Humans had not yet been empowered by the Torah to synthesize the physical and the spiritual, to elevate the mundane into the holy. Every day was a tremendous test for Chanoch.

And yet, he persevered. Through immense effort, he “*walked with G d*,” battling his own nature and his generation’s tendencies.

As a reward, when G d saw that the tests would become so great that even Chanoch would not be able to withstand them, G d “*took him*.”

This, the Rebbe said, answers the young girl’s questions.

His free will was not compromised. On the contrary, he exercised it heroically every single day of his life. [emphasis added]

Why was he taken? Not to save him from struggle, but precisely because of his incredible struggle and victory.

This also explains his angelic transformation. It was not that a vulnerable man became an angel. Rather, it was because he had successfully battled his powerful physical inclinations his entire life that he achieved the purity necessary to be transformed into a purely spiritual entity.

Footnotes:

1. Genesis 5:24.
2. Rashi on Genesis 5:24.
3. See, for example, *Targum Jonathan*, ad. loc.
4. Printed in *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 10, page 189

* Managing editor at Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/7059617/jewish/The-Rebbe-Unravels-the-Enoch-Enigma-for-a-Schoolgirl.htm

Bereishit: The Power of Music

By Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

Yaval’s brother’s name was Yuval; he was the forerunner of all those who play the harp and flute.
(Gen. 4:21)

Music has the power to transform us. It can create an environment, put us in a mood or take us out of one, uplift us, deject us, refine us, or profane us. It is one of the quickest ways for us to lose our self-awareness as we become absorbed in the experience. This loss of self can temporarily wipe out our ego, thereby opening us up to new insight.

Music is therefore an integral part of the sublime rites of the holy Temple in Jerusalem, as well as of Jewish prayer, both communal and individual. By way of contrast, music also figures prominently in non-Jewish spiritual paths and pursuits, whether religious or secular.

It is therefore essential that we become musical connoisseurs, developing a finely-honed sensitivity to what types of music enhance our Divine consciousness and what types are detrimental to it. Harnessing the power of music can be an effective tool in promoting spiritual growth.

– From *Daily Wisdom 3* *

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom 3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

Gut Shabbos.

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Welcome to the 33rd year of Likutei Divrei Torah.

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Shabbat Parashat Bereshit

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

A Living Book

It is the most famous, majestic, and influential opening of any book in literature: "... בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא" "When God began creating heaven and earth, the earth was void and desolate, there was darkness on the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved over the waters. God said, "Let there be light." And there was light." Genesis 1:1-3

The traditional translation is, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." What is surpassingly strange is the way Rashi – most beloved of all Jewish commentators – begins his commentary on the Chumash: Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah - which is the Law book of Israel - should have begun with the verse, "This month shall be to you the first of the months" (Exodus 12:2), which is the first commandment given to Israel. Rashi on Genesis 1:1

Can we really take this at face value? Did Rabbi Isaac, or for that matter Rashi, seriously suggest that the Book of Books might have begun in the middle – a third of the way into Exodus? That it might have passed by in silence the creation of the universe – which is, after all, one of the fundamentals of Jewish faith?

Could we understand the history of Israel without its prehistory, the stories of Abraham and Sarah and their children? Could we have understood those narratives without knowing what preceded them: God's repeated disappointment with Adam and Eve, Cain, the generation of the Flood and the builders of the Tower of Babel?

The fifty chapters of Genesis together with the opening of Exodus are the source-book of biblical faith. They are as near as we get to an exposition of the philosophy of Judaism. What then did Rabbi Isaac mean?

He meant something profound, which we often forget. To understand a book, we need to know to what genre it belongs. Is it history or legend, chronicle or myth? To what question is it an answer? A history book answers the question: what happened? A book of cosmology – be it science or myth – answers the question: how did it happen?

What Rabbi Isaac is telling us is that if we seek to understand the Torah, we must read it as Torah, which is to say: law, instruction, teaching, guidance. Torah is an answer to the question: how shall we live? That is why he raises the question as to why it does not begin with the first command given to Israel.

Torah is not a book of history, even though it includes history. It is not a book of science, even though the first chapter of Genesis – as the 19th-century sociologist Max Weber pointed out – is the necessary prelude to science, because it represents the first time people saw the universe as the product of a single creative will, and therefore as intelligible rather than capricious and mysterious. It is, first and last, a book about how to live.

Everything it contains – not only commandments but also narratives, including the narrative of creation itself – is there solely for the sake of ethical and spiritual instruction.

It moves from the minutest details to the most majestic visions of the universe and our place within it. But it never deviates from its intense focus on the questions: What shall I do? How shall I live? What kind of person should I strive to become? It begins, in Genesis 1, with the most fundamental question of all. The Psalm puts it thus: "What is man that You are mindful of him?" Tehillim 8:5

Pico della Mirandola's 15th century Oration on Man was one of the turning points of Western civilisation, the "manifesto" of the Italian Renaissance. In it he attributed the following declaration to God, addressing the first man:

"We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very centre of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made

you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine."

Homo sapiens, that unique synthesis of "dust of the earth" and breath of God, is unique among created beings in having no fixed essence: in being free to be what he or she chooses. Mirandola's Oration was a break with the two dominant traditions of the Middle Ages: the Christian doctrine that human beings are irretrievably corrupt, tainted by original sin, and the Platonic idea that humanity is bounded by fixed forms.

It is also a strikingly Jewish account – almost identical to the one given by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in *Halachic Man*: "The most fundamental principle of all is that man must create himself. It is this idea that Judaism introduced into the world." It is therefore with a frisson of recognition that we discover that Mirandola had a Jewish teacher, Rabbi Elijah ben Moses Delmedigo (1460-1497).

Born in Crete, Delmedigo was a Talmudic prodigy, appointed at a young age to be head of the yeshiva in Padua. At the same time, he studied philosophy, in particular the work of Aristotle, Maimonides and Averroes. At the age of 23 he was appointed professor of philosophy at the University of Padua. It was through this that he came to know Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who became both his student and his patron. Eventually, however, Delmedigo's philosophical writings – especially his work *Bechinat ha-Dat* – became controversial. He was accused, by other rabbis, of heresy. He had to leave Italy and return to Crete. He was much admired by Jews and Christians alike, and when he died young, many Christians as well as Jews attended his funeral.

This emphasis on choice, freedom and responsibility is one of the most distinctive features of Jewish thought. It is proclaimed in

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the first chapter of Genesis in the most subtle way. We are all familiar with its statement that God created man “in His image, after His likeness”. Seldom do we pause to reflect on the paradox. If there is one thing emphasised time and again in the Torah, it is that God has no image. “I will be what I will be”, He says to Moses when he asks Him His name.

Since God transcends nature – the fundamental point of Genesis 1 – then He is free, unbounded by nature’s laws. By creating human beings in His image, He gave us a similar freedom, thus creating the one being capable itself of being creative. The unprecedented account of God in the Torah’s opening chapter leads to an equally unprecedented view of the human person and our capacity for self-transformation.

The Renaissance, one of the high points of European civilisation, eventually collapsed. A series of corrupt rulers and Popes led to the Reformation, and to the quite different views of Luther and Calvin. It is fascinating to speculate what might have happened had it continued along the lines signalled by Mirandola. His late 15th century humanism was not secular but deeply religious.

As it is, the great truth of Genesis 1 remains. As the Rabbis put it (Bereishit Rabbah 8:1; Sanhedrin 38a): “Why was man created last? In order to say, if he is worthy, all creation was made for you; but if he is unworthy, he is told, even a gnat preceded you.” The Torah remains God’s supreme call to humankind to freedom and creativity on the one hand, and on the other, to responsibility and restraint – becoming God’s partner in the work of creation.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The First Marriage – Overcoming Loneliness and ‘Aloneness’

“...It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a help-opposite for him.” (Genesis 2:18) The Torah opens on the grandest scale possible, the creation of the world: heavens and earth, firmament, sun, moon, stars and the planet itself. Each day we climb the ladder of creation until the sixth day, when the human being appears. But even after his appearance, the epoch described still seems remote, carved out of a meta-historic consciousness dealing with such realities as the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Our imagination only goes so far in understanding that age, and without relying on symbol and metaphor most of us would be lost.

But directly after the prohibition of tasting the forbidden fruit, we read in the Bible the first verse which has an immediate and relevant bearing on the modern human condition: ‘God said, It is not good for the human being to be

alone. I will make a ‘help-opposite’ (In Hebrew, *Ezer k’negd*) for him’ [Gen. 2:18]. Adam may be in the Garden of Eden, but who doesn’t understand what it means to be alone? With this verse we recognize his flesh-and-blood reality. His dilemma is our dilemma, and the next paragraph – which should be read closely – deals with the major existential issues of humanity, then and now: how the Torah views the fundamental human predicament, the human need which only marriage can fulfill, and the ideal relationship between husband and wife, and the significance of the sexual act between them.

The first problem in the biblical text is the strange Hebrew term, *ezer k’negdo*, the phrase God uses to describe the creature He will provide for Adam to overcome his being alone. The literal translation is ‘help-opposite’. Other translations are ‘help-mate’ or ‘a help to match him’ or ‘compatible helper’, terms which do not fully reflect the inner tension expressed by the biblical Hebrew form.

Rashi, in explaining the phrase, writes: ‘If the man is worthy, then his wife will be an *ezer*, a helper, and if he is unworthy then she will be *k’negdo*, against him, an opposite force.’ This interpretation does take into account the oxymoron, or antithetical nature of the phrase – indeed one of my college professors once introduced his wife to the class as ‘Mrs. *K’negdo*’ – but neglects to explain how two such different concepts can come together.

Thus, despite Rashi’s commentary, a ‘help-opposite’ still remains a difficult construction. If it’s not good for Adam to be alone, why doesn’t God simply create a ‘helper’ for him? Why an ‘opposite’?

Second, if God is so worried about Adam being alone, then why, in the midst of the segment dealing with the creation of Eve, does the text digress and turn to something entirely different – Adam’s naming of the animals? ‘The Lord God had created from the earth all the beasts of the field, and all the fowl of the heavens, and he brought them to the human to see what he ought to call them. And whatever name the human gave to any of these creatures, that was its name. So the human called names to all of the animals and the fowl of the heavens and all of the beasts of the field. But Adam did not find a help-opposite who was compatible for him’ [Gen. 2:19–20].

This question is compounded by the fact that the Torah seems to be weighing the possibility that Adam’s help-opposite might be found among the donkeys, camels or other four-legged creatures – a preposterous idea, to say the least.

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I believe that the key to understanding the difficult term ‘help-opposite’ lies in the introductory verse: ‘It is not good for the human being to be levado – alone.’ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik discusses the tragedy of aloneness most poignantly in his classical novella, *The Lonely Man of Faith*. Aloneness has two aspects: First there is social loneliness, the lack of someone with whom to share one’s innermost thoughts and emotions. Several verses back we read ‘the Lord God formed the human being of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the human being became a living soul’ [Gen. 2:7]. The Targum (original Aramaic translation of the Bible) translates ‘living soul’ as *ruah memalela* – a spirit that speaks. It would seem axiomatic that a human being is a creature that speaks – must speak – in order to feel alive. Aristotle even defines the human being as a social animal. Clearly, the act of communication is built into the very psyche of our being. Indeed, one of the worst punishments imaginable is that of solitary confinement.

The second type of aloneness cuts close to the very bone of life and death. We could call it existential aloneness, a concept already alluded to in the Torah with the odd form of the verb *heyot* in our key verse, which connotes existence, literally: ‘it is not good...existing (*heyot*)...human alone’ [Gen. 2:8]. In this form the word *heyot* suggests the existential condition of one’s being, not only our being socially lonely, but specifically relating to an aloneness that penetrates to the depths of one’s very existence. We generally live each day as though we will continue to live for eternity, but at the back of our minds we are aware of the painful truth that the day will arrive when we must, each of us, embark upon a journey that we must take alone. The bleak, black specter of non-existence at the end of the road, is the angst which echoes God’s declaration that ‘it is not good for man to be alone.’

The Torah is telling us, therefore, that what a human being desperately needs is a relationship that will help assuage both social loneliness as well as existential aloneness; one’s complement/companion must serve as a sharing partner and soulmate, as well as a link to eternity.

How does the *ezer k’negdo* help overcome social loneliness? Only if there is a willingness to limit oneself and allow the other person not to necessarily agree, sometimes to stand opposite and think opposite. A marriage partner is not a geisha girl or boy, an automatic amen-sayer, constantly regaling his/her spouse with compliments and praises, a trophy accessory who serves drinks, sets the table or provides money in the bank. A genuine life partner must be able to say ‘no’ if that is what

is necessary – the k'negdo part – because if you marry a yes-sayer, you aren't really confronting or being confronted by an 'other'; you are not sharing your life with a truly significant 'other.'

Moreover, if the partner is always expected to agree, the lips may be moving 'yes,' but the heart may be saying 'no' silently until the heart breaks from the weight of 'noes.' In the end, a help-opposite on both sides creates its own synthesis, and only with this formula can a new oneness emerge. The couple must drink together, but not always from the same cup, so that one can correct the other, complement the other, cheer and comfort the other, help and be helped by the other. Only then is the one not alone; only then is there a partner each can respect, thereby creating a relationship in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts – a unit in which one plus one equals three. Hence, the greatest help is provided specifically by a loving partner who at times stands in opposition for the good of the other as well as for the good of the relationship.

From this perspective we can answer the second textual question which queries why God, in media res creatio, turns to the creatures of the world to line up and be named by man. The Midrash makes the daring suggestion that Adam cohabited with all of the animal creatures, but was totally unsatisfied; 'He did not find in them a help-opposite.' The reason for Adam's failure in attaining satisfaction is suggested by the fact that the Almighty asks him to name the animals. When we name something, we define it, and when we define it, we control it.

However, a relationship of control is not a relationship of complement; it is one-sided and not mutual, taking and not giving. Indeed, humanity is commanded to control the physical, animal world ('and you shall subdue them...') [Gen. 1:28], but one spouse is not to control the other. For if one does, he/she has lost out on discovering the ezer k'negdo and overcoming social loneliness. (Indeed, when the Bible declares 'And he shall rule over you' [Gen. 3:6], it is only as a result of the sin of the forbidden fruit, and not a description of the ideal relationship. The goal of humanity is both to overcome sin, and to overcome the attempt to control one's spouse as well!)

From this perspective, we can appreciate one of the most profound verses of the Bible: 'Therefore shall a human being leave his father and his mother, cleave unto his spouse, and they shall be one flesh' [Gen. 2:24]. The biblical Hebrew word for 'cleave – 'davok – generally connotes a compatibility of values and ideals, sensitivities and goals, a unity of mind and spirit. The Bible is telling us that such a real 'togetherness' of personalities

might logically and happily lead to a oneness of body in the sexual union – a union which may very well result in a permanent relationship, but provides a literal oneness only temporarily – a union which hopefully renders each filled and fulfilled as a part of the other, but still retains each individual apart and distinct in his/her own right.

Thus, clearly, the individual is enabled to reach his/her greatest potential precisely because he/she is not isolated and lonely, but is also a part of another and a complement within a family whose wholeness is greater than the sum of its parts.

The author of Ecclesiastes puts it very well: 'Two are better than one... woe to one who is alone when he falls, for there is no one to lift him! If two sleep together they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ... A three-ply cord is not easily severed' [Ecc. 4:9–12]. If the text is praising the importance of two together, how do we come to a three-ply cord? The answer is, that in a caring and mutual marital relationship, the added strength of the two together creates the new third entity which is the marital relationship itself; one plus one equaling not two, but three!

But what of existential aloneness? The result of a man-woman relationship of mutuality is the birth of a child, the creation of a family with intra-generational concern and cultural continuity, our entry into the future beyond our individual life span, our gateway to eternity.

Children and grandchildren who are a reflection of ourselves not only genetically, but also culturally and ideologically help assuage our fear of death by providing the individual with a sense of continuity. Since this is impossible with an 'animal' relationship, Adam must be provided with another partner compatible with the possibility of birth, a partner who can provide a child who will naturally project parents into the future.

Hence Rashi interprets the verse, 'You shall be one flesh' not as referring to the sexual union of the couple, but rather to the one flesh which emerges from husband and wife. Afterward, in our child, part of us lives on even after we die. Hence, our help-opposite provides both companionship and continuity, helping to assuage both aloneness and loneliness.

We have seen how the initial creation of humanity deals with the existential tragedy of loneliness and aloneness, the human need for communication and companionship, for self-transcendence and generational continuity. Hence the Almighty declares, 'I will make a help-opposite for him, 'an alter ego, a genuine soul mate. But how do we succeed in establishing such a relationship? Does the

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Bible actually spell it out for us? And what is the relationship, if any, between sex and love?

Remember that when the first human fails to find his help-opposite from among the animals, a deep sleep falls over Adam. 'And He (God) took one of his sides, and closed up the flesh in its place; and from the side, which the Lord God had taken from the man, He made a woman, and brought her to the man' [Gen. 2:21–22].

Why is the 'birth' of Eve seemingly surrounded with a mythical quality? Why is she created from Adam rather than as a separate creature in her own right? In the question lies the answer. Eve's unique 'birth' marks her unique role, as an inextricable part of her male counterpart, as a being with whom he must share, and not a creature he must control. After all, if she is part of him, then he is part of her!

In an earlier verse we read: 'God created the human being in His image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them' [Gen. 1:27]. Rashi cited the later reference to Eve's 'birth' from Adam's rib, quoting a Midrashic interpretation that God originally created the human with two 'faces,' Siamese twins as it were, an androgynous male-female human being. Hence when God puts Adam into a deep sleep, it's not to remove a rib, but to separate the female side from the male side.

According to this Midrashic interpretation, God's original human being was both male and female. While Adam sleeps, God divides the creature into two so that each half will seek completion in the other. So that the one will understand his dependency upon, and ultimate wholeness through, the other. Indeed, in every relationship of mutuality, there are times when one must play a more passive role, enter into a deep sleep as it were, in order to enable the other to fully emerge!

Awakening, Adam says of Eve 'This time, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh' [Gen. 2:23]. His search is over. And what's true for Adam is true for humankind. The human personality will be in anguish until he/she finds completion by means of a true life partner. Thus in the next verse, God announces the second basic principle in life, 'Therefore shall a human being leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his spouse, and they shall be one flesh' [Gen. 2:24]. 'Leave' does not mean reject; it does mean, however, a certain degree of emotional and economic separation; one must be mature and independent in order to enter into a relationship of mutuality with one's mate. After all, how many divorces can be traced to crippling parent-child relationships which

extend into, and seriously impede, the husband-wife relationship?

Moreover, since the goal of a human being is to become united with another human being, this, the truest of partnerships, can be achieved only with someone who is really part of yourself, only with someone to whom you cleave intellectually and emotionally. If a relationship suffers from a lack of concern and commitment, sexuality suffers as well; the oneness of two bodies becomes a false act of deceit, suggesting a unity which is in fact a lie. The Torah wants us to know that for humans, sex is not merely a function of procreative needs, not merely a biological release, but is rather an expression of mutuality on a profound level, a coupling in the deepest sense. For the human being, the sexual relationship must be an expression of concern and commitment for each other, and not merely a means towards procreation, or a biological release of physical pressure. It is a merging of bodies which reflects a unity of minds, souls and destinies. It is for this reason the Midrash suggests that only human beings – and not animals – face each other during the sexual act.

Without the fullness of a relationship, the sexual act of union descends to harlotry or masturbation, and ultimately leaves each participant unsatisfied and unfulfilled. In many ways, it is worse than no relationship at all, because there was the promise of a relationship which then resulted in severe disappointment. The bitter price paid by 'married singles' is that in addition to their loneliness they must suffer the mockery and hypocrisy of their physical setup. Benjamin, the major character of the award-winning movie of the sixties, *The Graduate*, ends his 'affair' with his classmate's mother because he only knows her as 'Mrs. Robinson'; they do not even call each other by their first names. In effect, he is saying: If I don't know you, how can I care about you; and if I don't care about you, how can I sleep with you (shades of Joseph's rejection of 'Mrs. Potiphar')?

Moreover, Nahmanides, ad loc, maintains that only human beings – and not animals – have constant sexual needs rather than periods of heat, and maintain sexual capacity long after menopause sets in. This is because for human beings – unlike animals – the sexual relationship is not merely a means of procreating the species, but is an expression of relationship, communication and concern. Such a sexual act truly enables us to transcend ourselves and merge into the other. Nahmanides speaks of one flesh in allegoric and even mystical terms: through a transcendent sexual act conceived in marriage, the two become one, which is the ultimate realization of the state in which they had initially been created.

The entire biblical sequence ends with the startling statement, 'And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed' [Gen. 2:25]. Given the Torah's strict standards of modesty and sexuality, how are we to understand a description which seems to contradict traditional Jewish values?

Perhaps we are dealing with a more symbolic interpretation: Nakedness without shame means that two people must have the ability to face each other and reveal the nakedness of their souls without external pretense. Usually we play games, pretending to be what we're not, putting on a front. The Hebrew word *beged* (garment) comes from the same root as the word *bagod*, to betray. Similarly, the word *me'il*, cloak, comes from the same root as the word *ma'al*, to deceive. With garments I can betray, wearing my 'public' mask and playing out my public role while I hide and mask over my true inner self. If there is any truth at all to the advertising hyperbole, 'clothes make the man,' there is an even greater truth to my advertisement, 'clothes fake the man.'

I remember, soon after my aliya, I suddenly returned to wearing the ties and jackets which I had thankfully put into storage as soon as I assumed Israeli citizenship. Upon analyzing my reversion to my 'former life' sartorial style, I realized that it was a psychological function of fear and self-doubt that I wouldn't 'make it' professionally in my new surroundings and Israeli identity. After a few setbacks, I turned to the external garb which I identified with my former Manhattan success.

The Torah wants husband and wife to remove garments which conceal truth, to be free to express fears and frustrations, not to be afraid to cry and scream in each other's presence without feeling the 'shame of nakedness.' This is the ideal *ezer k'negdo*, flesh of one flesh, bone of one bone.

In marital counseling, I am never put off when one partner screams at the other; as one wife said to her husband who complained that she often yelled at him: 'With whom then can I let out my frustrations, the stranger next door?' Of course, I'm not advocating shouting, but a far more serious danger sign is silence – non-communication – between the couple.

The result of all of this is that individuals must spend a lifetime working on themselves and working on their relationship with their spouses. Most important of all, we must be honest with ourselves and honest with our spouses, loving our spouses as we love ourselves and giving to our spouses no less – especially in respect and concern – than we wish to receive from them. Then our sexual relationship will be an expression of our

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mutual love and commitment, and we will be married soul mates rather than married singles.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Which Type of Chessed is Preferable: Anonymous or Known?

The pasuk in Parshas Bereshis says: "And Hashem G-d made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and he clothed them." (Bereshis 3:21). After the aveira (sin) of Adam and Chava, when they realized they were naked, the Ribono shel Olam made garments for them. The Gemara (Sotah 14a) interprets the mitzva of "Acharei Hashem Elokecha taylaychu" (You shall walk after the Hashem your G-d) (Devorim 13:5) as an imperative to emulate the attributes of the Ribono shel Olam: Just as the Ribono shel Olam clothes the naked, so too should you; just as the Ribono shel Olam visits the sick (as when He appeared to Avram in Elonei Mamrei after Avram's bris milah), so too should you; just as the Ribono shel Olam comforts the bereaved (Bereshis 25:11), so too should you; just as the Ribono shel Olam buried the dead (Devorim 34:6), so too, should you.

The Gemara then quotes a comment of Rav Simlai: The beginning of the Torah consists of gemilas chassadim (acts of kindness) and the end of Torah consists of gemilas chassadim. The Torah begins with the Ribono shel Olam's dressing the naked, and it ends with the Ribono shel Olam's burying the dead. The problem with this teaching of Rav Simlai is – what is he adding? We already see from the previous examples that the Torah begins with gemilas chassadim and ends with gemilas chassadim!

The sefer *Mishmeres Elazar* (by Rav Elazar Brach) suggests the following: Rav Simlai is not merely teaching that we need to emulate the Ribono shel Olam in what He does. We also need to emulate Him in how He does it. There is an inconsistency specifically in the two pesukim that Rav Simlai is referencing. When Hashem clothed Adam and Chava, the pasuk spells out who did it: "Va'ya'as Hashem Elokim l'adam u'l'ishto kosnos ohr..." The pasuk says exactly who did it. However, at the end of the Torah, the burial of Moshe Rabbeinu is left anonymous: "And He buried him in the valley." The Name of Hashem Elokim is not mentioned! Why the difference? Which is it? Should gemilas chassadim be performed in anonymity or with a name attached?

The *Mishmeres Elazar* explains that the Torah is not only teaching us to perform chessed. The Torah is teaching us how to perform chessed. Sometimes (or perhaps, most of the time) it is important for chessed to be anonymous. A person is saved from embarrassment by not knowing who is performing this chessed for

him. However, there are some situations in life, where it is important for the person to know who is performing the chessed.

After the aveira of Adam and Chava, when they realized what they had done and felt rejected, such that their relationship with the Ribono shel Olam had perhaps ceased to exist, it was important for the Ribono shel Olam to make the point that it was Hashem Elokim who was coming to their rescue. “Even though you committed a terrible aveira for which you are going to need to pay a significant price, nevertheless, I still love you!” In such a situation, the correct way to perform the chessed is to not do it anonymously, but rather to let the source of the chessed be known, to make the point that the relationship has not been broken.

This is different from the situation in V’zos Habracha, where there is no point in publicizing who buried Moshe Rabbeinu. Therefore, the pasuk just anonymously says “He buried him in the valley.”

The lesson is that we must not only practice chessed but we must learn how to practice chessed. Usually, it is best to keep our chessed anonymous. But at other times, it is preferable for the source of the chessed to become known.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is at the heart of our Judaism? Right now on the Jewish calendar we are approaching Shabbat Bereishit. As we are all aware, on Simchat Torah we concluded the Torah, the concluding word of which is Yisrael – and therefore the last letter of the Torah is lamed. And on Shabbat, we will commence the Torah once again with the word Bereishit – the opening letter of which is a bet. So, if you bring the last letter and the first letter together, it provides us with the word ‘lev’, which means heart. Emerging from this is a very powerful lesson. For the sake of the continuity of our Torah learning, our Torah devotion and our commitment to a Torah way of life, we need to have a good heart.

In of the Ethics of the Fathers, Chapter two, we read how Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai asked his five top students, what in their view was the most important characteristic that a person should have? And each one gave their answer. The first answer was that the most important characteristic is a good eye. The second said a good friend, the third, a good neighbour, the fourth replied the capacity to see the consequences of our deeds. And the fifth was the view of Rabbi Elazar, and he said, having a lev tov, a good heart. And Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai said that he agreed with that last view, because if you have a good heart, that includes all other fine attributes.

We need to engage and improve our ahavat Yisrael, love of our fellow Jews, our ahavat habriot, love of all human beings and in addition, of course, our ahavat Hashem, love of the Lord, our God. That is why The Talmud tells us, “rachmana liba boi”, the Merciful One, Almighty God, He wants our hearts. And that is the call of the hour. To be better people and to create a world that is built on love, tolerance and friendship.

So therefore, to answer our opening question, what is right at the heart of our Judaism? The answer is, the heart.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The War of the Spirit: Reflections on the First Rashi of Parshat Bereishit Rabbi Avishai Milner

These matters are profound yet simple; our enemies wage war not only against the people of Israel, but against God Himself, whom we represent.

In the war between David and Goliath, we read: “And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were sore afraid. And the men of Israel said: Have ye seen this man that is come up? Surely to defy Israel is he come up” (Shmuel I, 17:24-25). However, David immediately perceives the deeper dimension and asks: “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (ibid. 26)

The people saw a conventional national war. They were frightened and so they fled. But David knew that one who fights against the people of Israel fights against the Master of the Universe. This is not merely a war of might – it is a war of spirit. A struggle of values, morality, justice, and integrity. A war of the children of light against the children of darkness.

This timeless principle has held true for the people of Israel throughout history. So it was in the war with Amalek: “For the hand is upon the throne [written in Hebrew as יד, which is the shortened form for יְהוָה] of the Lord [written as יְהוָה and not as God’s full name]: the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Shemot 17:16).

Rashi comments on this verse: “The hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, is lifted to swear by His throne that He will have war and enmity with Amalek for eternity. For the Holy One, blessed be He, has sworn that His name is not complete and His throne is not complete until the name of Esav is entirely blotted out. And when the name of Esav is blotted out, the Name will be complete and the throne will be complete.”

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So it was, too, in the war against the Nazi oppressor, who, even in his depravity, understood the root of his hatred and murderous ideology toward the Jewish people. Hitler (may his name and memory be erased) declared that since the Jewish people are “the historical people of the God of the spirit,” and the German people are “the new chosen people serving the god of nature,” the two could never coexist. “The war for world domination,” he said, “is being fought only between us – between these two camps alone, between the Germans and the Jews. Everything else is but a false appearance.” Astonishing really.

Our Sages, if truth be told, had already articulated this very truth long before. “Rabi Nachman said: ‘And the one people shall be stronger than the other people’ (Bereishit 25:23) – [these are] Rome and Jerusalem. If one tells you that both have been destroyed or that both are prospering, do not believe it. If [you are told] Rome is destroyed and Jerusalem prospers, believe it.”

Rabi Nachman discerned the very essence of this spiritual struggle: there is a nation that has chosen the path of evil, and there is a nation that brings goodness and morality into the world. There is righteousness and there is wickedness – and the people of Israel are the bearers of God’s path and His will in the world. The two ways cannot reign together; only one may prevail.

The Iron Swords War is likewise a war of the spirit. And our greatest and foremost challenge lies in fortifying that spirit: in deepening our bond to our roots, to the vast and storied continuum of Jewish history; in renewing our faith in the righteousness of our cause; and in sharpening the clarity of our vision.

In recent times, it has at moments seemed that we have lost our way – that we have strayed from our identity. And sadly, it is precisely this war that reminded us who we are, where we come from, and what we aspire to become. From the remarkably high enlistment rates, through the nation’s extraordinary mobilization to assist soldiers, the wounded, and all those in need of comfort and support, to the countless stories of courage and inspiration- our beloved people have revealed once again the purity of their heart and the righteousness of their values.

Rashi’s first commentary on Bereishit: “He declared to His people the power of His works”

Rashi’s choice to open his entire commentary on the Torah with this specific Midrash carries great significance. Hundreds of Midrashim were written on the opening verse of the Torah, yet Rashi chose the well-known one of

Rabi Yitzchak, from which he wished us to learn a foundational truth (Bereishit 1:1):

“Rabi Yitzchak said: The Torah should have begun with the verse ‘This month shall be unto you the first of all months,’ (Shemot 2:2) which is the first commandment given to Israel. Why then does it begin with Bereishit? Because of the verse ‘He declared to His people the power of His works, in order to give them the heritage of the nations’ (Tehillim 111:6). For should the nations of the world say to Israel, ‘You are robbers, for you have conquered the lands of the seven nations,’ they will reply to them: ‘All the earth belongs to the Holy One blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom it was right in His eyes. Of His own will He gave it to them, and of His own will He took it from them and gave it to us.’”

I have often pondered the logic of this Midrash. The nations of the world accuse Israel of being thieves – of seizing lands that are not theirs – and Israel responds with a theological claim: that God created the world and chose Israel to inherit it. What kind of answer is this to the nations? It is, one might say, a distinctly Jewish response – an inwardly directed answer, drawn from within our own world of faith, grounded in belief and sacred conviction. How, then, can such an answer possibly satisfy the nations of the world, who do not necessarily acknowledge God, His Torah, or His command?

The Power of Israel’s Inner Faith - Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap addresses this question and reveals one of the deepest foundations of faith. Indeed, the Midrash’s answer is directed inwardly; it belongs to the language of faith spoken within Israel. Historically, whenever the Jewish people have returned to their land, the nations have protested: “You are thieves; the land is ours, not yours.” Only when Israel can respond with confidence and deep conviction – “He declared to His people the power of His works” – do the nations’ claims fall silent.

And this is a wondrous thing. When Israel is secure in its right, firm in its faith, unhesitating and clear that the land is theirs and that God rules the world – then even the nations acknowledge it. When the nations see Israel steadfast and confident in its beliefs and in the justice of its cause, they sense the truth within it.

Rav Charlap phrases it like this: “[Even] if only Israel knows and recognizes the power of His works, the nations’ arguments are immediately silenced, although they themselves do not know or recognize the power of His works. Yet they recognize the

power of Israel, and their role to submit before the people of Israel.”

How true – and how profoundly relevant to our own times. When the people of Israel forget their path, their strength, their Divine moral calling – when there are those among us who are ashamed of the Torah of Israel and its faith (and sadly, we have witnessed such things this past year) – then the nations of the world will not respect Israel or its Torah.

But when the people of Israel remember their roots and speak clearly and graciously of their path and their faith, then the nations hear and perceive the deep truth. When we are clear and steadfast, everyone understands it. And when we falter and waver, the nations understand that too, and act accordingly.

Thus, the verse chosen by the Midrash is nothing short of precise: “He declared to His people the power of His works” – not to other nations, but to His own people, to Israel.

“Not because of power, only because of the spirit, within me, in my mind, in my soul” (singer Micha Shitrit in his song ‘Only Because of the Spirit’).

With prayers for deliverance and consolation.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

**Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Eretz Yisrael:
The Divine Exception to the Natural Order**
There is perhaps no Rashi more famous than the first one in Chumash:

Rebbi Yitzchak said: The Torah should have commenced with the verse (Shemos 12:2) “This month shall be unto you the first of the months” which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it commences with the account of Creation? Because of the thought expressed in the text (Tehillim 111:6) “He declared to His people the strength of His works (i.e. He gave an account of the work of Creation), in order that He might give them the heritage of the nations.” For should the peoples of the world say to Israel, “You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan”, Israel may reply to them, “All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed, He gave it to them, and when He willed, He took it from them and gave it to us” (Bereishit 1:1).

There are many difficulties in understanding this Rashi. While it is surely important to affirm that Eretz Yisrael belongs to the Jews, it really is striking that this should be the very beginning of the Chumash. Secondly, while we believe this to be the case, we have a hard time convincing the nations of the world that this is so; it is very hard to take the Chumash with the

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Rashi, bring it to the nations, and point a finger and say, “here, you see it says it belongs to us!” So, what’s the point of it? They will never be convinced by a verse of Chumash and Rashi, while we don’t need to be convinced. So, who is it written for?

We also need to understand Rashi in a way that this is not telling us something that we would consider as ‘cutting a corner’; i.e. that Hashem is doing something that is ‘technically correct’ but not really appropriate. After all, don’t we all feel that things that are rightfully people’s should be theirs, even if there is legal recourse to expropriate it? So, what is being stated?

Let us contemplate Rashi’s question, when he asks that the Torah should start with ‘HaChodesh hazeh lachem’. This refers to the fact that the world really consists of two strata. There is a natural world where there is a process as to how change takes place; it’s true physically, economically, and politically. That natural world is embedded in Bereishit. It means Hashem created a world that has a natural mechanism and, as such, is “tov maod - very good”, as-is. The world functioning in its natural process and organization is something Hashem wants.

But there is a second strata on top of that. Hashem instructed the Jewish people with a set of laws, obligations, and prohibitions that they must keep. This is a whole new set of behaviors coming from a higher order; they do not emanate from the realities of our world. The basic Noachide laws, on the other hand, emanate from and apply to the world around us. This is why they ‘make sense’ to us.

Torah, therefore, being the document of divine commandments, emanating from beyond our tangible universe, should start with the halachos, as expressed in ‘HaChodesh hazeh lachem’. The natural world and its inherent morality doesn’t need a ‘Torah’ to express it. This is the essence of Rashi’s question.

Rashi’s answer is that even in the so-called natural world, there is one point that does not fit into the natural process; the natural laws of economics, society, politics, do not govern it, as such. When Chazal tell us that every country in the world has an angel that is in charge of it except for Eretz Yisroel (see Rabbeinu Bachya, Devarim 31:15), it refers to this point. It means that in all the countries in the world the natural order dominates, while the Divine hand is in the background. Eretz Yisroel is the exception. Therefore, in the very act of creation wherein Hashem set up the natural order which includes nations having homelands and geographical locations that they exist in, an exception was built in. Eretz Yisroel is just like the Beis Hamikdash which

was able to accommodate many more people than its physical area could accommodate (Avos 5:5); this area was 'extraterritorial', i.e. it belonged to a different order and was not part of physical nature.

This means that Israel's lands are not allocated merely by historical record, but rather by Divine will, as generated by righteous conduct. A rather famous example of this was when the Kushites came to live in Israel and continued their quasi-idol worship that they had gotten used to. Punishment came swiftly, and they desperately sent to the Jews asking them what's appropriate to worship and not to worship in Israel (Melachim 2, 17:25). Eretz Yisrael is a country that is much more in tune with the spiritual world, and the Jewish nation's performance is what dictates its hold on it.

Thus, the first passuk is telling us that Eretz Yisrael belongs to no one; it belongs to Hashem. It is not, and never was, part of the natural order. Those who fulfill His will have it, and if they cease to do so, they lose it. This is true about the nations of the world - when they sinned excessively, they lost Eretz Yisrael. But it also means that we, Klal Yisroel, maintain possession of it or lose it based on merit.

In effect, this passage is telling us that Hashem created a world to run naturally, but the creator leaves His mark in one place. Like an artist who paints a beautiful painting of some scene or other, and signs his name in the corner, so too Hashem has 'painted' a picture of a natural world, but in a corner his name is 'signed'. That corner is Eretz Yisroel. Nations lived there and were evicted from there based on their performance. This passage is not here to convince the nations of the world that we're right. It is there to teach us that the reason why we have Eretz Yisroel is because someone else did not deserve it, and we have it only because we deserved it.

This places the great burden on us to do what it takes to keep this land which is, in essence, Hashem's land.

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's
Derashot Ledorot**

Good G-d

The Torah's record of the creation of the world by G-d, no matter how you may interpret it, is one of the major fundamentals of Jewish thought. Without the concept of creation, nothing else in Judaism makes much sense. It is therefore pertinent to raise one of the most persistent and universal questions that has bothered many a layman as well as some of the most serious thinkers of all times: why did G-d create the world? G-d is, after all, perfect. He does not need the world. He is complete

without it. Why, then, did He bring it into existence?

Furthermore, especially troublesome is the verse va-yar Elohim ki tov, and "G-d saw that it was good." What does the Bible mean when it says ki tov, "it was good?" And what do we mean by the words va-yar Elohim, "and G-d saw?" Certainly it could not mean that G-d stepped back, like an artist who has just finished an oil painting, to admire his handiwork from the proper perspective. What then does it mean?

Allow me to commend to your attention one of the most novel answers I have yet seen. It is suggested by Rabbi Jacob Zvi Meklenburg in his "Ha-ketav ve-ha-Kabbalah." The word va-yar, he says, does not mean "and he saw," but rather "he brought into existence." For va-yar in ordinary Hebrew parlance may mean not only "he saw" but "he showed." Just as the idea "to show" means to reveal something which is hidden, so creation by G-d means to bring into sight that which was previously hidden from mortal eyes. Creation by G-d means to bring an object from potential into real existence. Va-yar Elohim, "and G-d brought into existence (the world)" – and why? – because ki tov, because He is good! Not that G-d saw that the world is good, but He brought the world into existence because He, G-d, is tov, good! Whether the world is good remains at best a debatable thesis. It is the goodness of G-d, not the goodness of the world, that the Torah means to emphasize. So the verse va-yar Elohim ki tov comes to answer the question: why did G-d create the world? And the answer is, He created because He is tov, good.

Here is a marvelous idea which finds expression centuries later in vastly different forms of thought. Thus, the Kabbalah speaks of God's chessed or love or goodness, as primary hitpashtut, emanation, outpouring of creativity. And the Greek philosopher Plato (in his Timaeus) similarly maintains that God brought the world into being because He was not envious, He did not begrudge existence to those other than Himself. Because He is tov, He granted the gift of existence to the universe.

But important as this idea of a good God is philosophically, its effects and ramifications practically are far-reaching indeed. They affect each and every one of us most intimately – whether or not we are interested or understand the metaphysical problems. One need not be a philosopher at all to appreciate the consequences of this idea and this definition of goodness.

We Americans, and especially we American Jews, often speak of having a "good heart." Indeed, there are statements in the Talmud which are sufficient warrant for speaking admiringly of this quality. Yet if we are to accept what we have said concerning the words ki tov, then goodness can never be defined as a vague, benevolent sentimentalism.

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No one can be said to have a "good heart," unless the heart transmits goodness to his hands and his feet and his mouth. There is no difference between a good heart and a bad heart, unless the consequences are made felt to others. To spread blessing and happiness and confidence to those about you – that is the essence of being tov. To withhold these gifts from others – that is being no-good, or bad. To give goodness is the ultimate test of being good. Better yet, to be good means to do good! Like God, man is tov only when he creates, when he gives, when he reaches outward benevolently.

(No wonder the great Hassidic teacher, the author of the Tanya, maintained that Tzedakah is the most ideal mitzvah, for it is the mitzvah where man most closely imitates God. Just as God's most significant act, that of the creation of the world, is an expression of His goodness – that is, His willingness to give to others, so with man, the apex of his goodness consists of giving – whether charity, kindness, favors, friendship, even a smile. A good man, like the good G-d, will be a giving man.)

Perhaps with this definition of goodness, we may achieve a new insight into the famous words of the Torah in this morning's Sidra, lo tov heyot ha-adam le'vado, "it is not good for man to be alone." These words were uttered by God when He beheld Adam's loneliness, his absence of a spouse. Ordinarily we interpret those words to mean, that it is not good for a man that he should be alone, without a wife. It is bad for his mind, for his heart, for his psychological tranquility. It is better to be married, to live in society, than to be lonely. Yet the definition we have heard of tov, of goodness, would lead us to a new understanding of this verse: lo tov heyot ha-adam le'vado – it is not possible for a man who is alone to be tov, good. God beheld Adam in his solitude. He is a perfect man, said God. An excellent creature. But as long as he does not have a wife and children, how can he express goodness? He may have precious sentiments, he may cherish noble thoughts, he may even be moved to shed a tear of sympathy. But as long as he does not have a wife whom he can support and upon whom to shower his love and affection, as long as he has no family for whom to provide and upon whom to bestow his kindness and his goodness and his considerateness, or, barring these, a dear friend for whom to sacrifice and serve and work and labor – then it is impossible for him to be tov. And if man cannot be good, in this sense of giving, of what use is all his life and existence? Therefore did God create Eve for Adam – so that, in giving of his own self and time and kindness to another human being, he might fulfill his own potential tov, his goodness. What a reminder to modern husbands and wives that it is more important to give than to take, to love than to be loved! Probably one of the most general, pervasive reasons for marital discord is that many a man

and woman even after marriage, acts as if there is no one else – levado – and the aloneness and separateness can only be dissolved by being truly tov. What a reminder to every man or woman, married or unmarried, that as long as another human being lives, he has the precious opportunity to be tov, that by relating to others in terms of the service we can perform and the happiness we can bring them, we become truly good people and good Jews.

Indeed the Halakhah emphasizes this fact in a very practical way. Everyone knows that when we buy a new object, such as clothing, we recite a berakhah, a blessing. What kind of blessing do we recite? The halakhic decision is quite interesting (according to the Babylonian Talmud, see Beur Ha-Gera and Mishnah Berurah on Sh.A., O.Ch. 223:5): if one purchases or acquires an object from which he alone will benefit, such as a suit or a hat, then he recites the blessing of she'hecheyanu – he thanks God for allowing him to live and survive to this happy time. But if the object he buys is something which can be enjoyed by others as well as himself, such as the house for his entire family, or an automobile in which he will be able to drive others as well as himself, then he must recite a superior and greater blessing, that of ha-tov ve'ha-metiv – blessing God "Who is good and does good to others." Here again we find this remarkable definition of goodness! If I do something for myself I may be happy; only if what I do brings happiness to others as well, may I characterize my happiness as something good and noble. Only when something fortunate happens to me that I can share with others can I thank G-d who is Himself tov, for He gave me something, and ha-metiv, for He made it possible for me, in turn, to be tov by giving to others. Goodness does not describe the static heart or the stagnating sentiment; it speaks only of self-sacrifice, of a surging sense of service and munificence that spills over the sides of the soul so that others may derive satisfaction, happiness and pleasure from me. If I take care only of myself, I am entitled to no more than she'hecheyanu; "who has let us live" – I merely live, and live for myself. Only when I consider others as well as myself can I say ha-tov ve'ha-metiv; then I am truly good – even as G-d is good.

Our Rabbis (Berakhot 5a) expressed an admirable idea when they declared, ein tov ela Torah, "Torah is truly goodness." Torah is identical with the good. By this I believe that our Rabbis meant, that those people err grievously who conceive of Torah as something to hoard, a device invented to advance their own credit rating in Heaven. There is nothing really tov or "good" about Torah if one thinks of it selfishly, as a development of one's own mind and soul and family, while he blithely ignores the welfare of the community. That is why we ought to be unimpressed by the self-righteousness of those individuals who are proficently pious,

fearlessly "frum," and demonstratively devout solely in their own four cubits, but refuse to impart their learning, their experience, their loyalties and their talents to the wider community; who decline any responsibility towards the synagogue and our important communal organizations by proclaiming shalom alekha nafshi – I worry only about my own soul. This kind of attitude may make them live happier; but they do no good for the world. At most they are entitled to a she'hecheyanu; never do they reach to the level of ha-tov ve'ha-metiv.

How appropriate is the definition offered by the Rabbi of Kotzk of the Yiddish expression "a tzaddik in peltz," a righteous person in a fur coat. This is the sarcastic title characterizing one who is only pseudo-pious. The Kotzker Rebbe says that there are two kinds of tzaddikim, or pious persons. These are equivalent to the two ways of keeping warm. One type of person, when he wishes to keep warm, builds a fire. The other kind puts on a fur coat, a peltz. The one who builds a fire is himself warm, and he succeeds in warming others as well. But the man who merely covers himself with his peltz, he reserves warmth for himself, but denies it to others. So, there is a tzaddik whose piety can benefit many people. But it is an inferior type of tzaddik who selfishly hoards his religiosity; he is tzaddik in a peltz! So it is with those who are satisfied that they and their children study Torah and observe Jewish law, but refuse to participate in those communal agencies which try to ensure the emanation and dissemination of Torah throughout all the Jewish community. They are tzaddikim in little fur coats, forever ignoring the frigid atmosphere in which their neighbors must thrive. They are not really tov, good. Ein tov ela Torah – true Torah, true Jewishness, true Judaism, requires creative goodness, outgoing goodness, a superabundance of goodness that is a service for others as well. It is true of people as it was of the old railroad tickets, upon which was printed the legend, "no good if detached."

When, a few minutes ago, we blessed the new month, we asked G-d for chayyim, for life filled with all kinds of wonderful gifts: health, wealth, Torah, good deeds, honor. But cardinal among them is: chayyim shel tova – a life of goodness. This is not just a summary of the other requests. More than that, it is a prayer that we learn to be tov, and share these very blessings with those about us. Va-yar Elohim ki tov. God brought the world into existence because He is good. Man like God must understand that goodness is not a state of being, but a state of doing; not a way of feeling, but a way of giving; not a matter of being a beneficiary, but that of being a benefactor.

May God, who is ha-tov ve'ha-metiv, grant that each of us be blessed with the wherewithal, the health and the happiness, as we enter the new month, and the New Year

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which begins with the cycle of the Torah, to be able to be good in this expressive, creative, genuinely Jewish manner: ve'yimal'u mishalot libenu, may all the desires of our hearts be fulfilled, not only for ourselves, but le'tovah, enabling us to be good by sharing our blessings with these as yet unblessed – Amen Selah.



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Bereishis, Dinosaurs, and the Age of the World

Collected by **Chaim Ozer Shulman** (with assistance from AI)

בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ

In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth. As this is written, we are in the Jewish year 5787, counted from Creation. Modern science, applying its present methods and assumptions, dates the earth to approximately 4.54 billion years and the universe to approximately 13.8 billion years. It places the extinction of the dinosaurs about 66 million years ago and dates remains classified as anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* to roughly 300,000 years ago. The difference is therefore not a small discrepancy in calculation. It raises the basic question of how we should understand the opening chapters of *Bereishis* in light of the scientific account of the distant past.

The difficulty is broader than dinosaurs. How are billions of years to be reconciled with six days? What are we to make of very ancient remains classified as *Homo sapiens*? And even if יום means a long period, the

conventional scientific sequence does not neatly match *Bereishis*: for example, modern science places the formation of the sun long before the appearance of plants, while *Bereishis* describes vegetation on Day Three and the sun and moon on Day Four. What follows are four broad Torah approaches to these questions. The authorities grouped within each approach do not necessarily say precisely the same thing; they are grouped because they answer the basic difficulty in related ways.

Maaseh Bereishis Was Never a Simple Subject

The Mishnah in Chagigah 11b teaches במעשה בראשית בשנים - *Maaseh Bereishis may not be expounded before two students*. The Ramban (c. 1194–1270), writes מעשה בראשית סוד עמוק אינו מובן מן המקראות - *The mysteries of Creation are a profound secret which cannot be understood from the verses and can be properly known only through the received tradition*. He also calls belief in Creation שורש האמונה - *a root of faith*. The Ramban therefore makes two points that are both important here: Creation itself is fundamental to faith, while the full meaning of *Maaseh Bereishis* is not apparent from a surface reading of the pesukim. (Ramban to Bereishis 1:1.)

The Ramban (1138–1204), makes a related point in the *Moreh Nevuchim*. In II:25 he explains that a demonstrated truth can require a nonliteral interpretation of a biblical passage, while rejecting Aristotle's eternity of the world because it had not been demonstrated; in II:29 he indicates that not every detail of *Maaseh Bereishis* is necessarily to be read in the simplest literal manner.

Bereishis Rabbah records R. Abahu (c. 279–320) as saying that Hakadosh Baruch Hu היה בורא עולמות ומחריבן - *created worlds and destroyed them*. (Bereishis Rabbah 3:7.) Chazal do not explain there whether these were physical worlds, spiritual worlds, or stages of Creation. As we will see, the Tiferes Yisrael understood this teaching as referring to actual earlier physical worlds.

The Midrash teaches דאמר ר' שמעון בן לקיש שני אלפים שנה קדמה התורה - *the Torah preceded the creation of the world by two thousand years*. (Bereishis Rabbah 8:2.) Elsewhere the Midrash derives from the words מִכָּאן שְׁהִיָּה סֵדֵר זְמָנִים קוֹדֵם that יהי ערב rather than ערב יהי - *from here we learn that there was an order of time beforehand*. (Bereishis Rabbah 3:7.) Rabbeinu Bachya (c. 1255–1340) connects these teachings and explains that although time itself was created, Chazal nevertheless speak of the two thousand years that preceded the world, כִּי - *because those days were not like human days*. His point is not that the six days of Creation were billions of years long, but that references to time at the beginning of Creation cannot simply be assumed to mean time as human beings ordinarily experience it. (Rabbeinu Bachya to Bereishis 1:3.)

Approach #1. The Torah Is Not Giving a Scientific History — Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik

One approach is that of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook (1865–1935), who argues that the Torah's account of Creation need not be read as a scientific description of how the physical world developed. In *Igros HaRe'iyah* he writes אפילו אם היה מתברר לנו שהיה סדר היצירה בדרך התפתחות - *Even if it were established that the order of creation proceeded through the development of species there would still be no contradiction*. He explains why: והתורה ודאי סתמה במעשה בראשית - *The Torah certainly concealed the account of Creation and spoke through allusions and parables, for everyone knows that Maaseh Bereishis is among the secrets of Torah, and if everything meant only its simple meaning what secret would there be*. (*Igros HaRe'iyah* I, no. 91.) For Rav Kook, the central purpose is knowledge of Hashem and the life of true

morality. He therefore does not need to make each Torah day correspond precisely to a geological era.

In *Shemonah Kevatzim* I:594, Rav Kook writes אין מעצור לפרש פרשת אלה - תולדות השמים והארץ שהיא מקפלת בקרבה עולמים של שנות מליונים - *There is no obstacle to interpreting the account of the generations of heaven and earth as encompassing within itself worlds of millions of years*. At the same time, Rav Kook cautions that scientific theories change, and he does not tie Torah to any particular scientific theory. His basic point is that even if a developmental account of the physical world were established, it would not contradict the essential teaching of *Maaseh Bereishis*. Science may be describing the physical development of Creation, while the Torah is teaching its Divine meaning and moral purpose.

The more difficult question is Adam HaRishon. Rav Kook discusses a long development culminating in a distinctively human spiritual and moral consciousness. He does not explicitly say that anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* existed before Adam. His language does, however, leave room for distinguishing between the appearance of a being that a modern anthropologist would classify as *Homo sapiens* and the emergence of Adam as a spiritually and morally responsible human being.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903–1993) provides a related distinction between a biological description of man and the religious meaning of man. In his 1964 article *Confrontation*, Rav Soloveitchik expressly makes clear that he is not discussing prehistoric man. Rather, in analyzing different aspects of man's existence, he explains, "I am speaking not in anthropological but typological categories." The distinction becomes more directly relevant to our question in *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, where he states that the issue does not turn on "divine creation and mechanistic evolution as such." A biological account may describe man's physical origin and development, but it does not by itself explain the Adam who bears צלם אלקים, is addressed by Hashem, and becomes subject to Divine command. (Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6:2 [Spring–Summer 1964], pp. 5–29; *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, ed. Michael S. Berger [2005], pp. 4–5.)

This distinction becomes particularly important when considering the evidence for anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* long before the traditional date of Adam HaRishon. Neither Rav Soloveitchik nor Rav Kook explicitly says that biological man existed before Adam, and Rav Kook does not identify any pre-Adamic beings as *Homo sapiens*. Their writings do, however, provide a basis for distinguishing the scientific classification *Homo sapiens* from the Adam described by the Torah. The Adam of *Bereishis* is not merely a biological classification. He is addressed by Hashem, commanded, judged, and made morally responsible. Rav Kook's approach in particular therefore leaves open the possibility that biological man existed before the emergence of Adam as the morally responsible human being described by *Bereishis*.

This approach does not require a separate answer for the age of the earth, fossils, evolution, and every problem in the sequence. *Maaseh Bereishis* and the scientific account of the distant past are not necessarily competing accounts of the same thing. Science describes the physical development of the world, while the Torah describes Creation from the perspective of its Divine meaning and purpose.

The main change I think is important is "Rav Soloveitchik expressly makes clear that he is not discussing prehistoric man." That prevents the *Confrontation* quotation from being used for something he specifically says he is not discussing. I also changed the later sentence from "Their approaches do show" to the more careful "Their writings do, however, provide a basis for distinguishing..." The actual possibility of biological

man before Adam is then attributed particularly to Rav Kook, where the source gives us more room to say it. This distinction becomes particularly important when considering the evidence for anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* long before the traditional date of Adam HaRishon. Rav Soloveitchik does not say that biological man existed before Adam, nor does Rav Kook explicitly identify pre-Adamic beings as *Homo sapiens*. Their approaches do show, however, why identifying an ancient being scientifically as *Homo sapiens* does not necessarily answer the Torah's question of Adam. The Adam of *Bereishis* is not merely a biological classification. He is addressed by Hashem, commanded, judged, and made morally responsible. Rav Kook's approach therefore leaves open the possibility that biological man existed before the emergence of Adam as the morally responsible human being described by *Bereishis*.

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Approach #2. The Days as Epochs and the Possibility of Earlier Worlds - Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffmann and the Tiferes Yisrael

Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffmann (1843–1921) and the Tiferes Yisrael offer two distinct but related reconciliations: Rav Hoffmann allows the Creation days themselves to encompass long periods, while the Tiferes Yisrael speaks of earlier worlds. Rav Hoffmann writes that יום in the Creation account need not mean an ordinary twenty-four-hour day. In the Hebrew edition of his originally German commentary, he describes it as יום שנמשך תקופה בלתי מסוימת - *a day extending over an indeterminate period*, and expressly suggests that geological periods might correspond to the six days. He also notes the difficulty of treating the first three days as ordinary solar days when the luminaries appear only on Day Four. (Commentary to *Bereishis* 2:1–3.)

The attraction of Rav Hoffmann's approach is its simplicity: the Torah's six-day structure remains meaningful, while the length of a Creation day need not correspond to an ordinary day measured by the sun. It does not, however, require that every detail of modern scientific chronology correspond exactly to a particular pasuk. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) similarly wrote that Judaism need not be frightened by the "hundreds of thousands and millions of years" proposed by geology, and that such questions were not themselves articles of faith so long as "every beginning is from God." ("The Educational Value of Judaism," *Collected Writings*, vol. VII, p. 265.)

Rav Tzvi Hirsch Chajes (1805–1855), the Maharitz Chayos, also understood that major features of the earth could have developed gradually through the laws of nature established by Hashem. In his notes to Niddah 23a, while explaining the use of the word צִירָה in connection with mountains, he refers to סיפורי קורות הטבע - *accounts of natural history*. He writes that mountains and valleys were not necessarily present in their present form at the beginning of Creation, but נתהוו אחר כך - *came into being afterward over the course of time*. He points to trees and the bones of various animals found beneath mountains and explains that these changes occurred through השתלשלות חוקי הטבע אשר - *the working out of the laws of nature that Hashem established*. The Maharitz Chayos is not giving an age for the earth or interpreting the six days of Creation. His point is nevertheless significant: the world created by Hashem could continue to develop over time through the natural laws that Hashem Himself established.

Rav Yisrael Lipschitz (1782–1860), author of the *Tiferes Yisrael* commentary on the Mishnah, discusses the fossil discoveries of his time in *Derush Or HaChaim*. Referring to extinct creatures such as the

mammoth, Iguanodon, and Megalosaurus, the Tiferes Yisrael writes מכל האמור נראה ברור שכל מה שמסרו לנו המקובלים שכבר היה עולם פעם אחת ושוב נחרב וחזר ונתקומם הכל התברר עכשיו בזמנינו באמת וצדק - *From all this it appears clear that what the Kabbalists transmitted, that a world had previously existed and was destroyed and arose again, has now been confirmed in our time.* He understands בורא עולמות ומחריבן as referring to actual earlier physical worlds and roots the idea in older Kabbalistic traditions rather than presenting it as a nineteenth-century response invented to accommodate geology. (*Derush Or HaChaim*, sec. 3, printed with *Tiferes Yisrael* in the Yachin u'Boaz Mishnayos, Seder Nezikin, vol. 1, after Sanhedrin)

Even more strikingly, the Tiferes Yisrael speaks of אותן הבני אדם שהיו - those people who existed in the earlier world before the creation of the present Adam HaRishon. His nineteenth-century chronology is not the same as modern paleoanthropology, but his basic point is clear: the existence of pre-Adamic people in an earlier created order does not necessarily conflict with Torah.

The Tiferes Yisrael attempts to connect these earlier people with the 974 generations mentioned by Chazal (Shabbos 88b; Chagigah 13b–14a). For our purposes, the important point is not his particular chronology but the possibility he recognizes: Adam HaRishon need not exclude the prior existence of people in an earlier world.

This approach therefore allows for a physical world much older than the traditional chronology of Adam HaRishon. Rav Hoffmann allows the Creation days to encompass long periods, while the Tiferes Yisrael allows earlier worlds before the present order of Creation.

Approach #3. Creation-Time and Creation-Processes Were Different — Rav Dessler and Rav Schwab

Rav Dessler and Rav Schwab likewise offer related but not identical approaches. Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (1892–1953) writes in *Michtav MeEliyahu* - ימים אלו היו קודם גמר הבריאה שאז היתה הבחנת זמן אחרת - *these days were before the completion of Creation, when the concept of time was different.* He explains that the Torah describes what preceded the completion of Creation in terms that human beings can understand, using our concepts of matter, space, and time. At the level of peshat, the Torah therefore speaks of actual days, while their deeper meaning refers to the six sefiros, six modes of Divine revelation. Rav Dessler is not simply saying that one day lasted a billion years. His point is that our ordinary measure of time cannot simply be projected back into the process of Creation itself. (*Michtav MeEliyahu*, vol. II, p. 151.)

Rav Shimon Schwab (1908–1995) offered a related but more concrete reconciliation in his essay "How Old Is the Universe?" He insists that the six days remain genuine Creation Days, defined by the appearance and reappearance of the Creation-light, but proposes that before the first Shabbos the earth's physical processes need not yet have been synchronized with that Creation-time. The earth could therefore have undergone an enormous amount of physical change while only six Creation Days elapsed. Rav Schwab writes that "the billions of years which science claims to have calculated ... all actually occurred during six ordinary days." His point is therefore more precise than simply saying that things happened faster: he proposes two measures of time that became synchronized when Creation was complete. Rav Dessler questions whether Creation-time itself is comparable to our time; Rav Schwab preserves the six-day structure while allowing the physical history contained within those days to be vastly greater when measured by present processes. (Simon Schwab, "How Old Is the Universe?," *Challenge: Torah Views on Science and Its Problems* (1976), pp. 164–174.)

Approach #4. Scientific Theories Do Not Determine How We Read Bereishis — The Steipler and the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (1899–1985), the Steipler Gaon, was considerably more skeptical of scientific theories about the distant past. In *Karyana D'Igarta* (I, no. 56), he sharply rejected evolutionary theories as theories about the distant past rather than established scientific fact, insisting אין שום עובדה מדעית אמיתית שתתנגד ח"ו למה שקבלנו מרבותינו הקדושים - *no genuine scientific fact contradicts what we have received from our holy teachers.* This passage does not offer a separate calculation of the age of the earth. Its importance here is the distinction he draws: the Steipler did not regard theories about origins and the distant past as facts that require us to reinterpret the Torah account.

Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, gives priority to the traditional chronology. In his letter "The Age of the Universe," dated 18 Teves 5722 (December 25, 1961), he refers explicitly to "the Torah view that the world is 5722 years old." His central argument concerns the limits of what science can establish about the distant past. He distinguishes science based on direct observation from attempts to reconstruct the distant past by projecting present processes backward into conditions that were never observed. Since the conditions of Creation could have differed radically from those of the completed world, he argues that fossils do not compel the enormous elapsed ages conventionally assigned to them. He expressly allows both unusually rapid fossilization under radically different conditions and the possibility that fossils and other mature products were themselves created as part of a completed world. (Letter reproduced in *Challenge: Torah Views on Science and Its Problems*, pp. 142–149.)

The idea that Creation emerged in a completed state has a basis in Chazal. The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah 11a teaches כל מעשה בראשית - *all the works of Creation were created at full stature.* Adam HaRishon, for example, was created as an adult rather than beginning as an infant. This provides a Chazal framework for understanding the Lubavitcher Rebbe's argument that a newly created world need not have looked new. It could contain features which, under the ordinary processes of nature, would appear to require a much longer history. A similar argument appears in his earlier letter "Dating by Starlight," dated 1 Sivan 5716 (May 11, 1956), where he writes, "Just as stars were created, light rays were also created." On this approach, the apparent age of the physical world need not correspond to the amount of time that actually elapsed.

The Real Question Is Adam Ha'Rishon

Dinosaurs are ultimately the easier case. Each approach can account for them in a different way: through long Creation periods, earlier worlds, a different measure of Creation-time, accelerated Creation-processes, or a Creation whose apparent physical history need not equal elapsed history. Adam HaRishon is more difficult. If the accepted scientific chronology is correct and anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* existed hundreds of thousands of years ago, what distinguishes the Adam of Torah? Rav Kook's language leaves room for distinguishing biological man from the emergence of the spiritually and morally responsible Adam; the Tiferes Yisrael explicitly allows pre-Adamic people; Rav Dessler and Rav Schwab question whether present measures and rates can simply be applied backward to Creation; the Steipler questions whether scientific reconstructions of origins should control our reading of Torah; and the Lubavitcher Rebbe directly maintains the traditional chronology. Rav Soloveitchik's emphasis on צלם אלקים helps sharpen the issue. He is not being cited here as proposing an age-of-the-world theory, but for the distinction between biological description and the Torah's conception of man. Ancient bones can tell us much about anatomy; they cannot tell us whether the being to whom they belonged stood before Hashem under

Divine command and moral responsibility. The Torah's question of Adam is therefore not necessarily identical to the scientific question of when anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* first appeared.

Four Approaches to One Parsha

These approaches differ substantially, and some can overlap. Long Creation periods do not necessarily exclude earlier worlds, and a different measure of Creation-time does not necessarily exclude unusual rates of physical processes. What they share is the starting point of the Torah itself: *In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth*. The disagreement among these Torah authorities is not over whether Hashem created the world, but over how *Maaseh Bereishis* describes that Creation and how its words relate to the physical history of the world. Their different approaches show that there is more than one Torah way of addressing the age of the universe, the fossil record, evolution, and the relationship between Adam HaRishon and whatever physical history may have preceded him.

Adapted and translated from:

Haamek Davar by Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, the "Netziv" (1816-1893)

Introduction to Sefer Bereishis – Sefer HaYashar

Sefer Bereishis is called by the Nevi'im *Sefer HaYashar*, the Book of the Upright. The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (25a) derives this from the pesukim *הלא היא כתובה על ספר הישר* - *Is it not written in the Book of the Upright* (Yehoshua 10:13), and *הנה כתובה על ספר הישר* - *behold, it is written in the Book of the Upright* (II Shmuel 1:18). Rabi Yochanan explains that *Sefer HaYashar* is Sefer Bereishis, the book of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who were called *yesharim*. Bilaam said of them, *תמות נפשי מות ישרים* - *Let my soul die the death of the upright* (Bamidbar 23:10).

But this requires explanation. Why did Bilaam choose specifically the description *yesharim*? Why not call the Avos *tzaddikim* or *chassidim*? And why is Sefer Bereishis, more than any other sefer of the Torah, called *Sefer HaYashar*? Finally, why did Bilaam ask that his own end should resemble the end of those who bear this particular title?

What Does It Mean to Be a Yashar?

The answer may be understood from the pasuk in Haazinu, *הצור תמים* - *The Rock, perfect is His work, for all His ways are justice; a faithful G-d without iniquity, righteous and upright is He* (Devarim 32:4). The Torah praises Hakadosh Baruch Hu not only as *tzaddik*, righteous, but also as *yashar*, upright. This description explains the justice of the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash, in a generation that the Torah's language describes as *דור עקש ופתלתל* - *a crooked and twisted generation*.

That generation contained *tzaddikim*, *chassidim*, and men who toiled in Torah. Their failing was not that they had abandoned Torah. Their failing was that *היו צדיקים וחסידיים ועמלי תורה אך לא היו ישרים בהליכות* - *they were righteous, pious, and devoted to Torah, but they were not upright in the way they conducted themselves in the world*. Because of the baseless hatred in their hearts, when they saw another person serving Hashem in a manner different from their own, they suspected him of being a *Tzeduki* or an *apikores*. They went so far as to apply the law of *מורדין ולא מעלין* - *they are cast down and not raised up*. In this way religious disagreement became suspicion, suspicion became hatred, and hatred led to bloodshed and ultimately *לכל הרעות שבעולם עד שחרב* - *to all the evils in the world, until the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed*.

This is why the pasuk declares *צדיק וישר הוא* - *He is righteous and upright*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is *yashar*, and *אינו סובל צדיקים כאלו* - *He does not tolerate tzaddikim of this kind*. Righteousness is not enough if a

person's conduct toward others is crooked. A person must walk in the straight path *גם בהליכות עולם* - *also in the ways of the world*. Even when such conduct is undertaken *ל'shem Shamayim*, *זה גורם חרבן הבריאה* - *it causes the destruction of Creation and the ruin of the settled world*. Religious sincerity does not transform crookedness into *yashrus*.

The Yashrus of the Avos

This was the distinctive praise of the Avos. Certainly Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were *tzaddikim*, *chassidim*, and lovers of Hashem to the highest possible degree. But they possessed something more: they were *yesharim*. Even when dealing with the nations of the world, including corrupt idolaters, they conducted themselves with love and concern for their welfare *באשר היא קיום הבריאה* - *because their welfare is part of the preservation of Creation*. *Yashrus* is not merely refinement of character. It is a way of living that preserves the world Hashem created. We see this first in Avraham Avinu. Avraham intensely hated the wickedness of Sedom and its king. His refusal to take even a thread or shoestring from the king of Sedom showed how little he wanted any association with him. Yet when Sedom faced destruction, Avraham pleaded for its continued existence. Chazal apply to him the pasuk *אהבת צדק ואתשנא רשע* - *You loved righteousness and hated wickedness* (Tehillim 45:8), and explain Hashem's praise of Avraham: *אהבת לצדק את אהבת לצדק את* - *you loved to vindicate My creatures and refused to condemn them* (Bereishis Rabbah 49:9). This is precisely the greatness of Avraham. His concern for Sedom did not require him to minimize its evil. He could hate its wickedness and still desire the welfare of the people themselves. This is the meaning of *אב המון גוים* - *a father of a multitude of nations*. Even when a child does not walk straight, a father still seeks his peace and his good.

The same quality appears in Avraham's dealings with Lot. The Torah teaches us extraordinary *derech eretz* in the way Avraham sought to avoid conflict and preserve peace even when separation became necessary. Yitzchak Avinu displayed the same quality. After Avimelech and his people had treated him as an enemy, they came to seek peace. With only a few words of conciliation, Yitzchak was ready to be reconciled with them, and he gave them more than they had asked. Yaakov Avinu gives us the same lesson. Yaakov had every reason to be angry with Lavan. He knew that Lavan had sought to uproot him, and only Hashem's protection had saved him. Yet even when the Torah says *ויהר ליעקב וירב בלבן* - *Yaakov became angry and contended with Lavan* (Bereishis 31:36), Chazal marvel at the restraint of the Avos: *קפדנותו של* - *the anger of the fathers was greater than the humility of the children*. What did Yaakov's anger look like? The Midrash asks whether we imagine blows or wounds and answers: *אלא דברי פיוסים יעקב מפייס את חמיו* - *rather, words of conciliation; Yaakov was appeasing his father-in-law*. Even at the moment when his grievance was fully justified, Yaakov's anger remained within the bounds of *yashrus* and could end in reconciliation.

Sefer HaYashar Is Sefer HaBriah

We can now understand why these lessons occupy so central a place in Sefer Bereishis. This sefer is *Sefer HaBriah*, the Book of Creation. It teaches not only how the world came into existence, but what kind of conduct allows that world to endure. The many accounts of the Avos' *derech eretz* are therefore not incidental details. They belong to the subject of Bereishis itself. The Avos show how holiness must express itself in the ordinary relationships through which human society is sustained: how one speaks to an adversary, responds to provocation, seeks peace, and remains concerned even for people whose conduct one rejects.

For that reason Sefer Bereishis is called *Sefer HaYashar*. The stories of the Avos are not merely biographies of great *tzaddikim*. They reveal the quality of *yashrus*, the straightness of character necessary for *kiyum ha'olam*. A Torah life that does not produce this straightness is incomplete. Worse, when religious conviction is joined to hatred and crooked behavior toward others, it can become a force of destruction rather than a force that sustains Hashem's world.

Bilaam's Final Wish

This also explains Bilaam's strange prayer. Bilaam, at the moment when *Ruach Hakodesh* rested upon him, could hardly be surprised that he was not a *tzaddik* or a *chassid* like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. He was a prophet of the nations and stood at the opposite spiritual source. What astonished him was something more basic: the corruption of his own *derech eretz*. Even if he hated Israel because they were the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov and were rooted in holiness, it was still not fitting to seek to uproot an entire nation. **ואינה דרך ישרה בקיום העולם** — *this is not a yashar way of sustaining the world*.

It was this realization that moved Bilaam to cry out **תמות נפשי מות ישרים** — *Let my soul die the death of the upright, and let my end be like theirs* (Bamidbar 23:10). He was not merely asking to die like righteous men. He was looking at the Avos and recognizing the quality he himself lacked. They were *yesharim*; they were **מקיימי הבריאה** — *those who sustain Creation*.

We may now understand the name of the sefer. Bereishis is *Sefer HaBriah*, and precisely for that reason it is *Sefer HaYashar*. The Torah's first sefer teaches that the preservation of Hashem's world requires more than being a *tzaddik* or a *chassid*. It requires *yashrus*: fidelity to Hashem joined to straightness in one's dealings with other human beings. One may oppose evil without losing concern for the person who has done evil; one may be angry without abandoning conciliation; one may be certain that one's cause is *l'shem Shamayim* and still be forbidden to act crookedly. This was the greatness of the Avos. They were not only righteous men who lived in the world Hashem created. They were *yesharim*, men whose conduct helped preserve that world. That is why *Sefer HaBriah* is also *Sefer HaYashar*.

Adapted from

Dorash Dovid by Rav David Hofstedter

An Appropriate Helpmate for Him: An Integral Part of Creation

Why was man created “deficient” — alone, without woman — whereas all other creatures were created in pairs, male and female?

ויאמר ה' אלקים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו ויצר ה' אלקים מן האדמה - כל חית השדה... ויבא אל האדם לראות מה יקרא לו... ולאדם לא מצא עזר כנגדו - Hashem said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I shall make for him an *eizer k'negdo*, an appropriate helpmate for him.” Then Hashem formed from the earth every beast of the field... and brought them to the man to see what he would call them... but, as for Adam, he did not find an *eizer k'negdo* for himself. (Bereishis 2:18–20)

Hashem brought them - חזר והעבירן לפניו וזוגות אמר לכל יש בן זוג ולי אין בן זוג before Adam in pairs, male and female. Adam said, “Every other creature has a mate, but there is no mate for me!” (Bereishis Rabbah 17:4)

The narrative of the creation of the first two human beings, Adam and Chavah, leaves us with several questions. Why did the Supernal Wisdom see fit to create the first human being deficient, without a counterpart? Was man not worthy of being created in his final, perfect form, with a mate, as were all of Hashem's other creatures? Indeed, the Gemara teaches that all other creatures were created “in their stature, with their *daas*, and in their *tzivyon*” — in their full stature, with their understanding, and in their final form (Chullin 60a).

Even more puzzling is why Hashem did not create the female half of man until the male half specifically requested an *eizer k'negdo*, as the Midrash cited above explains. Adam had to first look at the rest of Creation and say, “Every other creature has a mate, but there is no mate for me!”

Another question arises from the verse itself. Hashem says, **לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו** — “It is not good for the man to be alone; I shall make for him an *eizer k'negdo*.” Read superficially, the verse might seem to describe a sudden realization that man should have been created as a male and female pair. But such an interpretation is obviously impossible. Hashem certainly knew from the outset that man could not achieve his intended perfection without an *eizer k'negdo*. What, then, does Hashem mean when He says, “It is not good for the man to be alone”?

Creation by Utterance

Dovid Hamelech proclaimed, **בדבר ה' שמים נעשו וברוח פיו כל צבאם** — “By the word of Hashem the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their hosts” (Tehillim 33:6). The Mishnah teaches that Hashem created the universe through Ten Utterances (Avos 5:1). According to Avos D'Rabbi Nasan, the tenth and final utterance, the one that brought woman into being, was **לא טוב היות האדם לבדו** — “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

But what does the statement “It is not good for the man to be alone” have to do with the creation of the world? It seems to address the needs of man, specifically his need for a mate, an *eizer k'negdo*. Why should this verse be considered one of the utterances through which Hashem created the world?

Marriage: Completion of Creation

The Gemara teaches: Any man who does not have a wife is not a complete man, as it is stated, **זכר ונקבה בראם ויברך אתם ויקרא את שמם אדם** — “Male and female He created them; He blessed them and called their name Adam” (Bereishis 5:2; Yevamos 63a). Similarly, the Midrash teaches that only when the two are joined together are they called *adam*. Accordingly, the bond of marriage is the completion of man's stature. Thus, Chazal teach that a man who has no wife dwells without joy, without blessing, without goodness, without Torah, without protection, and without peace (Yevamos 62b). Since man's route to completion is through marriage, marriage itself must be an integral part of Creation. Had the concept of marriage, of *eizer k'negdo*, not been created when the world was created, man, the crown of Creation, would have remained imperfect and, by extension, the entire universe would have been deficient.

Hashem therefore brought forth a unique utterance to create the bond of marriage, inherent in the creation of an *eizer k'negdo* for Adam, because through it Adam's creation became complete.

Once we understand that the creation of Adam's spouse was an integral part of the creation of the world, we can understand as well why Chazal view the union of husband and wife as something rooted in Creation itself. Thus, the Gemara teaches that Bas-Sheva was the wife intended for Dovid Hamelech “from the six days of Creation” (Sanhedrin 107a).

Why Was Man Not Created Complete, With a Spouse?

But this brings us back to our original question. If the bond of marriage is an integral part of Creation, and if man's completion and the perfection of the world can come only through marriage, why did the Creator bring man into the world incomplete? Should not Adam and his mate have been created simultaneously, as were all the other species, “in their stature, with their *daas*, and in their *tzivyon*”?

We may suggest that the Supernal Wisdom wanted man to understand the immense importance of marriage. Without it, he would remain incomplete; only through marriage could he achieve his intended

completeness and perfection. Had man been created from the outset as male and female, he might never have recognized the true value of marriage and how necessary it is for his very being. Only after he realized his own incompleteness, only after experiencing לא טוב היות האדם לבדו — “It is not good for the man to be alone” — could he properly appreciate the fulfillment he would merit through his bond with his spouse.

This explains why Chavah’s creation was delayed until Adam himself recognized the need for an *eizer k’negdo*. It also explains why, as the Midrash teaches, Hashem brought all the animals before Adam in pairs, male and female. Adam had to see that “every other creature has a mate, but there is no mate for me.” Only when he had viewed every other species in its paired state and had become fully aware of what he himself lacked could he recognize and appreciate the importance and value of an *eizer k’negdo*. Only through that realization could he — and, through him, mankind — reach the intended perfection.

Surely Hashem Knew That “It Is Not Good for the Man to Be Alone”

We can now return to the wording of the verse. Of course Hashem knew that “it is not good for the man to be alone.” Adam’s need for an *eizer k’negdo* was part of the Divine plan from the beginning. Hashem’s words are therefore not a statement indicating an oversight in Creation. Rather, they explain why Hashem did not create man and woman simultaneously.

The verse may be understood to mean: When man himself realizes that לא טוב היות האדם לבדו — “it is not good for the man to be alone” — then אעשה לו עזר כנגדו — “I shall make for him an *eizer k’negdo*.” Man first had to understand what was missing before he could properly receive what would complete him.

This formula set the pattern for the marriages that would follow. When a man recognizes that he is incomplete by himself, he is prepared to understand the significance of the person with whom he will build his life.

The Gemara illustrates this idea with a parable. Commenting on the verse כי יקח איש אשה — “If a man takes a wife” (Devarim 22:13), Chazal explain that it is the nature of a man to search for a wife rather than the woman to search for a husband. The Gemara compares this to a person searching for a lost object: Who searches for whom? The owner searches for the object he has lost (Kiddushin 2b). Just as a person does not search for a lost object until he recognizes that it is missing, so too Adam first had to recognize the deficiency inherent in being alone. He had to understand that his intended completeness could not be achieved without an *eizer k’negdo*.

Realizing the Value of One’s Spouse Brings True Joy

We can now understand why man was first created in a deficient state. It was precisely so that he would recognize the importance of his spouse. Once he achieves this awareness, he can appreciate that his wife is not merely someone who accompanies him through life, but his *eizer k’negdo*, an integral part of his own completion.

The experience of לא טוב היות האדם לבדו had to precede אעשה לו עזר כנגדו. Adam first had to recognize what was lacking. Only then could he appreciate what Chavah brought to his life. By recognizing his own incompleteness, he could see the unique value of his spouse and understand that together they could attain a completeness that neither could achieve alone.

This understanding also sheds light on the extraordinary joy that Chazal associate with marriage. The Zohar Chadash (Ruth 89a) teaches that the ten expressions of joy in the final *brachah* recited under the *chuppah* — ששון ושמחה חתן וכלה גילה רינה דיצה וחידה אהבה ואחזה ושלוה ורעות — correspond to the Ten Utterances with which Hashem created the world.

The connection is now clear. Marriage is not merely one of the experiences that takes place within the created world. The creation of the bond between husband and wife was itself part of the completion of Creation. Adam was therefore created first in a state of incompleteness so that he would recognize what his *eizer k’negdo* meant to him. Only after אעשה לו עזר כנגדו could come לא טוב היות האדם לבדו.

And perhaps that is why the joy of *chassan* and *kallah* echoes the Ten Utterances of Creation itself. When husband and wife understand that each brings the other toward a completeness that could not be attained alone, their marriage becomes not merely the joining of two lives, but the continuation of the very process through which Hashem brought His world to completion.

Adapted from

Bereishis 5780 - The Mysterious and Conflicted Depths of a Person – Who is the Real I?

Rav Moshe Tzvi Weinberg

(based on a transcript of the 2019 shiur at www.yutorah.org/lectures/details?shiurid=934804 & notes from Daniel Kaminetsky)

There is a well-known question about the Maariv of Motzaei Yom Kippur. We have just spent almost twenty-five hours fasting, davening, confessing, and begging Hakadosh Baruch Hu for forgiveness. We have reached the promise לפני ה' תטהרו - before Hashem you shall be purified. And then Yom Kippur ends. We begin Maariv and almost immediately say והוא רחום יכפר עון - He is merciful and forgives sin. A few minutes later, in Shemoneh Esrei, we once again say חטאנו כי חטאנו - Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned. What could we possibly have done wrong in the few minutes since Neilah?

Rav Gedaliah Eisner, the Gerrer chassid and Holocaust survivor, related an answer in the name of Rav Itche Alter, a son of the Imrei Emes. In Ger, the custom was to respond in Kaddish מן כל ברכתא לעילא ולעילא, and during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, when we say לעילא ולעילא, people became so accustomed to the extra ולעילא that on Motzaei Yom Kippur someone might accidentally say it again. Rav Itche said that this is why we need Selach lanu: “Hashem, forgive me. I said le’eila ule’eila when I should already have gone back to le’eila.” It sounds like a humorous answer, but the Pnei Menachem said that his brother was expressing something very deep. There is a danger in going through very lofty days and then not knowing how to return to ordinary life. We would like to remain le’eila ule’eila, but most of life is not Neilah and most of life is not Simchas Torah. If I know how to serve Hashem only during extraordinary moments, then I am missing something. I have to know how to return to le’eila, to ordinary holiness.

That is really the transition we make as Sefer Bereishis begins. We have spent a month fasting, davening, sitting in the Sukkah, saying Hallel, dancing with the Sefer Torah, and experiencing moments when we almost felt like angels. But Hashem now sends us back into ordinary life and reminds us of a simple fact: we are still human beings. And perhaps that is precisely why we now begin again with Adam HaRishon. There is a beautiful remez in the apple with which we began Tishrei. The Chamra Tava notes that תפוח has the same gematria as הנשמה, while the difference between the gematria of גוף and נשמה is 7. The apple therefore represents the human experience: body and soul together. On Rosh Hashanah we dip that apple into honey, as though we are trying to sweeten the bodily part of ourselves and spend the month becoming as neshamahdik as possible. But some tzaddikim had a custom on Simchas Torah of giving or throwing apples to their chassidim. Perhaps the message is that when the chassidim are sent back into the world, the apple is given back to them. You are returning to the world of גוף ונשמה. You cannot remain le’eila ule’eila forever. You have to learn how to be

what the Kotzker called the mission statement of the Torah, ואנשי קדש - You shall be holy people unto Me. Hashem does not need angels. He has plenty of angels. Hashem wants holy human beings.

1. The Hidden Man

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik writes in *Family Redeemed* that man has an inner existence which cannot be identified merely by watching what he does. We may know when our neighbor leaves his house, where he works, what he says, what interests him, and how he normally responds to different situations. Yet after knowing all of that, do we really know him? Rav Soloveitchik calls man a *homo absconditus*, a hidden man, and speaks of the *mysterium magnum*, the great mystery of the human personality which ultimately only Hashem can penetrate. The pasuk says כל האדם כוזב - all men are false, not necessarily because a person wants to deceive others, but because there is so much within him that even he does not fully understand. There are hidden acts of righteousness and hidden weaknesses. There are aspirations we barely recognize and parts of ourselves of which we may be ashamed. A human being is a mystery not only to other people. Very often, he is a mystery to himself. And we change so quickly. We would imagine that after an entire Tishrei of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos and Simchas Torah we would emerge as entirely different people. Halevai we feel somewhat different. Yet frighteningly quickly we can find ourselves slipping back into the same habits we had before. The Skulener Rebbe tells of someone who came to him three days in a row with the same question. The Rebbe finally asked, "Why do you keep asking me the same shailah?" The man answered with complete sincerity: "The person who asked yesterday is not the person asking today." A person can be very different on Monday than he is on Tuesday. The Rambam describes the wonderful side of that phenomenon in *Hilchos Teshuvah*: yesterday a person was distant from Hashem and today, after teshuvah, he is beloved and close. Unfortunately, the movement can take place in the other direction as well.

We find this mystery already in Adam HaRishon. After the sin, Hashem calls to Adam and asks איכה - Where are you? Rav Yonasan Eybeschutz, in *Tiferes Yonasan*, cites the Midrash in which Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to Adam הנחש עמי ועכשיו עם הנחש - Yesterday you were with Me, and now you are with the serpent. But what does "yesterday" mean? Adam was created and sinned on the same day. There was no yesterday. Rav Yonasan answers that the Midrash is referring to Adam's neshamah, which had already been created at the beginning of Creation. He reads איכה as איכה, "Where is the twenty-fifth?" Day six of Creation was Rosh Hashanah, the first of Tishrei, so the first day was the twenty-fifth of Elul. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is asking Adam: Where is the being I first created? Previously you were with Me, and now you are with the Nachash. Before the body entered the picture, everything seemed so clear. Now suddenly you are hiding from Me. But if so, perhaps we can ask a question on Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself. Why did You make us this way? Why take a pure neshamah and place it inside a body? Every time we say Asher Yatzar we conclude ומפליא לעשות - Who acts wondrously. Part of the wonder is this extraordinary shidduch of body and soul. They seem to want different things and speak different languages, and yet Hashem put them together and called the result Adam. Why create such a confusing creature?

2. Who Is Speaking When I Say "I"?

Rav Dessler gives us an extraordinary way of understanding the confusion. In *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* he writes הסתת היצר מגעת עד כדי - The persuasion of the yetzer reaches the point that we think its will is our will; it penetrates into our very self. The yetzer hara does not normally speak to us by saying, "You want this." It says, "I want this." "I need this." "I want to

sleep." "I want to enjoy." "I want to say this even though I know I should not." Rav Dessler asks a remarkable question: Who exactly is this "I"? Is the yetzer hara really "I"? My real "I" is my neshamah.

And notice what happens when the spiritual voice speaks. Suddenly the grammar changes. "You really should learn more." "You should get to davening on time." "You should make your brachos more carefully." "You should daven with more kavanah." When the body speaks, we say "I." When the neshamah speaks, we say "you." Rav Dessler therefore writes היצר גנב את הבחנת האני שלנו - the yetzer stole our sense of "I." The spiritual ani, the real "I," has somehow been pushed into the corner and turned into "you," while the yetzer hara has seized the first person. But it was not always that way. Rav Chaim Volozhiner explains in *Nefesh HaChaim* that before the sin Adam certainly possessed free will. Indeed, *bechirah* is essential to the entire purpose of Creation. Yet evil was not then part of his inner personality. Adam - כי הוא היה אדם ישר לגמרי - was completely upright. The yetzer hara confronted him from the outside, in the form of the Nachash. Only after the sin did the forces of evil become mixed into the person himself, ואז נתערבו כחות הרע בתוכו ממש - then the forces of evil became actually intermingled within him. Before the sin, Adam's internal consciousness was fundamentally straight. The voice telling him to rebel against Hashem was an outside voice. Perhaps this is what *Koheles* means when it says האלקים עשה את האדם ישר והמה בקשו חשבונות רבים - G-d made man upright, but they sought many calculations. Adam began as yashar. We somehow made ourselves complicated. Before the sin, the inner "I" was basically clear. After the sin, the Nachash moved inside. Man did not merely acquire another temptation. He lost clarity about who was doing the talking.

3. The Argument of the Nachash

But now we have a serious problem. If Adam and Chavah were yashar on the inside and the yetzer hara was still outside, how did the Nachash ever persuade them? How did he get in? The Torah introduces the Nachash by saying והנחש היה ערום מכל חית השדה - The serpent was more cunning than every beast of the field. His first words to Chavah are אף כי אמר אלקים לא תאכלו מכל עץ הגן - The sentence itself is difficult. What exactly does אף כי אמר mean? Rashi explains that the Nachash deliberately exaggerated Hashem's command, implying that Hashem had prohibited all the trees, in order to draw Chavah into conversation. She would correct him, the conversation would begin, and he would have his opening.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, however, hears something still deeper in the word אמר. The Nachash is saying: "Even though G-d said..." Hashem may have said that you may not eat, but Hashem did not only speak to you. Hashem also created you. He created the tree. He made it attractive. Most importantly, He created the desire within you to eat from it. Why are you listening to an outside voice of Hashem telling you not to eat when there is also an inner voice within you?

Rav Hirsch formulates the argument in astonishing words: כלום היצר - Is the impulse within you not also the voice of Hashem? If eating from the tree is truly bad for you, why did Hashem give it the power to attract you? Why did He give you the desire for it? כלום בכך לא אמר לכם בפירוש שהאכילה ואתם נבראתם זה לזה - Did He not thereby tell you explicitly that you and the food were created for one another? The Nachash was not simply saying, "Hashem said no, but ignore Him." That would have been a crude argument. The Nachash was saying something much more sophisticated: Hashem said one thing, but perhaps the way Hashem made you says something else.

Think about how powerful that argument is. "Trust yourself." "Be true to yourself." "Listen to your inner voice." We generally assume that penimiyus is more authentic than chitzoniyus, that what comes from inside is more truly "me" than something imposed from the outside. The

Nachash used precisely that truth against Chavah. Why listen to the external command when your internal desire seems to say something different? Maybe the desire itself is the deeper voice of Hashem. Maybe you misunderstood what He said. After all, why would you have such a strong desire for something if it were not really meant for you? And this is how the Nachash entered. Chavah was persuaded to confuse desire with identity. The Nachash first argued that the inner voice must be the authentic self, and as a consequence of the sin the Nachash himself became an inner voice. The yetzer hara, which had been outside, moved inside and began to say “I.” The yetzer tov, which reflects what we really want at the level of the neshamah, can now sound like somebody standing outside and saying what “you should” do. The Nachash has accomplished an extraordinary inversion. What is really “I” sounds like “you,” and what is really the intruder speaks as “I.” That is why the human being is so mysterious even to himself.

4. The Real You

Rav Aryeh Kaplan begins his essay “Meet the Real You” with a simple exercise. Point to yourself. Most people will point somewhere toward the center of their chest. But what are you pointing to? Your body? Your heart? Is your heart really “you”? Rav Kaplan notes that a person can receive another person’s heart and remain the same person. Philip Blaiberg, one of the early heart-transplant recipients, lived for many months with someone else’s heart beating inside his chest. Clearly, the heart is not the essence of the person.

So what is the real you? Koheles says וישב העפר על הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב - אל האלקים אשר נתנה - The dust returns to the earth as it was, while the spirit returns to G-d Who gave it. Rav Kaplan explains that the body, and even the physical brain, returns to the earth, while the neshamah, the identity of the person, endures. That is the essential person. That is the real you.

We all know this intellectually. The difficulty is that the body also feels very real. In fact, on an ordinary day I often feel the body far more clearly than I feel the neshamah. I know when I am hungry. I know when I am tired. I know when something hurts. The body announces itself constantly. The neshamah is quieter. And Hashem deliberately put these different elements together in one person.

Even great people contain apparently contradictory elements. Rav Hillel Goldberg once described Rav Yitzchak Hutner as a remarkable combination of worlds: Talmudist and poet, philosopher and chassid, intellectual and humorist, private person and public personality, connected to the world of the Vilna Gaon and yet practicing elements of Chassidus. Rav Hutner once applied to himself the Midrash that Adam was created from earth gathered from throughout the world. “I, too, am a gathering point,” he said, “from Poland, from Lithuania, from Riga, from Germany, from Eretz Yisrael, from the United States.”

But in a sense that is all of us. Hakadosh Baruch Hu gathered earth to form Adam, and then ויפה באפיו נשמת חיים - He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. We are made of earth and neshamah. We are pulled in different directions because different realities really are joined within us. The complexity is not an accident in Adam. It is built into the very way Adam was created.

5. Why Is His Name Adam?

This raises another fascinating question. Why are we called Adam? Why did Adam HaRishon call himself Adam? A name identifies essence. Adam himself is charged with naming the creatures and identifying what they are. So why choose a name that comes from אדמה, the earth? Why not call himself Nefesh or Neshamah? If the neshamah is the eternal and higher part of the human being, that would seem to be a much more beautiful name.

Rav Yehuda Asad asks this question in Chiddushei Mahari. He quotes the Midrash that when Hashem created man, the malachim objected מה הנפש היא חלק אלקי ממעל והגוף הוא - What is man that You should remember him? Hashem answered that Adam’s wisdom was greater than theirs. Hashem then asked Adam, “What is your name?” and Adam answered, “Adam.” Rav Yehuda Asad asks: this demonstrates Adam’s great wisdom? He seems not even to recognize his own essence. הנפש היא חלק אלקי ממעל והגוף הוא - the soul is a Divine portion from Above, while the body is dust from the earth. Why define yourself by the lower part? Rav Yehuda Asad gives a clever answer. Adam is actually the perfect name because it works in either direction. If Adam lives as a tzaddik, he can say, “Hashem, look what I accomplished even though I came from the dirt. You made me from earth, and look what I became.” And if he fails, he can say, “Hashem, what did You expect? I came from the earth.” Adam understood exactly what kind of creature he was. That was his wisdom.

But there is another dimension in the very word Adam. On one side stands אדמה - earth. On the other stands לעליון - I will resemble the One Above. The same word points downward and upward. The same human being can descend toward the earth from which his body was formed or rise toward the G-dliness breathed into him. We are adamah, and we are capable of adameh la’Elyon. Both possibilities are contained within the name Adam.

6. Holy Human Beings

And so we return to our question. Ribbono Shel Olam, why did You make it this way? Why put a neshamah into a body? Why allow the Nachash to get inside? Why give us inner voices and outer voices, desires that pull in one direction and a neshamah that pulls in another? Why make us so complicated?

I do not think we need to pretend that we can explain why Hashem gives every particular nisayon. We ask Hashem not to test us. But the more basic point is that this is the world Hashem created. Open Sefer Bereishis and look at the lives that unfold before us. People rise and fall. Families are built and fractured. Entire societies develop and collapse. There is the Mabul, there is the Dor Haflagah, there are the nisyonos of Avraham Avinu. Again and again we see conflict, struggle, success, failure, and rebuilding. This is the human story.

It is going to be confusing. There will be inner voices and outer voices. There will be body and soul. There will be conflict and opposition. That does not mean something has gone wrong with avodas Hashem.

Somehow, Hashem has placed the meaning and purpose of our lives within that struggle. We do not seek nisyonos, but when the struggle is there, we should not imagine that spirituality would be more authentic if only there were no resistance. This is the arena in which human avodas Hashem takes place.

The Tosh Rebbe found this idea in the words with which the Rema begins the Shulchan Aruch, וייתי ה' לנגדי תמיד - I have placed Hashem before me always. The word לנגדי means “before me,” but negdi can also mean that which stands opposite me. Sometimes encountering Hashem means doing what is negdi, what goes against my immediate inclination. There are times when holiness feels natural and there are times when it does not. There are moments of le’eila ule’eila, and there are moments when simply reaching le’eila requires work.

The Torah concludes the first account of Creation with the words אשר ברא אלקים לעשות - which G-d created to do. Hakadosh Baruch Hu created a world with something left for us to do. And perhaps much of what we have to do is ourselves. We are not finished products. We are not angels. We contain earth and neshamah, the pull downward and the possibility of reaching upward.

Chazal compare Klal Yisrael both to the stars and to the dust. When we rise, we can rise extraordinarily high. When we fall, we can fall very low. That is Adam: adamah and adameh la'Elyon. גוף ונשמה. Body and soul.

And now we can return to where we began. Tishrei eventually ends. The le'eila ule'eila moments recede. The apple returns, and we return to the ordinary world of body and soul. But that does not mean that we have left the world of holiness. Hashem does not expect us to remain angels, because we were never meant to be angels. ואנשי קדש תהיון לי - You shall be holy people unto Me. Hashem wants human beings who are holy. Even when different voices pull us in different directions, even when the body feels more real than the soul, and even when the Nachash has managed to speak in the language of "I," the neshamah remains the deepest truth of who we are. Our task is to reclaim the "I," to remember which voice expresses our essential self, and then to bring that neshamah into the ordinary world of eating, working, sleeping, family, responsibility, and daily life. Being human is not a contradiction to being holy. That is precisely where holiness has to be created.

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Kol Torah Ha'azinu and Yom Kippur

Saying VaYechulu with Another Person [or Not]

By Rav Chaim Jachter

A Popular Mishnah Berurah Ruling

It is widely accepted (at least in Ashkenazic circles) that someone who missed saying VaYechulu with the Tzibbur should grab another to say it along with him. This practice is based on the Mishnah Berurah (268:19), which says that one should not say VaYechulu with fewer than two people. However, many do not realize that the Mishnah Berurah's ruling is not well-based in earlier sources.

Tosafot and the Rosh

Tosafot (Pesachim 106a s.v. Zochreihu) and the Rosh (Pesachim 10:15) say that we repeat VaYechulu after Friday night's Arvit's silent Amidah, as a back-up for Shabbatot that fall on Yom Tov, when VaYechulu is not included in the silent Amida.

The Mishnah Berurah wants no less than two since the post-Amida VaYechulu recital is Eidut (testimony) to Hashem creating the world, and a minimum of two of Eidim is required for testimony in Beit Din (Devarim 17:6 and 19:15). However, according to Tosafot and the Rosh, the post-Amida VaYechulu has nothing to do with Eidut.

Tur and the Shulchan Aruch

However, the Tur (Orach Chaim 268) and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 268:7) mention the custom of reciting the post-Amida VaYechulu aloud, standing. The Taz (Orach Chaim 268:5) explains that the Minhag stems from VaYechulu, which constitutes testimony that Hashem created the world (one stands when testifying; see Shavu'ot 30). Indeed, the Gemara (Shabbat 119b) states that one who prays and says VaYechulu on Friday night becomes a Shutaf (partner) to Hashem in Creation. This assertion reflects common business wisdom that without publicity, a product does not exist. Thus, without our publicizing that Hashem created the world, it is as if it did not happen. We are Hashem's partner when we say VaYechulu Friday night, since we act as his publicist. Rashi in BeReishit 24:7 expresses a similar point when he says that before Avraham Avinu spread the word about Hashem, it was as if Hashem was only Elokei HaShayim, God of the heavens. Only after Avraham Avinu spread recognition of Hashem among humanity did He become Elokai HaAretz, God of the earth, as well.

The Taz and the Mishnah Berurah

The Taz takes this idea to the next level, saying that an individual should not say VaYechulu alone. Rather, a Minyan is required to testify to Creation. The Mishnah Berurah codifies the Taz and adds that, according to this approach, one should say VaYechulu with at least one other person. However, the Taz presents the choice as between saying VaYechulu or saying it with a Minyan. The Taz believes that in the silent Amida's VaYechulu, we testify as individuals to Creation. However, in the post-Amida VaYechulu, we testify as a community to Creation.

According to the Taz, there is no greater significance to two people saying VaYechulu than to one person doing so. Moreover, the post-VaYechulu bears little resemblance to Beit Din testimony, which requires at least two Eidim.

VaYechulu is said at night, whereas Beit Din testimony takes place during the day, with witnesses testifying separately, not concurrently. Moreover, even those who are Pesulim L'Edut (not accepted as witnesses in Beit Din, such as women and children) are not excluded from saying VaYechulu.

The Chazon Ish

The Chazon Ish (Orach Chaim 38:10) thus does not accept the Mishnah Berurah's two-person requirement for VaYechulu, noting that it lacks a basis in earlier sources.

Sephardic Poskim

Sephardic Poskim as well do not side with the Mishnah Berurah on this issue (Rav Ben Tzion Abba Sha'ul, Teshuvot Ohr L'tziyon 2:18 and Yalkut Yosef Orach Chaim 267:24). Moreover, they do not follow the Pri Megadim (codified by the Bi'ur Halacha 268:7 s.v. Ume'umad), who recommends hurrying one's silent Amida to enable him to say VaYechulu with the Tzibbur. Both Rav Abba Sha'ul and Yalkut Yosef view Tosafot and the Rosh's reason for the post-Amida VaYechulu as primary, and saying a proper silent Amida takes priority over saying VaYechulu with the Tzibbur.

However, Yalkut Yosef does write that one who says VaYechulu alone should not intend his recital to serve as Eidut.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik

When the Talmidim in his Yeshiva University Shiur in 1984 asked Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik his opinion about this matter, he sided with the Chazon Ish. Rav Soloveitchik smiled and said that VaYechulu is a matter of "Ne'emanut" but not "Eidut."

Although Rav Soloveitchik did not explain what he meant by this distinction, I believe he meant as follows: Ne'emanut refers to the trust we may have in other religious Jews regarding ritual matters. Regarding Ne'emanut, there is no requirement for two Eidim. However, there is also no difference between an individual and a Tzibbur regarding Ne'emanut.

I believe that Rav Soloveitchik refers to the trust later generations have in earlier generations in transmitting God's message. This trust is like the trust Yitzchak Avinu exhibited in Avraham Avinu at the Akeida, where the former believed the latter that Hashem communicated to him that he was to offer him as a sacrifice at Har HaMoriyah.

We transmit the Mesorah as individuals and as a community. With VaYechulu, we present our "Ne'emanut" both as individuals in the silent Amida and as a community in the post-Amida VaYechulu.

Explaining the Popularity of the Mishnah Berurah's Ruling

Despite the cogent criticism of the Mishnah Berurah's ruling, its popularity has not waned. I suggest that, intuitively, we are drawn to highlight our role as Hashem's witnesses. Indeed, Yishayahu HaNavi stunningly (43:10; Ashkenazim recite this Pasuk as part of the Haftarah for Parashat BeReishit) presents Hashem describing us as "Atem Eidai," you are My witnesses.

We Jews serve as the Torah's "companion volume," for we are (overwhelmingly) the biological descendants of the nation that witnessed the great events of the ten Makkot, Kri'at Yam Suf, and most importantly, Ma'amad Har Sinai. We serve as the witnesses supporting the veracity of the Torah's claims. Thus, we relish the opportunity to emphasize our role as Hashem's witnesses and therefore embrace the Mishnah Berurah's ruling to grab another person to say VaYechulu. One cautionary note. I have seen people grab another to say VaYechulu with them during Kaddish. One should not mar the beauty of the Mishnah Berurah's practice by violating the prohibition to interrupt the recital of Kaddish. One should wait until after the Tefilla to say VaYechulu with a second person.

Conclusion

We are Bnei Nevi'im Pesachim 66a accords great respect to the spiritual intuitions of our people, declaring that if we are not prophets, we are the children of prophets, "Im Lo Nevi'im Heim, Bnei Nevi'im Heim". Thus, although the Mishnah Berurah's recommendation to say VaYechulu with two people is highly questionable, its widespread acceptance (at least in Ashkenazi circles) directs us to respect it.

Adapted from

שורי ונחמה - Reflections & Introspection – by Rav Moshe Shapiro (1935–2017): Bereishis: The Meaning of a Beginning

Synopsis

A true beginning is more than a first moment. It contains the direction and potential of everything that follows. This is why the first *maamar* of Creation, the Aron, Noach's *teivah*, and Matan Torah are all described as beginnings that cannot be fully measured by ordinary rules. The same is true of the Jewish soul: its beginning is *emunah*, and knowledge grows out of it. Klal Yisrael is called *reishis* because its existence stays rooted in Hashem and Torah. Our task is to keep everything we become connected to that beginning.

1. Why Is Creation Called *Maaseh Bereishis*?

Chazal call the six days of Creation *yemei bereishis*, and we say every Friday night *zecher lemaaseh bereishis*. Why "the work of the beginning," and not simply "the work of Creation"? What does *Bereishis* add?

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 32a) offers a clue. The Mishnah says the world was created with ten utterances, but the Torah records only nine *vayomer Elokim*. The Gemara answers: *Bereishis nami maamar hu*, "Bereishis is itself an utterance," as the pasuk says *bidvar Hashem shamayim naasu*. So before light, sky, land, plants, animals, and man, there was a first *maamar*. What did it create?

The Ramban explains that it created a primordial substance, *yesod dak meod*, extremely subtle and without form, but able to receive form. This is what the Greeks called *hyle*, matter in potential. Everything created during the six days was already contained in it in potential, and each later *maamar* brought some of that potential into actuality.

That is why Creation is called *Maaseh Bereishis*. The six days were not six unrelated additions. They were the unfolding of what the beginning already contained. But this raises a deeper question: what is a beginning?

2. A Beginning Contains What Follows

A beginning is not just the first item in a sequence. It is called a beginning only because it starts something that continues. As Chazal say, *gufa basar reisha garir*, "the body follows the head" (Eruvin 41a): the beginning sets the direction of what comes after it.

On this basis the Seforno and the Gra understand *Bereishis* as the creation of time itself: *bereishis betechilas hazman*, the first indivisible moment, before which there was no time. Time was not a backdrop that Hashem placed the world into. It was one of the things He created.

This changes how we think about existence. We usually imagine that a person exists and, separately, time passes over him. In truth, a created being's time *is* its existence. To be given existence is to be given a beginning, a

course, and an end, a journey from *reishis* toward *acharis*. When the journey is finished, so is that form of existence.

This is the meaning of *maggid mereishis acharis* (Yeshayahu 46:10) and *tov acharis davar mereishiso* (Koheles 7:8). The end is bound up with the beginning because a real beginning already contains a direction. A person who thinks, "I exist, and meanwhile time is going by," has misunderstood. His life is the time Hashem gave him, and each day is a step from his beginning toward the purpose for which he was created.

3. The Beginning Is Beyond the System It Begins

We can understand how time continues, but not its first point. Every moment we know has a moment before it. If something came before the first moment, it wasn't first. If nothing did, we cannot picture it, because all our thinking happens inside time. So the beginning of time belongs to our world and also touches what lies beyond it. It is where something outside our experience enters it, which is why it cannot be fully measured by the rules of what comes after.

The same principle appears in space. Chazal say *mekom aron eino min hamiddah* (Yoma 21a): the Aron had exact dimensions (Shemos 25:10), yet it took up no measurable space in the Kodesh HaKodashim. This is a contradiction only if the beginning must obey the measurements of what grows from it. The Aron stood on the *Even HaShesiyah*, called that because *mimenah hushas haolam*, the world was founded from it (Yoma 54b). It marks the starting point of physical space, just as the first moment marks the starting point of time. We need not explain how the miracle worked; we need to see what it teaches. The origin of the created order cannot be fully explained by the order that comes from it. That is what *bereishis* means: every true beginning points beyond itself.

4. The Teivah of Noach: A New Bereishis

Hashem gave Noach exact dimensions for the *teivah*: 300 by 50 by 30 amos (Bereishis 6:15). Yet it held Noach, his family, and a vast number of animals, which could only happen miraculously. Rabbeinu Bachya asks why precise measurements were needed at all.

The answer is that the *teivah* was not just a large boat. It was a new *bereishis*. Hashem said He would wipe out everything He had created (6:7, 7:23), so the world that came from the first beginning was ending. For existence to continue, a new point of beginning was needed, and that was the *teivah*.

This explains the Zohar on *vahakimosi es berisi itach uvasa el hateivah* (6:18). The Zohar asks, "What is this *teivah*?" and answers, *Aron haBris*.

Both had exact measurements, and in both, what happened inside transcended those measurements. That is the nature of a *reishis*: a point from which a world can begin again.

5. Matan Torah Was Another Beginning

The Gemara (Zevachim 116a) says that when the Torah was given, the nations' kings heard a tremendous sound and asked Bilaam whether another flood was coming. He replied that Hashem had sworn never to bring another, and that this was Hashem giving the Torah to His people, citing *Hashem lamabul yashav... Hashem oz leamo yiten* (Tehillim 29:10-11).

Why did they mistake Matan Torah for a flood? Because both were the start of a world. The Mabul ended one world, and the *teivah* began the next. At Har Sinai, the Torah became a new beginning. The Luchos were placed in the Aron, and the Sefer Torah beside it (Devarim 31:26). The *teivah* saved Noach from the flood. From Matan Torah on, the Torah, held in and alongside the Aron, is the *teivah* through which the world endures. That is why the same chapter of Tehillim joins the Mabul and *oz leamo yiten*. The first destroyed a world that had become corrupt, and the second established the *reishis* from which the world could continue.

This is also the Gemara in Shabbos (88a) about the extra *hei* in *yom hashishi*. Hashem made a condition with Creation: if Israel accepts the Torah, you will endure; if not, I will return you to *tohu vavohu*. The world continues to exist only through its connection to this new beginning. What does this mean for a human being?

6. Olam, Shanah, Nefesh

Sefer Yetzirah describes Creation in three categories: *olam* (space), *shanah* (time), and *nefesh* (man). Each has a *reishis*. For time, it is the first moment of Creation. For space, it is the *Even HaShesiyah* and the place of the Aron. For man, it is *emunah*.

This does not mean rejecting thought. Torah demands that we learn, investigate, and understand. But all thinking starts from something prior to thinking. The intellect can analyze, compare, and reason about what exists, but it cannot step outside existence to explain the first point from which existence comes.

This is why *bereishis bara Elokim* corresponds to *anochi Hashem Elokecha*. The Ten Maamaros parallel the Aseres HaDibros: the first *maamar* is *Bereishis* and the first *dibbur* is *Anochi*. The Ramban connects Shabbos to both: one who keeps Shabbos *meid al maaseh bereishis umodeh bemitzvas anochi*. The beginning of the physical world is recognizing that Hashem brought it into being, and the beginning of the inner world of man is the same recognition, *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*. That is *emunah*.

The Navi's image is *vetakativ yated bemakom neeman* (Yeshayahu 22:23): a peg fastened in a secure place. *Emunah* means a person does not rest on himself. His existence is anchored in a Source beyond him. Understanding, calculation, and action grow from that anchor, but they cannot produce their own beginning.

7. Why Klal Yisrael Is Called Reishis

The Navi calls Israel *reishis tevuasoh* (Yirmiyahu 2:3). *Reishis* here is not about chronology. It means that one's existence stays connected to its Source. Chazal say that Yehoshua once gathered all of Israel *bein shnei bedei aron*, between the two poles of the Aron. Even the 600,000 adult men were only part of the nation, so this is impossible by ordinary measure. It follows the same principle as *mekom aron eino min hamiddah*, and Klal Yisrael can fit there because *ein reishis ela Yisrael*.

This says something basic about Jewish existence. Other nations measure their strength by population, territory, wealth, and armies. These are real, and Torah does not tell us to ignore the natural world, but they do not explain Klal Yisrael. Our existence is that of a *reishis*, tied to a point that cannot be reduced to the measures of ordinary history.

This is not only a promise of survival. It is an obligation. If we try to live only by *maaseh*, *cheshbon*, *daas*, and *chochmah* while cutting them off from where they come from, we have misunderstood ourselves. The beginning of the Jewish soul is *emunah*, and the beginning of Jewish history is Torah. We are not asked to abandon reason, only to know where reason begins.

8. From Emunah to Daas

We can now answer the opening question. Creation is called *Maaseh Bereishis* because everything depends on its beginning. The first *maamar* held the potential of all Creation. Time begins at a point that the time following it cannot explain. Space begins at the *Even HaShesiyah*, where the Aron stands beyond ordinary measure. When the Mabul destroyed the first world, the *teivah* became a new *reishis*. At Har Sinai, Torah became the beginning from which the world would endure. And in man, the beginning is *emunah*.

This is why the pasuk reads *vearastich li beemunah, veyadaat es Hashem* (Hoshea 2:22). *Emunah* comes first, and then knowledge of Hashem. This does not diminish *daas*; it explains how *daas* becomes possible. A beginning is not a place to stay. It is something to proceed from, so a person must keep learning, questioning, and deepening his understanding throughout life, while keeping all of it connected to where it began.

That may be what the first word of the Torah is teaching. *Bereishis* does not only say that the world once began. It tells us what it means to exist: to have been given a beginning, and therefore a direction. Our days are not time passing around us but the course Hashem gave us from our *reishis* toward our *acharis*. This is especially true of Klal Yisrael. Our strength lies in knowing that we do not stand on our own. Our beginning is *emunah*, our *teivah* is Torah, and everything we are meant to become must grow from that beginning.

Adapted and translated from

עיונים בספר בראשית
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הוא הנחש הוא יצר הרע - The Serpent as the Yetzer Hara

The Torah tells us, ותפקחנה עיני שניהם וידעו כי עירמם הם, - *Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked* (Bereishis 3:7). Rashi, citing Bereishis Rabbah, explains, מצוה אחת היתה בידם ונתערטלו הימנה, - *one mitzvah had been in their hands, and they had stripped themselves of it*. Adam and Chavah faced only one restriction. Yet before the sin could occur, that simple command had to become blurred, enlarged, and weakened in their minds.

What is difficult to understand is how one simple command could lead to such a profound failure. Adam and Chavah were given an entire garden with only one forbidden tree. How did that single restriction come to dominate Chavah's perception of the garden? The answer emerges from the subtle changes in the serpent's words and in Chavah's own language. The Torah allows us to watch the *yetzer hara* at work, step by step.

The Command as Hashem Gave It

Hashem's command begins not with deprivation but with abundance: מכל עץ - *From every tree of the garden you may freely eat* (Bereishis 2:16). Only afterward comes the single restriction, ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל, - *but from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat* (2:17). The order matters. The permitted sphere fills the garden; only one boundary remains.

At first glance, פרו ורבו in Bereishis 1:28 might seem to have preceded this prohibition. Chazal teach, however, that the mitzvah of *peru urevu* derives from the later command to Noah and his descendants (Sanhedrin 59b). Rashi to Bereishis 9:7 likewise explains that the earlier statement was a blessing, while the later one was a command. Thus the prohibition concerning the tree may properly be viewed as the first command placed upon Adam.

How the Yetzer Hara Changes the Picture

The serpent now enters, and Chazal identify him with the force at work within man: הוא השטן הוא יצר הרע - *he is the Satan, he is the yetzer hara* (Bava Basra 16a). His first question is striking. Hashem had permitted every tree but one, yet the serpent asks אף כי אמר אלקים לא תאכלו מכל עץ הגן - *Did G-d indeed say that you may not eat from any tree of the garden?* (Bereishis 3:1). Rashi explains that although the serpent saw them eating the other fruits, הרבה עליה דברים כדי שתשיבנו ויבא לדבר באותו העץ - *he drew her into an extended conversation so that she would answer him and he could come to speak about that tree*. The *yetzer hara* does not begin by telling Chavah to eat. It begins by getting her to discuss Hashem's command on its terms.

The Ohr HaChaim sees here another characteristic tactic. The prohibition is exaggerated until obedience appears impossible. The *yetzer hara* has not yet denied the command; it has redrawn it as oppressive.

The opening words אף כי are themselves revealing. Rashi reads them as שמה בקושטא ארי אמר ה' - *Perhaps He told you not to eat from any tree of the garden*. Onkelos gives them a more incredulous tone, לא תכלון - *Is it really true that Hashem said you may not eat*. Either way, the serpent speaks as though he sympathizes with Chavah over a harsh restriction. The garden is filled with למאכל וטוב למראה - *every tree pleasant to the sight and good for food* (Bereishis 2:9), yet he teaches her to experience abundance as deprivation.

The Serpent Has Already Won Half the Argument

At first Chavah appears to reject the serpent's distortion. Yet her words show that something has changed. Hashem had said לא תאכל מכל עץ הגן - *from every tree of the garden you may freely eat*. Chavah says only מפרי עץ הגן - *of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat* (Bereishis 3:2). The expansive מכל and the generous תאכל have disappeared. She has not accepted the serpent's claim, but she has begun to see the garden through his eyes.

At the same time, the prohibition grows larger. Chavah calls the forbidden tree העץ אשר בתוך הגן - *the tree that is in the midst of the garden* (3:3), moving it psychologically to the center, and she adds touching: לא תאכלו ממנו

you shall not eat from it and you shall not touch it. Most strikingly, Hashem's command is introduced by ויצו ה' אלקים - *Hashem G-d commanded* (2:16), while Chavah says merely אמר אלקים - *G-d said* (3:3). The command has already lost some of its authority in the retelling. Benno Jacob notes a telling contrast with Noah. Hashem says ויאמר אלקים - *G-d said to Noah: Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood* (Bereishis 6:13-14), yet Noah responds ויעש נח ככל אשר צוה אתו - *Noah did according to everything that G-d had commanded him* (6:22). Noah hears an *amira* as a *tzivui*; Chavah turns a *tzivui* into an *amira*.

From Command to Doubt

What remains to be understood is how the serpent moves from exaggerating the prohibition to denying its consequence. Hashem had warned כי ביום אכלך - *for on the day you eat from it, you shall surely die* (Bereishis 2:17). Chavah says פן תמתון - *lest you die* (3:3). What Hashem stated with certainty has become a possibility.

Rashi states the next problem succinctly: הוסיפה על הציווי לפיכך באה לידי גרעון - *she added to the command, and therefore came to diminish it* (Rashi, Bereishis 3:3). Hashem prohibited eating; Chavah added touching. On the next pasuk Rashi, following Bereishis Rabbah, explains that the serpent pushed her against the tree and argued that just as touching had not killed her, neither would eating. The addition supplied the serpent with the means to undermine the command itself. This is the warning אל תוסף על דבריו פן יוכיח - *Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you and you be found false* (Mishlei 30:6).

The Haamek Davar finds the same opening in פן. Once the warning is expressed as *perhaps*, the serpent can portray it as intimidation rather than truth. This is a recurring strategy of the *yetzer hara*: to persuade a person that the consequences described by Torah will not really occur, or will not be as serious as they sound.

The Final Argument: Question Hashem's Motive

We can now understand why the serpent's final argument is more radical. כי ידע אלקים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם כאלקים ידעי טוב ורע - *For G-d knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like G-d, knowing good and evil* (Bereishis 3:5). Rashi explains the accusation, *every craftsman resents those who share his craft*. According to the serpent, Hashem Himself ate from the tree and created the world, and now fears that man too will become *creators of worlds*. The *yetzer hara* has moved from questioning the command to questioning the motives of the One Who gave it.

Once the Inner Resistance Is Gone

With this explanation, the next pasuk follows naturally: וטרא האשה כי טוב העץ למאכל - *The woman saw that the tree was good for food* (Bereishis 3:6).

Rashi explains, *she accepted the serpent's words, they appealed to her, and she believed him*. Only then does the Torah describe the tree as טוב למאכל, תאוה לעינים and נחמד להשכיל. The desire that appears at the end was prepared by the argument that came before it. Once the mind accepted the serpent's reasoning, the eye saw the tree differently.

The Torah later warns - ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זנים אחריהם - *Do not stray after your hearts and after your eyes, after which you go astray* (Bamidbar 15:39). Here that process unfolds before us. ותקה מפריו ותאכל ותתן - *She took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate* (Bereishis 3:6). By this point there is no debate or hesitation. The struggle had already been lost in the stages that preceded the act.

The Punishment That Is Already Inside the Sin

But the Torah does not end its analysis of sin with the act itself. Why does Adam hide before Hashem has pronounced any punishment? Because there is a punishment that follows sin, and a punishment contained within sin. *They heard the voice of Hashem G-d, and Adam and his wife hid from Hashem G-d*

among the trees of the garden (Bereishis 3:8). The sinner has already been changed by what he has done.

Shir HaShirim Rabbah (3:14) explains, *עד שלא יחטא אדם נותנין לו אימה ויראה* - *and before a person sins, awe and fear are placed upon him and he fears others*. After the sin Adam says *I heard Your voice and I was afraid* (Bereishis 3:10). Sin has not merely exposed Adam to an external penalty. It has changed the person who hears Hashem's voice.

Even the place of hiding carries the same message. Cassuto notes the repeated words *betoch*, *etz*, and *gan*. The tree that had been *in the midst of the garden*, became the setting of the sin; afterward Adam and Chavah hide *among the trees of the garden*. The garden given to man as a place of blessing has become a place in which he hides from Hashem.

So now we can understand Rashi's comment with which we began: מצוה אחת - *one mitzvah had been in their hands, and they had stripped themselves of it*. The first victory of the *yetzer hara* was not the eating of the fruit. It was the confusion that preceded it. Abundance became deprivation; one boundary became the center of existence; a command became an *amira*; certainty became doubt; and finally Hashem's motive itself became suspect. By the time Chavah reached for the fruit, the decisive struggle had already taken place. The battle with the *yetzer hara* is often won or lost long before the actual act, in the way we allow ourselves to understand Hashem's command. Once man rejected that boundary, the voice before which he had once been able to stand became a voice from which he hid.

Questions for Further Study

On אף כי אמר אלקים לא תאכלו מכל עץ הגן (Bereishis 3:1), compare the King James rendering with Buber-Rosenzweig. Which interpretation of אף does each follow, and which seems closer to *peshuto shel mikra*?

On לא מות תמתון (Bereishis 3:4), Rashi cites the Midrash that the serpent pushed Chavah against the tree and argued that just as touching did not cause death, eating would not cause death. What difficulty in the pasuk is Rashi addressing through this Midrash?

On כי ידע אלקים (Bereishis 3:5), what is the meaning of כי? What unstated link in the serpent's argument lies between verses 4 and 5, and how does the tactic of verse 5 differ from that of verse 4?

Compare Shir HaShirim Rabbah above with Sifrei Bamidbar 5:3, which contrasts Klal Yisrael's fearlessness before the sin of the Golden Calf with their later fear of the radiance of Moshe's face. What idea is common to the two teachings?