



Parshas Bereishis

For the week ending 27 Tishrei 5759
16 - 17 October 1998

Overview

In the beginning, Hashem creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, Hashem rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbos, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava — the Human pair — are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing “sin,” Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain in childbirth. Now begins the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the main subject of world history. Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to Hashem. Hevel gives the finest of his flock, and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain until the birth of Noach. After the death of Sheis, Mankind descends into evil, and Hashem decides that He will blot out Man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noach, finds favor with Hashem.

Insights

ON AND ON

“In the beginning...” (1:1)

Life is like a film. When we watch a film, we’re not watching a homogeneous whole, we’re watching hundreds of individual pictures. The “magic” of the cinema is based on a peculiarity of the human brain. When presented with separate images in rapid succession, the brain ceases to discern them as separate images, rather it links them all together. This is called *the persistence of vision*. The result is the illusion of movement — motion pictures. Our eyes and brain retain a visual impression for about 1/30th of a second (the exact time depends on the brightness of the image.)

Persistence of vision accounts for our failure to notice that a motion picture screen is dark about half the time, and that a television image is just one bright, fast, little dot sweeping the screen. Motion pictures show one new frame every 1/24th of a second. Each frame is shown three times during this period. The eye retains the image of each frame long enough to give us the illusion of smooth motion.

Someone once said that “life is a movie.” I doubt they realized the truth of their words. Life is like a movie because, like a movie, life is an illusion of continuity. G-d didn’t just create the world once. He re-creates it every split second. That’s what our Sages mean when they say that G-d “renews the creation every day.”

Every second is a separate and distinct creation. It just looks like a continuous whole.

When a craftsman makes an artifact, from the moment of its completion that artifact becomes independent of its creator. Not so the Creation. Even though G-d finished the Creation in seven days, it still needs His support. If for one second G-d would remove his attention from Creation, it would return to nothingness.

From the beginning of the world to this very day, G-d’s statement “*In the beginning*” goes on and on, re-created over and over again.

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“In the beginning...” (1:1)

Beginnings. And endings. The beginning has a quality that the end does not possess, and the end has that which the beginning lacks.

Beginning has its strength in quality, but it is weak in quantity. The beginning of something is its source, its root, its focal point. It is the powerhouse of its strength, the wellspring of its life-force.

On the other hand, ending is strong in quantity, in size, in extent — but it is weak in quality: The end of something represents its maximum span, its fullest extrusion into the physical world — its greatest presence, its most developed incarnation.

However its greatest extent is also the weakest expression of its essence: The leaves of a tree may define its ultimate reach, but they are also the weakest point of its life-force. The roots, on the other hand, may be hidden, but they contain its very essence.

The greatness of an empire is evaluated by its furthest outpost, but it is also there that it is at its weakest, with its lines of communication at full stretch.

This is all true in the physical world. But on the spiritual plane, quality and quantity are identical at the beginning as they are at the end.

This is the hallmark of Shabbos. Shabbos is the end of Creation, but it is also its first purpose and goal. “Last in action; first in thought.”

Shabbos has to come after the six working days. Even if you get lost in the desert and forget which day of the week it is, you nevertheless count six days and only then keep a day of Shabbos. Not the reverse.

But Shabbos is not just the end. For every Shabbos throughout the generations is still called “*Shabbos Bereishis*” — the first Shabbos — because every Shabbos contains the primal power of the first, of the root. The source of blessing and the root of holiness.

“Yet your longing will be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (3:16)

There once was a thief who stole a credit card from a wealthy woman. The card actually belonged to her husband. After a few days, the thief was surprised to find that no one had put a stop on the card. The months came and went and he was able to run up extremely large sums. Eventually he was caught on another offense and when he was searched the stolen credit card was found.

The credit card company obviously wanted to know why no one had reported the theft of the card. They contacted the husband and asked him why he had not reported its theft to the police.

“I decided not to report it” said the husband “when I saw that the thief was spending less than my wife.”

The Talmud (*Bava Metzia 59a*) tells us that when a husband honors his wife, it bodes well for the state of his bank account — he will become rich.

If you think about it, the reverse should be true. Honoring one’s spouse with one’s credit card is unlikely to be a harbinger of wealth to come.

G-d, however, always rewards us measure for measure. When a husband honors his wife, he lightens the curse that was decreed on her at the time of the sin of Adam and Chava “*he shall rule over you.*”

The Torah views man’s domination of woman as a curse, something to be avoided. Just as no one walks barefoot in the forest in order to help the snake fulfill its curse of “*you will bite his heel,*” so must a husband strive to avoid being the cause of the curse “*he shall rule over you.*”

So, when a husband lightens his wife’s curse by not behaving like a despot, Hashem also lightens his punishment — “*by the sweat of your brow, you shall eat bread.*” Instead of having to work hard for a living, Hashem sends him riches, lightening the amount of sweat it takes to put bread on the table...and his credit card remains without a dent.

Sources:

On And On - *Mayana shel Torah*

First And Last - *Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in L'Torah U'Imoadim*

Credit Where It's Due - *Rabbi Mordechai Druck, heard from Rabbi Calev Gestetner*

Haftorah: Isaiah 42:5 - 43:10

The Haftorah takes up the Parsha's theme of Creation. It stresses that the Creation was not just a primordial event, but that Hashem creates the world anew at every second. Without this constant re-creation, the world would cease to exist.

Similarly, Hashem did not just create the world and then leave it to its own devices, like winding up a clock. Rather, He involves Himself with the smallest event in creation. The Haftorah also mirrors the creation of Adam (the key player in Hashem's purpose in creating the world) with the role of the Jewish People who are to be the key role-model for the world — *a light unto the nations*.

Just as in the Parsha, Adam sins but is given the opportunity to redeem himself, so the Haftorah describes how the Jewish People falter and sin, and yet, through Hashem's mercy, Israel is never abandoned, for they are the agents of Hashem's original purpose.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU DO

“Hashem desires for the sake of His righteousness that the Torah be made great and glorious.” (42:21)

Why are there so many *mitzvos* in the Torah? You've got to do this. You can't do that. Can't a person just think holy thoughts? Why do we have to *do* so many things?

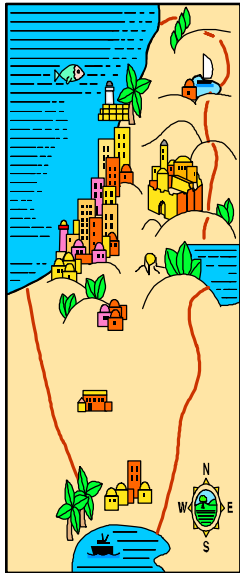
You are what you do. What a person does dictates who he is. G-d gave the Jewish People a multitude of *mitzvos* so that we would be constantly involved in actions of holiness. Through these actions, inevitably we would become holy and deserving of an eternal existence.

It's not enough to think holy thoughts. Holy thoughts are banished by unholy actions. However if a person does *mitzvos* and studies Torah — even if his motivation is self-serving, the mere process of studying the Torah and performing the *mitzvos* will impact on his personality and he will immediately start to change for the better. You become what you do — not what you think.

• *Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 16*

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



THE LOFTIEST LEVEL

Adam and Noach were not given more than seven commandments by Hashem. If these were sufficient for them to achieve spiritual perfection, why was it necessary for the Jewish Nation to be commanded so many hundreds more, and for Jews living in *Eretz Yisrael* to be required to observe all of the 613 *mitzvos*?

The answer is supplied by the Torah in these words:

“Every *mitzvah* which I command you today you shall observe and fulfill in order to live and prosper, and to inherit the land which Hashem has vowed to give to your forefathers.” (*Devarim 8:1*)

Spiritual perfection has different levels. The level achieved through the seven Noachide commandments is a successful, disciplined life in both the relationship to G-d and to man. But in order to prosper spiritually and achieve a level which transcends time and place, it was necessary for Jews to be given the *mitzvos* of the Torah which prepare them for eternity and an intimacy with Hashem. To achieve the loftiest level, they must also fulfill those special *mitzvos* connected with *Eretz Yisrael* so that they will inherit the land whose spiritual power makes possible prophecy, the constant presence of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) and a miraculous existence. This is what Hashem promised the first of the patriarchs when He vowed (*Bereishis 17:8*): “I will give you the land...and I shall be your G-d.”

Rabbi Leibish Meir Malbim - Parshas Eikev

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