

BS"D

(Chidushei Maran Riz HaLevi)

This explanation of the Gemara was told to the preeminent Rosh Yeshivah Rav Boruch Ber Leibowitz. He allegedly commented, "The explanation is correct, but it's still a chutzpah on the Gentiles' part to say what they did..."

It is recorded that when the Brisker Rav said the above dvar Torah he added that the Divine purpose of the new train route between St. Petersburg and Berlin was to facilitate students traveling to the renowned Volozhin Yeshivah. Likewise, the construction of the Trans-Siberian train route was extremely costly and took its toll of human lives. It was perceived as being of no value. The Brisker Rav commented that its Divine purpose was to transport the yeshivah students from Eastern Europe to Shanghai in relative comfort during World War II.



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ON **BEREISHIS** - 5766

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Parashas Bereishis from
Shabbos Delights A collection of enlightening and stimulating comments on the parashah By Rabbi Aryeh Leib Lopiansky



From Yeshivat Har Etzion Office <office@etzion.org.il>
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This parasha series is dedicated in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l. Dedicated in loving memory of Esther Okon, on the occasion of her yahrzeit.

The Snake's Sin and Its Punishment
By Rav Yaakov Medan

THE SNAKE'S SIN "The snake was the most cunning of all the beasts of the field that the Lord God had created...." (3:1) What was the snake's sin? Rashi (3:14) explains, based upon the Gemara (Sanhedrin 29a), that it is considered a "mesit" - an inciter: "Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: From where do we learn that no arguments are presented for an inciter? From the primeval snake, as Rabbi Salmi taught: The snake had many arguments which it did not present. And why did the Holy One, Blessed be He, not argue for the snake? Because the snake itself did not argue." Tosafot and Chizkuni have difficulty with this explanation, "for no one is called an 'inciter' unless he incites to idolatry." They go on to explain that the transgression of eating from the Tree of Knowledge bordered on idolatry, since the snake told Chava that eating of the tree would turn her and Adam into "gods, knowing good and evil." It is possible that the idolatry of the snake involved not only its comparison between the creature and its Creator, but also its slander against the Creator.[1] The snake accuses God of fearing that man will become as wise as He, knowing good and evil, and therefore forbidding him to eat of the tree.

The idea that God "fears" man and therefore tries to curtail his activities is a familiar theme in various mythologies - from the Greek back to the Canaanite. The story of Prometheus, in Greek mythology, is an example. According to legend, life for man was bitter and difficult until Prometheus discovered fire. Since man did not know the secret of fire, he was forced to suffer from cold, he ate raw meat, and was unable to develop any sort of real industry. The secret of fire was known only to the gods, and they kept it to themselves so that man would never have the possibility of elevating himself from his lowly state and endangering their hegemony. Prometheus had mercy on man and violated the prohibition against publicizing the information: he revealed the secret of fire. As a result, he was punished with eternal torture by the chief god. In the snake's view, God is incomparably strong and powerful, but He lacks moral stature. All the pettiness that afflicts man's heart is to be found in God's heart, too. And, just like any evil and petty ruler, with a little cunning he can be overcome. Since the snake passed on these perverted values to Chava, his act is considered incitement to idolatry. Although there is no incitement here to serve a

Parashas Bereishis

In the beginning... (1:1)

Rashi quotes a midrash (Osiyos D'Rabbi Akiva, 2) which states that the word bereishis can be interpreted exegetically to teach us that everything in this physical world was created for the sake of the Jewish people, and for the sake of the Torah. This exegesis can clarify a seemingly hard-to-understand Gemara.

The following aggadah is found in the Gemara.

In the future Hashem will place a sefer Torah on His lap, and announce that all those who engaged in the study of Torah in this world should come to receive their reward. The Romans will arrive first and say, "Master of the universe! We set up many marketplaces, we built many bathhouses, and it was all done in order that the Jews should be able to study Torah! [Therefore we deserve to get rewarded.]" Hashem will respond, "Fools! Whatever you built was for your own selfish needs -- not to help the Jews." The other nations will then engage in similar dialogues with Hashem (Avodah Zarah 2b).

On a superficial level, this aggadah is difficult to comprehend. How will the nations have the audacity to lie to Hashem and claim that all their projects were intended to benefit the Jews?! It's a blatant falsehood! Furthermore, the nations will say that their sole motive was the Jews' benefit. This seems even more preposterous. More so, Hashem will call them fools and not liars, which seems to indicate that they are actually telling the truth.

The explanation for this is based on a profound concept. In the initial creation of the world everything was created to assist the Jews in their study of Torah, likewise everything that is subsequently built or anything which occurs in this world is for this very same purpose. Rambam (Intro. to the Mishnah) addresses this point, and writes that an individual may build a beautiful palace and its Divine purpose is that one day many years later a pious man will find refuge in the shade of the walls and thereby save his life. Therefore it is true that everything the Gentiles built -- marketplaces, bridges and bathhouses -- were built for the sake of the Jews -- to facilitate their study of the Torah.

Today, one cannot discern how everything serves the Jews. It is only with the arrival of Mashiach that this will become obvious to everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike. The nations will then ask to be rewarded since they will see how everything they did was indeed for the benefit of the Jews. Hashem's response will be that although that was the true Divine purpose behind all their activities, since at the time that was not their intention they do not deserve to be rewarded.

different god, this view treats God Himself as a "different god," as it were – as something other than what He is. This teaches us a general lesson about slander: it always reflects the subjective view and interpretation of the speaker, at the expense of the objective truth.

"IT PLACED ITS CONTAMINATION IN HER" In the Midrash, Chazal stray far from this understanding and conclude that the snake and Chava sinned in an entirely different manner: "For what reason are idolaters contaminated? Because they did not stand at Mt. Sinai. For when the snake conjoined with Chava, he contaminated her. When Israel stood at Mt. Sinai, their contamination ceased. Idolaters, because they did not stand at Mt. Sinai – their contamination did not subside." (Shabbat 145b) The attempt to attribute to the snake the sin of sexual immorality rests upon the results of the sin: "The eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves and made themselves loincloths." (3:7) Commentators with a linguistic bent have noted the connection between the Hebrew words "begeg" (garment) and "begida" (infidelity, treason), and between "me'il" (coat, covering) and "me'ila" (duplicity, perfidy). The need to cover the genital area – especially for the woman – is connected to the most despicable of all sins: that of infidelity and adultery. It is from the results that Chazal deduce the sin; since, following the sin, Adam and Chava sewed themselves loincloths, the woman must have committed the sin of adultery, and Adam is likewise guilty of sinful sexual relations, since he does not separate from her despite her adultery with the snake.

Based upon our conception of a snake, it is difficult to conceive of any sort of "adultery" with Chava. Even if we imagine the snake as having legs (before his legs were chopped off and God commanded him, "You shall go about on your belly"), the distance between it and humankind remains enormous, and it is quite unclear how it would have enticed the woman to sexual relations. We are forced to conclude that the change undergone by the snake after the punishment was so drastic that the snake we know today is in no way similar to its primeval ancestor. Unless we attribute to Chava some perverse sexual orientation, we must accept that the snake resembled humankind, at least externally. It is perhaps for this reason that the snake also knows how to express itself so articulately, and perhaps his intellect was not inferior to that of man. But man – and only man – was created in the image of God, and in my opinion, the "image of God" within man is his conscience. Man is created with an inner knowledge of which good traits are desired by God. Man did not need to learn ethics from some outside source, for his conscience – his inner truth, which is the image of God within him – would lead him to them. It is possible that the snake had intelligence, but it certainly lacked conscience, for it was not created in God's image.[2]

"I HAVE ACQUIRED A MAN FROM GOD" There may be something attractive in the snake's determination, in its lack of doubts and pangs of conscience, and Chava is drawn after this temptation. When her first son is born, she derives his name, Kayin, from the expression, "I have acquired a man from God." It is interesting that there is not the slightest hint of the third partner in the child's creation – her husband, Adam. It is possible that she knows the real, hidden reason for this; she knows who Kayin's father really is. Kayin and his descendants – Lemekh and his sons – are intelligent, strong and creative people, but they have no conscience. Concerning Hevel we know almost nothing; only when it comes to Shet does the Torah tell us, "He [Adam] bore in his image, as his likeness." Perhaps this implies that Kayin was not in Adam's image.

Science tends to divide prehistoric man into two species: the strong and violent type - homo erectus, and the weaker, gentler, more thinking type – homo sapiens. This categorization may parallel the division known to us from parashat Bereishit, between the sons of Kayin and

the sons of Shet. The vulgar, violent descendants of Kayin ruled the world, as proved by Lemekh's declaration. They are the "children of elo-him" who snatched human women for themselves, and therefore the Holy One decides to wipe them from the face of the earth. But the contamination remains for many more generations, since Noah's wife, Na'ama, was a descendant of Lemekh (see Bereishit Rabba 23:3). Only among Bnei Yisrael, who stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai and accepted with the promise, "We shall do and we shall hear," the seventh Commandment – "You shall not commit adultery" – did the contamination subside, and they were purified from the source of living waters: "God is the 'mikveh' of Israel."

"WE DO NOT SEARCH FOR THE MERIT OF AN INCITER"
"The Lord God called to Adam and He said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said: 'I heard Your voice in the Garden, and I was afraid, for I am naked, and I hid.' And He said: 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?' Adam said: 'The woman whom You put with me – she gave me from the tree, and I ate.' The Lord God said to the woman: 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said: 'The snake tempted me, and I ate.' The Lord God said to the snake: 'Because you have done this, you are cursed above all the animals and above all the beasts of the field. You shall go upon your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. And I shall place hatred between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. They shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise their heel.' To the woman He said: 'I shall surely increase your pain in childbearing; in sorrow shall you bring forth children, and you shall desire your husband, and he shall rule over you.' To Adam He said: 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree concerning which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat from it" – cursed be the land because of you; you shall eat from it in sorrow all your life. It shall produce thorns and thistles for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to the earth, for from it you were taken; for you are dust and you shall return to dust.'" (3:9-19)
Reviewing the respective punishments of Adam, Chava and the snake, it is difficult not to be struck by the lack of symmetry between God's attitude towards Adam and his wife, who are questioned as to their motives for the sin, and His treatment of the snake, which receives an immediate punishment with no attempt to give him or his motives the benefit of the doubt. As we noted at the outset, Rashi (3:14) explains this on the basis of the Gemara (Sanhedrin 29a), teaching that "We do not make an effort to find merit for an inciter." From Rashi it would appear that we do not make an effort to find merit in the inciter precisely because he has a potential defense – he may claim that the "victim" need not have listened to him: "If the teacher says one thing and the student says another, to whom do we listen?!" [3] Alternatively, it is possible that we do not make an effort to find some defense for the inciter because of the severity of his offense, since he is considered as having "sinned in order to anger [God]." We seek defense only for someone who performed a transgression out of a desire, having been overcome by his evil inclination, but not for someone whose intention was specifically to anger God and to rebel. It would seem that the actual principle according to which we do not make an effort to seek a defense for an inciter may be learned from the language of the text in the parasha dealing with an inciter: "If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife of your bosom or your neighbor who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' – which you have not known, neither you nor your forefathers..." (Devarim 13:7)

According to the simple reading of the text, the "victim" – the person who is incited – is the witness. Proof for this conclusion lies in the fact that he is the first commanded to kill the inciter, as the Torah

teaches explicitly: "Your hand shall be upon him first to kill him, and the hand of all the nation thereafter" (Devarim 13:10). Witnesses are generally commanded to be the first to put to death the person they have testified against: "The hand of the witnesses shall be upon him first to put him to death, and the hand of all the nation thereafter" (Devarim 17:7). However, this gives rise to a simple question. The Torah tells us that the inciter tried to lead astray someone close to him: "Your brother... or your son or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom...." But a relative is invalid as a witness; he cannot testify that his relative enticed him! [4] From here Chazal learn that "We do not invest effort in finding a defense for an inciter": the reason for the invalidation of a family member for testimony is because of his tendency to try and find justification for his relative's act. Because of this, he is not invalid for testimony as to incitement, for we do not give the inciter the benefit of any doubt. Even a relative is considered a "witness" (at least for the purposes of "the hand of the witnesses shall be upon him first to put him to death"), although a relative is invalid for any other type of testimony in Torah law. We have hereby solved another difficulty posed by the Rishonim: the snake received no prior warning as to the prohibition of and punishment for incitement – so how could it be punished? It would seem that an inciter is punished even if there was no prior warning (as the Rambam writes explicitly – *Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim* 5:3), because the need for warning prior to the deed is meant for the purposes of easing up on the suspect: perhaps he didn't know, or perhaps he forgot that it was forbidden. No attempt is made to find defense for the inciter – and therefore the snake is punished even though it received no warning. Indeed, it appears that this very point explains the difference between man and the snake. At the beginning of the story of Gan Eden, we are told that God prohibits man from eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and warns him as to his punishment if he should eat: "And from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil – you shall not eat from it, for on the day that you eat of it you will surely die." (2:17) The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 40b) tries to derive the requirement of warning a sinner before his act (so that he will be liable if he commits it) from far-fetched sources and forced applications. Perhaps what Chazal viewed as the background to the law of warning was this difference between man and the snake: God forbade man from eating of the Tree of Knowledge and warned him as to what his punishment would be if he did so, while the snake received no explicit warning. From here we learn that an inciter is punished without having received warning, while any other transgressor is punished only after first having been warned.

ONE WHO SINS DELIBERATELY VS. ONE WHO SINS IN ORDER TO ANGER GOD Moreover, the law of warning was implemented by Chazal so as to render it all but impossible to mete out punishment: "Both a scholar and an ignoramus need warning, for warning is given in order to distinguish between one who sins inadvertently and one who sins deliberately, in case he was acting inadvertently. How is he to be warned? He is told, 'Desist, or do not do it, for it is a transgression and you will be deserving of death or lashes.' If he desists – he is exempt, and likewise if he was silent or lowered his head – he is exempt. Even if he says, 'I know' – he is exempt, unless he forfeits his life and declares, 'I am doing it because it is forbidden' – then he is put to death. And it is necessary that he performs the deed immediately after the warning, right after speaking; but if he performs it after the amount of time necessary to speak – he needs a separate warning." (Rambam, *Hilkhot Sanhedrin* 12:2) A warning so close to the deed, and accompanied by an explicit declaration that "I am doing it because it is forbidden," seems impossible, and it is quite illogical that this should be the distinction between one who sins inadvertently and one who sins deliberately. It is possible, however, that such a warning serves to clarify whether the person is performing the sin in order to anger God, or out of desire.

Halakha does not allow a court to put a person to death unless he has sinned in order to anger God – i.e., only if he says, "I am doing it because it is forbidden," and actually commits the sin as he says these words.[5] Thus a death sentence passed by a Jewish court became a very rare phenomenon, and a Sanhedrin that put a person to death once in seven years (or once in seventy years) was called a "Sanhedrin of Destruction" (Mishna, *Makkot* 7a) – for most sinners do not transgress in order to anger God. This principle, too, would appear to have its source in the Torah. In all of the Torah there are only two instances of a death sentence being carried out by a court: the person who blasphemed (*Vayikra* 24), and the one who gathered wood on Shabbat (*Bamidbar* 15). It is obvious that the former transgressed in order to anger God, and therefore he was put to death.[6] From the context of the parasha, it would seem that the latter, too, sinned with the intention of angering God, since we are told: "A person who acts presumptuously, whether a native citizen or a stranger – he dishonors God, and that soul shall be cut off from among its nation. For he has despised the word of God and has violated His command; that soul shall surely be cut off, his sin is upon him. And Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, and they found a man gathering wood on Shabbat. And those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moshe and Aharon and to all the congregation..." (*Bamidbar* 15:30-33) The Torah tells us that a person who "acts presumptuously" is considered to "dishonor God," since he is acting knowingly, to anger God. There is some foundation for the theory that the man who gathered wood did so in response to the Divine decree following the sin of the spies. After it was decreed that Am Yisrael would wander in the desert for forty years, the wood-gatherer claimed that the acceptance of the Torah had been solely for the purpose of receiving an inheritance in the land, and if he was not to receive any inheritance – he would not fulfill the Torah. He also tried to lead the whole nation into a rebellion against Moshe; it is no wonder that this narrative is placed directly before the story of Korach. It is possible that Chazal learned from these two parashot that the essence of the law concerning the death sentence referred only to one who sinned in order to God, whose whole intention is to rebel and to incite. In such a situation, his punishment is the same as that meted out to the primordial snake: there is no need to give him warning, nor is any attempt made to give him the benefit of the doubt.

MAN'S ADVANTAGE Perhaps the lack of attempt to seek merit for the snake can be understood in a different way than the one proposed by Rashi. It would appear that there should be no benefit of the doubt for Adam and Chava, either. They were aware of the command and the prohibition, and they decided to transgress them in following the advice of the snake. How can this be justified? Nevertheless, God addresses Adam with questions: "Where are you?" "Who told you that you are naked?" "Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" God expects an answer (*teshuva*) from man, but not necessarily the answer to His questions. He expects an act of *teshuva* (repentance): an admission of guilt, a request for forgiveness, a search for some way of making amends. God opens the door for Adam to say, "I have sinned" – but he does not use the opportunity. Instead of admitting the sin, he blames his wife. God goes on to question Chava, but she too – instead of admitting her guilt – blames the snake. Thus, the first human act of *teshuva* failed to happen, and the continued stay in the Garden of Eden and the continued revelation of the Shekhina were consequently curtailed. Adam and his wife acted as did King Shaul, much later on, when confronted by the prophet Shemuel: "Shemuel said: 'What is this sound of sheep in my ears, and the sound of cattle that I hear?' Shaul said: 'They were brought from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the flock and of the cattle in order to sacrifice to the Lord your God; the rest we destroyed.'" (*Shemuel I* 15:14-15) Shemuel begins with a question so that Shaul may confess, but the

first king of Israel chooses to blame the nation instead of accepting responsibility himself, and thus the heroic moment of the first Israelite dynasty was likewise lost. God does not address any questions to the snake. The snake is part of nature, and it is judged with the attribute of strict justice. The rigid laws of nature leave no room for teshuva. Sin brings punishment; there is no third option. Only man, God's friend, created in His image, merits the demonstration of the attribute of mercy – the ability to return to God, to make amends for the sin. Only to man does God extend the opportunity to confess and repair; He knocks on man's door and asks him questions. A similar lesson may be learned from the story of R. Elazar ben Dordaya: "We learn: It was said of R. Elazar ben Dordaya that there was not a single prostitute in the world with whom he had not had relations. Once he heard that there was a certain prostitute over the sea, who demanded a bag of dinarim as payment. He took a bag of dinarim and went, and he crossed seven rivers to reach her. In the midst of their intercourse, she passed gas. She said, 'Just as that air cannot return to its place, so Elazar ben Dordaya will not be accepted as a penitent.' He went and sat between two mountains and hills. He said: 'Mountains and hills, beg for mercy on my behalf!' They said to him: 'Before we ask mercy for you, first we must ask for ourselves, as it is written, "For the mountains shall move, and the hills collapse.'" He said: 'Heavens and earth, beg for mercy for me!' They said: 'Before we ask for you, first we must ask for ourselves, as it is written, "The heavens shall vanish like smoke, and the earth shall expire as an old garment.'" He said: 'Sun and moon, beg for mercy on my behalf!' They said to him: 'Before asking for you, first we must ask for ourselves, as it is written: "The moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed.'" He said, 'Stars and constellations – beg for mercy on my behalf!' They said: 'Before asking for you, we must first ask for ourselves, as it is written, "All the host of the heavens shall rot away.'" He said: 'I have no one to rely on but myself.' He placed his head between his knees and wept and sobbed until his soul departed from him. A heavenly voice emerged and said: 'R. Elazar ben Dordaya is invited to Eternal Life.'" (Avoda Zara 17a) There is no repair and no teshuva – not through the heavens and the earth, neither by the agency of the mountains and hills, nor any hope in the sun and moon or the stars and constellations, nor through the snake. Teshuva and repair exist only within man, and we have no one to rely on but ourselves.

NOTES:

- [1] The words of this slander later became the source among Chazal and the poskim for the laws and concepts related to slander in general: see Arakchin 15b.
- [2] In order to imagine such a phenomenon, let us recollect some images from children's literature. The dementors, who serve as wardens in the Prison of Azkaban in the "Harry Potter" series, are such creatures. Similarly, the dead who come back to life in Lloyd Alexander's "The Black Cauldron" have intelligence and strength, but have no will of their own. It is possible that this represents a sort of prototype of science's future clones. It may well be that science will eventually be able to clone everything, except for man's Divine image. Science may thereby bring upon us automatons devoid of individual will, character and conscience, descendants of the primordial snake, who act in the service of the arbitrary will of their creator.
- [3] The Rishonim debate the meaning of this 'merit' – see Tosfot on the Torah, Chizkuni and Sefer ha-Zikaron.
- [4] The law is that valid witnesses must be installed in a concealed place in order to testify against him – see Sanhedrin 67 and Rambam, Hilkhos Avodat Kohavim 5:3.
- [5] This law contradicts the opinion of R. Yossi bar Yehuda, who writes: "A scholar needs no warning, since warning is given only in order to distinguish between one who sins inadvertently and one who sins deliberately" (Sanhedrin 8b).
- [6] It is possible that he was brought before Moshe for judgment because he had not received any explicit warning.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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From: TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org]
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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

The Purpose of Creation

The wisdom of Hashem is expressed to us in two ways, via the world of nature and the world of Torah. Both, the natural world and the world of Torah speak of the greatness of Hashem. Rashi comments on the first word of the Torah, "Bereishis", that there is a relationship between creation and the Torah. The Torah is referred to as reishis, the beginning, which teaches us that the entire creation of the world was for the sake of Torah. Thus, the wonders of creation testify to the wisdom of the Creator, and through the study of Torah, we are privileged to involve ourselves with the knowledge of Hashem.

This relationship between creation and the Torah requires of us to view the natural world in a unique manner. The primary purpose of all creation is to enable us to observe the Torah. If we utilize the natural world for its primary purpose, we are then permitted to benefit from it for our own needs. An example of this idea appears in the description of the creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars. The Torah tells us that they were created to be signs for the days, seasons, and years. Rashi comments that this refers to their role in determining the season of the yomim tovim. After the Torah establishes their primary purpose in assisting us to perform mitzvos, we are told that they were also created to give us light. We learn from here, that one can only benefit from the physical world if one first uses its gifts for their true purpose. Chazal in maseches Pesachim (49b) tell us that one who does not study Torah, has no right to partake of meat. The commentators explain that one who does not study the Torah which is written on the skins of animals, in essence, is not using the animal world for its primary purpose. Such an individual has no right to use animals for his own materialistic needs.

Chazal have a fascinating interpretation for the pasuk which describes the seven species of produce with which Eretz Yisrael was blessed. Each of the foods mentioned in the description of Eretz Yisrael corresponds to a halachic measurement (maseches Eruvin, 4a). Eretz Yisrael is blessed with olives and the amount of food which constitutes a halachic act of eating is the size of an olive. Eretz Yisrael is blessed with dates - if one eats the measurement of a date on Yom Kippur, then one is subject to punishment.

Why is it significant to link the various halachic measurements to the fruits of Eretz Yisrael? Chazal are teaching us how to view all of creation. One who views creation through the eyes of the Torah sees, in an olive, a halachic concept. Stories are told of Torah scholars who would look at a fence and immediately ponder whether the fence was acceptable for an eruv. Similarly, when a Torah scholar looks at a lake he does not see a body of water but rather a potential mikva. Everything in the world was created to enable us to observe the Torah. We have to open our eyes to see the primary purpose of creation.

We not only view creation through the lens of Torah, we view the unfolding of history in a similar manner. The Beis Halevi comments on a difficult wording of a pasuk following yetzias Mitzraim (Shmos, 13, 8). We are commanded to relate the events of yetzias Mitzraim to our children. We are told to relate the story as we point to the korban

Pesach, the matza and the marror. We tell our children that because of the korban Pesach, matza and marror we were taken out of Mitzraim. It would seem that the order of the pasuk should be reversed and instead say that we observe these mitzvos because we were taken out of Mitzraim, not the other way around. What do we mean when we say that yetzias Mitzraim took place because of these mitzvos? The Beis Halevi explains that the Torah is teaching us how to view history. Hashem wanted to give us these mitzvos and orchestrated history in a manner to make these mitzvos meaningful to us.

When we look at the natural world and at historical events we have to view them with the proper perspective. All of creation and all of history are to enable us to observe the Torah. May we merit that Hashem opens our eyes to view His creation and His hand in history, in their proper light.

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Sent: , October 28, 2005 To: Peninim Parsha

Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
- Parshas Bereishis

In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth. (1:1) Sefer Bereishis is aptly given its name as a result of being the "first" of the Chumashim. The Talmud in Avodah Zarah 25A has another name for Sefer Bereishis: Sefer HaYashar or Sefer Yescharim, the Book of Righteousness. Yashar means more than righteousness. It means straightforwardness, integrity, mentchlichkeit, human decency. Sefer Bereishis chronicles the lives of the Avos, Patriarchs, men who exemplified righteousness to G-d and mentchlichkeit to all human beings. In the preface to his commentary to Sefer Bereishis, the Netziv, zl, expands on this idea. The Patriarchs distinguished themselves not only in their relationship with Hashem on the highest spiritual plane, but also in their dealings with the non-Jewish people with whom they came in daily contact. They acted with integrity and esteem for every human being. Propriety, honesty, and decency were character traits which earned them the deep admiration and respect of all people. The non-Jewish world knew not of their spiritual relationship with Hashem. They knew only of their yashrus with people.

In his commentary to the first pasuk in the Torah, Rashi questions why the Torah, which is primarily a book of commandments and instructions for life, begins with an account of Creation, rather than the first mitzvah which Hashem gave to the Jewish people. He explains that the Torah anticipated a time when, after we would have conquered Eretz Yisrael, the nations of the world would arise and condemn us as robbers and thieves. Thus, from the onset, the Torah informs us that Hashem created the world, and, as Creator and Proprietor of the entire universe, He gave Eretz Yisrael to us. He may do as He pleases. It pleased Him to give Eretz Yisrael to His Chosen People. We are not thieves. We are simply taking what is rightfully ours.

Everyone has heard of or studied this Rashi. Does anybody ever wonder about Rashi's answer? How will our response to the citizens of the gentile world allay their critique of us? They do not care about what is stated in the Chumash. Rashi's exposition certainly has no place in their minds. A quotation from Sefer Bereishis is not an argument that would compel the non-Jewish world to rescind their complaints against us. I do not believe that this approach will sway them.

Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, explains that Rashi is not suggesting a reply to be offered to the nations of the world. Nothing will impress them. They will never abandon their hatred towards us. The response, however, is for our own edification. As a kind, softhearted, mentchlech nation, we have a difficult time listening to complaints which impugn

our integrity. If we hear the nations of the world calling us thieves long enough, we might even begin to believe them. We might begin to doubt our inherent right to the land. Perhaps the Torah was wrong in granting us the land that had until now belonged to the Canaanite nations. These are some of the thoughts that might slowly infiltrate our minds. Before long, we will lose the courage and will to fight for the land.

It is for this reason that the Torah begins by assuring us that everything it does is with yashrus. The only way to act is with propriety and fairness. The nations that had inhabited Eretz Yisrael did not have eternal rights to the land. Their lease had expired, and it was time for them to move on. It was now time for the Jews to enter and inhabit the land which Hashem had given them. If it is in the Torah, it is yashar and, therefore, the land is ours.

Let me take the liberty of citing a few vignettes to support the idea and demonstrate the significance of acting with yashrus. In the Talmud Sotah 40A, Chazal relate that Rabbi Avahu was a great Torah scholar who had the opportunity to become a Rosh Hayeshivah. This was an enviable position, not only because of the inherent esteem, but also because of the financial rewards that were involved. When Rabbi Avahu heard, however, that Rabbi Abba, another Torah scholar, who was in deep financial straits also needed this position, he deferred, asserting that Rabbi Abba was more suitable to be Rosh Hayeshivah. This is yashrus at its zenith! Imagine, how much time and effort Rabbi Avahu had exerted preparing for such a position. He had expended endless hours of study and research to achieve a position of erudition and respect that would render him worthy of being selected as Rosh Hayeshivah. He had another character trait that outshone his learning - yashrus. This trait did not permit him to assume a position that another scholar needed. His humility was consistent with his erudition. He was rewarded with five sons that illuminated the Torah world with their knowledge.

Horav Meir Simcha HaKohen, zl, Rav of Dvinsk and author of the Ohr Sameach and Meshech Chochmah, was certainly well-known for his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah. He was also recognized for another unique quality - his relationship with -- and the respect he received from -- the non-Jews of Dvinsk. When World War I broke out, Grand Duke Nikolai ordered the expulsion of all Jews from the Russo-German front. Dvinsk became dangerous for the Jews, and many fled, leaving their homes and belongings. Even the Rogatchover Gaon, zl, the other rav in Dvinsk, was prevailed upon by his congregants to leave. Rav Meir Simcha refused to budge. He said, "As long as there are nine Jews and I am the tenth, I will be there for the Minyan." When he was reminded of the constant danger, his response was simply, "Every bullet has a designated address, and none will reach where there is no Heavenly decree that it do so." Yet, despite the obvious dangers of doing so, thousands of Jews and gentiles signed petitions attesting to the nobility of the Rav's character and his vital importance to the well-being of all of the members of the community. He was allowed to remain unharmed. His reputation was so widespread that even non-Jews sought his counsel. Indeed, some say his universal acceptability began with a decision he had rendered in a dispute between a Jew and a gypsy. These two had been business partners until a major conflict of interest developed between them. The gypsy suggested that they both go to the Rav for a decision. Rav Meir Simcha listened to both sides and, after his own careful independent investigation, decided in favor of the gypsy. From that day on, word of Rav Meir Simcha's integrity and sense of justice spread throughout all of Dvinsk and even Latvia.

Horav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, zl, was an outstanding tzaddik and undisputed halachic authority. Indeed, he was a man of singular greatness. His ability to "conceal" his greatness was a true measure of his gadlus, distinction. As the head of the famous Ezras Torah charitable organization, he carried on his shoulders the plight of literally tens of thousands of families throughout the world. Their daily well-being was his daily concern. Yet, he never revealed the identity of these families.

His weekly salary was a paltry fifty dollars. Indeed, at one meeting, the resolution was passed that his "salary" should be increased. Rav Henkin immediately arose from his chair and exclaimed, "Must I leave Ezras Torah?" Rav Henkin carried a small notebook with him, in which he kept a log of those minutes during the day that he did not fully dedicate to Ezras Torah. He was not involved with personal business during this time. He had no personal business. He lived for the klal, general community. When someone would visit to discuss a halachah, however, or if he would receive a call from anywhere in the world requesting his opinion concerning a halachic issue, he would immediately look at the time and note in his record how many minutes he had borrowed from Ezras Torah. He would then know how many minutes he would have to "make up" for Ezras Torah. Yashrus!

The earth brought forth vegetation, grass producing seed of its kind, and trees producing fruit. (1:12)

There is a fascinating Midrash concerning this pasuk that should give us all something to ponder. Chazal teach us that when Hashem created iron, the trees became distressed, because the sharp blade of the axe could destroy them. Hashem replied to the trees, "Do not worry. As long as you do not provide wood for the axe handle, the blade will remain harmless." The simple lesson from this Midrash is: We are our own worst enemies. We shoot ourselves in the foot. No one can impose worse harm on us than the harm we cause ourselves. Ask anyone, however, who carries the fault for a certain incident or situation, the response will, in all likelihood, be-the other person. The fault lies either with parents, or teachers, or the community, but never oneself. Parents provide their children with all forms of gifts, both monetary and tangible gifts. We give them every electronic invention known to man, then we wonder why they have no time to study. The first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet - aleph and bais - spell the word av, which means "father". Veritably, it is from our fathers, our parents, that we learn the alphabet of life. The Jewish home is the primary institution in life. It is the place in which the character and proclivities of a child are molded and shaped for the future. Thus, parents must assume responsibility for their own actions. We would do well to examine ourselves vigorously before attributing our faults to others.

There is another lesson to be derived from Chazal. The trees complained about the possible destruction that could be wrought by iron. If we think about it, it is not the iron or the wood, nor is it the axe that destroys; it is man who swings the axe that destroys. Yet, the trees immediately complained. That is nature. As soon as progress is about to commence, someone has to voice a complaint. They are afraid it might hurt them. It is always about "me." Considerable progress has abruptly come to a halt as a result of people's petty vested interests. As soon as the trees heard of another creation that might affect them, they complained. History has proven that this attitude still plagues us.

These are the products of the heaven and the earth when they were created in the day when Hashem made earth and heaven. (2:4)

The Torah now focuses on the events preceding the creation of man. In the second interpretation he offers in his commentary to this pasuk, Rashi explains the word b'hi'baram, "when they were created," to mean that Hashem created them with the letter "hay." This is supported by the pasuk in Yishayah 26:4, "With 'kah' (G-d's Name is spelled with "yud" and "hay"), G-d created worlds." In other words, b'hay'baram means that the two worlds - this temporary world and the Eternal world - were created with the letters that connote Hashem's Name, "yud" and "hay." The letter "hay" was used to create this world and the letter "yud" was used to create the Eternal world. What is Rashi teaching us?

Horav Aharon Soloveitchik, zl, explains that each of these letters has a separate function in the Hebrew alphabet. The letter "hay" represents the hay ha'yediah in Hebrew grammar. When the letter hay prefixes a word,

it indicates something outstanding. For example, while shulchan means table, ha'shulchan is a reference to the table, a distinct, specific table.

The letter hay, in this case, is used to denote a certain entity.

The function of the letter "yud" is primarily at the end of a word. In Hebrew grammar, when a "yud" is added to the end of a word, it indicates possession. Hence, shulchani means my table.

The Torah teaches us that man is created b'tzalmo, in his image (ibid.1:27). It also states that man is created b'tzelem Elokim, in G-d's image. How do we reconcile these two expressions? The Torah is teaching us that while man is created in the G-dly image, he is also created in his own image, with his own unique potential. Every single person has his own "yud." This may be the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, but it is his exclusively, and no one can take it from him. Man must, therefore, strive to achieve his own potential, to realize the unique Tzelem Elokim within him. When we say that the next world was created with the letter "yud," it means that one can attain a share in the World to Come only if he exercises and asserts his individual tzelem, his 'yud.' We cannot, however, ignore man's "hay," the letter which denotes his desire to stand out in the crowd, to be recognized for his uniqueness, to be distinguished among men. This drive for individuality is what motivates men to excel, to be original, to be innovative. This drive also motivates selfishness among men, compelling them to live on a more materialistic level than their neighbor. After all, I cannot be like everybody else. Without the "hay," there would probably be little progress in this world. People would not be driven. Thus, the concept of this world being created with a "hay" means that advancement in worldly matters is, for the most part, achieved via the vehicle of man's selfish ambition expressing itself, whereas advancement to the World to Come is the product of asserting one's "yud," his uniqueness.

Let us go one step further. While constructive ambition, represented by the letter "hay," is commendable and, in fact, indispensable to world progress, destructive ambition is dangerous and can bring down the world. Constructive ambition takes on the forms of achievement in Torah study, amassing greater knowledge, endeavoring for chesed, acts of loving-kindness, and pursuing righteousness. Destructive ambition is the product of jealousy, and it is manifest when a person attempts to realize his goals to the detriment of others. The "hay" of progress can, in the wrong person, be transformed into the "hay" of destruction. It can corrupt and degenerate in the pursuit of the wrong goals.

How does one make sure that he does not fall prey to the "hay" of ruin? He can do so only by having the "hay" work in consort with the "yud." Thus, he channels his ambitions to act in consonance with his unique, inherent potential, his tzelem Elokim. We should try to achieve distinctiveness by becoming the individuals that Hashem has designed us to be.

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From: ZeitlinShelley@aol.com Sent: Thursday, October 27, 2005 9:27 PM To: ZeitlinShelley@aol.com Subject: In the Beginning by Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss

**In the Beginning
by Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss**

Our great sages have shown us a glimpse of the plethora of lessons hidden in the word Breishis, the first word of the Torah. Thus, in the Zohar, Rav Shimon Bar Yochai declares that this word contains many secrets. The great Chassidic master, the B'nei Yissachar relates 194 different combinations of the word Breishis! And the great sage Rav Yosef Nissim ben Adahan cites 720, including references to all 613 mitzvahs in the Torah and the seven rabbinical ones as well! Like these

great ones, let us try to delve into a few of the secrets of this great word - the first word of the Torah!

1. When jumbled (in Hebrew), the word Breishis also spells 'Bris - Aish - A Covenant of Fire.' On the simple level this teaches us that the Torah is a covenant of fire, as it also says, "Mi'y'mino aish das lamo - From his right (hand), a fiery law to his people." This comparison to fire, on the basic level, is designed to convey that one should not trespass the dictates of the Torah -- for that is like playing with fire! This is the way Rashi explains the Mishna in Pirkei Avos, which advises us to beware of the coals (words) of the sages lest one be burned!

The analogy to fire is also meant to convey the warmth of the Torah, as it states, "To warm oneself from the 'fire' of the sages." For the ways of the Torah are pleasant and sweet and foster warmth in a person - an all important ingredient in our relationships!

But this message of bris aish, a covenant with fire, also advises us that as we embark on the study of Torah, we should know that our study protects us from the fires of Gehenom. [Chagiga 27a]. In Sanhedrin [92a], the Talmud relates that "Any house which has no Torah in the nighttime will be consumed by fire." This is very mystifying and perplexing! Many Jewish homes are bereft of Torah study, alas, but (blessedly) they are not consumed by fire. Now, if the Gemora would have said, 'Any house that has Torah would be spared from fire,' it would have been easy to understand. But, the Gemora states the emphatically positive statement that without Torah, there will be fire. This is truly amazing.

I believe an explanation is that fire manifests itself in many ways besides the obvious one. There are also the fires of rage, of fighting, or the fires of fever and sickness. The study of Torah (the covenant with fire) will protect us from all these other manifestations of fire as well.

2. The Torah starts with the letter 'beis' which has the numerical value of two. This, says Rav Yehuda ben Pazi in the Medrash, is to teach us that there are two worlds - this world and the Afterlife. Thus, in the very first letter of the Torah is the first message of the Torah, for it advises us the most desirable direction and ambition for our lives. We must prepare for the infinite years of afterlife and this letter 'beis' fortifies us to be able to make the sacrifices necessary to be an observant Jew.

3. It is beautiful that the word Breishis, when jumbled, spells "Barasa shai - You created 310 worlds." The Mishna in Uktzin teaches us that every righteous person is destined to inherit 310 worlds!

4. The word Breishis also spells 'Rashi tavo - Rashi will come.' The great commentator, Rashi, who explained the Torah to the whole world like no one else, will come!

5. We've mentioned in past articles that one of the most severe crimes in the Torah is to embarrass someone publicly! Indeed, it's one of the only crimes that carries the penalty of the loss of one's Afterlife! It is, therefore, fitting that the first word of the Torah carries a warning against this heinous crime. Thus, the word Breishis spells "Y'rei boshes - Be fearful of causing embarrassment!"

6. The great Rokeach comments that the word Breishis is an abbreviation of the following words: "Amein, Y'hei Shmei Rabbah B'kol Tefilla -- (that one should say) Amein, Y'hei Shmei Rabbah, at every prayer." This underscores the amazing importance of our Kaddish, and our participation in it. Indeed, the saintly Mishnah Brurah, of blessed memory, writes that one who says responds loudly and with feeling with a 'Y'hei Shmei...' ensures that any bad decree confronting him (G-d forbid) will be torn up. (Thus, if someone was decreed to be hit by a car, but comes to shul in the morning and says this rejoinder with passion, it will literally save his life.) Therefore, if someone wakes up late and figures, "Why go to shul? I've surely missed Kedusha," one should still not hesitate, and should run to shul just to be able to answer "Amen, Y'hei..." Doing so is very worthwhile in its own right.

7. The Torah ends with the statement, "L'einay Kol Yisroel -- in the eyes of all of Israel." Rashi says this is a reference to Moshe's breaking of the Ten Commandments. I'd like to suggest this is alluded to in the first word of the Torah as well (the Sages have various ways of connecting the end of the Torah to the beginning), since Breishis spells "Es Yud Shavar - He broke the Ten!!!"

8. We've spoken in the past how life's great challenge and major goal is to constantly improve oneself, and change with Teshuva (repentance). Thus, it's no surprise that the word Breishis spells "Ashrei Tav - Fortunate is he who repents!"

9. The Vilna Gaon gives us this incredible acrostic: Beis - bitachon (trust in Hashem); Reish - ratzon (having the will to do what's right); Alef - ahava (love for Hashem, one's spouse, parents, children, fellow men, etc.); Shin - shtika - silence (knowing when to keep your mouth shut!); Yud - yirah (fear of Hashem); and Tav - Torah. It is especially noteworthy that, for the letter "Reish" the Gaon passed over a word like 'rachmonus - mercy,' and chose instead 'Ratzon.' Similarly, for 'Shin' he declined to choose the powerful words 'Shalom - peace,' or 'Simcha - happiness,' and instead chose 'Silence,' the great tool!

Let me conclude with words of encouragement to everyone. Begin reviewing the weekly Torah portion. Make this the year that you're going to finish from beginning to end. Don't let this week slip away and then say, "Oh, I missed it already. I'll do it next year."

Here are some helpful tips.

1. Many people wait to review the Parsha on Shabbos, and this is their undoing! For Shabbos is at the end of the week and, if they get busy or are too tired (a common occurrence), the week is over and it's already time for Parshas Noach. Therefore, start making inroads on Sunday. (If there is time each morning for the 'Daily News,' there's definitely time for the Parsha.) If you are too busy on a particular day, you still have the rest of the week ahead of you.

2. If you miss a week, don't give up! Mark down the Parsha you missed. You'll make it up. Better forty Parshas than no Parshas!

3. Get yourself a new sefer that you'll review each week's portion with, that will provide you with something new and challenging. In English, the Ozneyim La Torah by Rav Zalman Sorotskin is an excellent example. So is Rav Dovid Feinstein's, Kol Dodi. In Hebrew, the Tur on Chumash is a great selection.

Hatzlacha Rabbah! May we all be zocheh to finish the Torah this year and merit all of its many blessings.

To receive a weekly cassette tape or CD directly from Rabbi Weiss, please send a check to Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss, P.O. Box 140726, Staten Island, NY 10314 or contact him at RMMWSI@aol.com. Attend Rabbi Weiss's weekly shiur at the Landau Shul, Avenue L and East 9th in Flatbush, Tuesday nights at 9:30 p.m. Rabbi Weiss's Daf Yomi shiurim can be heard LIVE on Kol Haloshon at (718) 906-6400. Write to KolHaloshon@gmail.com for details. (Sheldon Zeitlin transcribes Rabbi Weiss' articles. If you wish to receive Rabbi Weiss' articles by email, please send a note to ZeitlinShelley@aol.com.)

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago]

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Bereishith

Garments of Light

The context is one of the best known stories of the bible. Together in the Garden of Eden, surrounded by the rich panoply of creation, the first human couple have everything they could possibly want - except one

thing, a tree from which they are forbidden to eat. Needless to say, that is the one thing they want. "Stolen waters taste sweet," says the Book of Proverbs. They eat; their eyes are opened; they lose their innocence; for the first time they feel shame. When they hear "the voice of God" they try to hide, but they discover that God is someone from whom we cannot hide. God asks them what they have done. Adam blames his wife. She blames the serpent. The result is paradise lost.

The episode is rich in its implications, but I want us to study one of its strangest features. The woman has been told that "with pain she will give birth to children." Next, Adam is informed that he will face a life of painful toil. There then follows a sequence of three verses which seem to have no connection with one another. Indeed, they sound like a complete non sequitur:

"By the sweat of your brow," God says to Adam, "you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all life. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

The problems are obvious. Adam has just blamed his wife for leading him into sin. He has also been condemned to mortality. Why, at just this juncture, does he turn to her and give her a new name? And why, immediately afterward, as they are about to be exiled from Eden, does God perform an act of kindness to the couple - giving dignity to the very symbol of their sin, the clothes with which they hide their shame?

The mood seems to have changed for no reason. The bitter acrimony of the previous verses suddenly dissolves, and instead -between Adam and his wife, and between God and the couple - there is a new tenderness. Rashi is so perplexed that he suggests that the middle verse is out of chronological sequence. It is the end, not of the story of the sin of eating the forbidden fruit, but of the earlier scene in which Adam gave names to the animals and while doing so found "no suitable companion." As we will see, that is not the only way of interpreting it.

Stranger still is the interpretation given by the first century sage Rabbi Meir to the phrase "garments of skin," *bigdei 'or*. Rabbi Meir reads the *ayin* of the second word as an *aleph*, *bigdei or* - and thus interprets the phrase as "garments of light." This is an almost mystical suggestion and a deeply intriguing one. Why -not when they were in paradise, but as they were leaving it - were the couple bathed with divine radiance, clothed in "garments of light"?

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said, "It is impossible for there to be a session in the house of study without some new interpretation." In that spirit let us see whether we can find new meaning in this passage.

When he heard the words, "dust you are and to dust you will return," for the first time Adam became conscious of his mortality. There is no more profound self-knowledge than this - that the world will one day be without us, and we without the world. Much of civilization has turned on this single fact, that our lives are finite, a microsecond in the context of eternity; that however long we live, our time is limited and all too short. The Torah is silent on what Adam's thoughts were in the wake of this discovery, but we can reconstruct them. Until then, death had not entered his consciousness, but now it did. What, if we are mortal, will live on? Is there a part of us that will continue, even though we ourselves are no longer here? It was then that Adam remembered God's words to the woman. She would give birth to children - in pain, to be sure, but she would bring new life into the world.

Suddenly Adam knew that though we die, if we are privileged to have children, something of us will live on: our genes, our influence, our example, our ideals. That is our immortality. This was an idea that eventually shaped the character of the whole of Judaism in contradistinction to most other cultures in ancient and modern times. The Tower of Babel and the great buildings of Ramses II - the two most significant glimpses the Torah gives us of the empires of the ancient world - testify to the idea that we defeat mortality by building

monuments that outlast the winds and sands of time. Judaism had a quite different idea, that we defeat mortality by engraving our ideals on the hearts of our children, and they on theirs, and so on to the end of time. Where the Mesopotamians and Egyptians thought of buildings, Abraham and his descendants thought of builders ("Call them not 'your children' but 'your builders'"). Judaism became the most child-centred of faiths. But there is one significant difference between personal immortality and the immortality we gain by those we bring to life and who will live on after us. The latter cannot be achieved alone. Until he became aware of his mortality, Adam could think of his wife as a mere *ezer kenegdo*, usually translated as "a suitable helper." He thought of her as his assistant, not his equal. "She shall be called 'woman' [*ishah*] for she was taken from man [*ish*]." She was, in his eyes, an extension of himself. Now he knew otherwise. Without her, he could not have children - and children were his share in eternity. He could no longer think of her as an assistant. She was a person in her own right - more even than he was, for she, not he, would actually give birth. In this respect she was more like God than he could be, for God is He-who-brings-new-life-into-being. Once he had thought these thoughts, recrimination ended, for he saw that their physical being, their "nakedness," was not simply a source of shame. There is a spiritual dimension to the physical relationship between husband and wife. At one level it is the most animal of desires, but at another it is as close as we come to the principle of divine creativity itself, namely that love creates life. That is when he turned to her and for the first time saw her as a person and gave her a personal name, Chavah, Eve, meaning, "she who gives life."

The significance of this moment cannot be sufficiently emphasised. It was not that previously Adam had given his wife one name and now gave her another. It was that previously Adam had not given her a name at all. He called her *ishah*, "woman," a generic noun not a proper name (Incidentally, he himself had not had a proper name until now either. He is simply called *ha-adam*, "the man" - a word that appears 21 times [3x7] in this early narrative. Not until he confers on the woman a proper name does he acquire one himself, Adam).

With the appearance of proper names, the concept of person is born. A noun designates a class, a group of things linked by common characteristics. Nouns speak of sameness and therefore substitutability. If we lose one watch we can buy another. If our car is stolen we can replace it. "Watch" and "car" are nouns, in both cases objects defined by their function.

A name is different. It refers not to a class or group of things but to an individual in his/her individuality. The primary bearer of a name is a person. Only by extension do we give names to non-persons for which we have special affection - a pet, for example. The concepts of "name" and "person" are intimately linked. We cannot have one without the other. The single most important ethical truth about persons is that none is substitutable for any other. As persons, we are unique. "When a human being makes many coins in the same mint," said the sages, "they all come out alike. [By contrast,] God makes every human being in the same image, his image, and they are all different."

This is what gives human life its dignity and sanctity. Without it, we would not know love - for love in its primary sense is always directed to a person: to this man, that woman, this child, in their uniqueness. One who truly loves does not love abstractly. The lover in *The Song of Songs* never tires of describing his beloved, her hair, her cheeks, her eyes, her mouth, the things that make her what she is and not woman-in-general. It is also what gives human love its particular pathos and vulnerability. We know that like us, our beloved will eventually grow old and die, and that he or she can never be replaced. If we knew we would never die, we would need no intimations of eternity. Because we know we will one day die, one of the greatest things that can happen to us is the moment beyond time (the one we know we will never forget) when two souls touch and between them form a bridge over the abyss of mortality. That

is what Shir ha-shirim means when it says, "Love is as strong as death, its passion as unyielding as the grave" (the idea Dylan Thomas translated into the words, "Though lovers be lost, love shall not; And death shall have no dominion").

At another and more general level, this is what gives human life its sanctity. "A single life," said the sages, "is like a universe." However lifelike robots may one day become, there will always be this fundamental difference between a machine and a person. Machines can be replaced. Persons cannot.

The moment when Adam turned to his wife and gave her a proper name, Chavah, was a turning point in the history of civilization. It was then that God robed the couple in garments of light. For it is only when we relate to one another as persons possessed of non-negotiable dignity, that we respond to the "image of God" in the other. In a sense the whole of Judaism - or at least mitzvot bein adam le-chavero, "the commands between us and our fellow human beings" - is an extended commentary to this idea. The rules of justice, mercy, charity, compassion, regard for the poor, love for the neighbour and the stranger, delicacy of speech and sensitivity to the easily injured feelings of others, are all variants on the theme of respect for the human other as an image and likeness of the Divine Other.

The idea goes deeper still. There is an intimate connection between the way we relate to other people and the way we relate to God - and this too is expressed in the difference between a noun and a name.

Though God has many descriptions, two are primary: Elokim and the four letter name we may not pronounce, known generally as Hashem.

The sages distinguished them by saying that Elokim refers to Divine justice, Hashem to Divine compassion. The eleventh century poet and philosopher Judah Halevi made a different distinction. The word E-I was generally used by pagans to signify a god, by which they meant, a force of nature (the sun, the storm, the earth, the sea, and the many other deities worshipped in ancient times). Monotheism was and is the insistence that none of these forces or powers represents ultimate reality. Each is only a segment of it. The One God is the totality of all powers. That is the represented by the word Elokim. It is a collective noun, meaning, "the force of forces." Elokim is God as we encounter Him in nature, in the vastness and intricacy of creation.

Hashem, by contrast, is not a noun but a name. It refers to God not as a power, or even the totality of all powers, but as a person, a "Thou." Hashem is The One who speaks to us and to whom we speak, who loves us as a person loves, who hears our prayers, forgives our failures, gives us strength in times of crisis, and teaches us the path of life. In one of the most profound insights in the history of Jewish thought, Halevi taught that the difference between Elokim and Hashem is the difference between the God of Aristotle and the God of Abraham. A philosopher can come to the realisation that the universe has an author, a creator, a first cause, a "prime mover." But only a prophet (or a child of Abraham and the nation of prophets) can relate to God as a person. Hashem is God as we encounter Him not in creation but revelation.

If we now turn to the biblical text, we see a remarkable phenomenon. In Bereishith 1, God is described as Elokim. In chapters 2 and 3, He is called Hashem-Elokim. In chapter 4, for the first time He is called Hashem alone. Something changes in the course of these chapters: not God (who does not change) but the human perception of God. In the first chapter, which speaks about the birth of the universe and the slow emergence of order from chaos, man is part of nature. That is the (partial) truth in the discovery that we share much of our DNA with other life forms. It is also why God is described as Elokim, the author of nature. In chapters 2 and 3, man begins to use language. He becomes, in the words of the Targum, "a speaking being." God brings the various forms of life to him "to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living thing, that was its name." But thus far he only uses nouns, first for the animals, and then for his wife, whom he calls

ishah, "woman." He has moved from nature to culture (of which language is the first step), but he has not yet understood the concept of a person. It is only after he gives his wife a proper name that the Torah uses the word Hashem alone. It is only after he has become aware of his wife as a person that he is capable of understanding God as a person. Judaism was much more than the discovery of monotheism, that there is only one God. That idea is contained in the word Elokim. It was also the discovery that God is a person - that the fact that we are persons, with loves, fears, hopes and dreams, is not an accidental by-product of evolution (as some neo-Darwinians claim) but is an echo of the ultimate reality of the cosmos. We are not gene-producing machines but persons, each of us unique, irreplaceable, here because God wanted us to be. That is the world-transforming concept of Hashem - and it was only when Adam responded to Eve as a person that he could respond to God as a person. That is why the commands between us and God are inseparable from the commands between us and our fellow human beings.

Now we understand that extraordinary sequence of three verses. Discovering his mortality, Adam knew that he could only live on through his children, born through an act of love. That was when he realised that immortality cannot be achieved by one alone, but only by the union of two. For the first time he looked on his wife as a person in her own right, and expressed this by giving her a proper name. Having done this, he was able to experience God through His proper name, Hashem. At that moment humanity ceased to be a mere biological species and became homo religiosus, man-in-search-of-God who meets Hashem, God-in-search-of-man. That is the profound message of the first three chapters of Bereishith, a story about language, relationships and what it is to be a person. Judaism is the story of how the love we feel for another person leads to the love of God, and robes us in garments of light.

From: **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column**

[parshat_hashavua@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Wednesday, October 26, 2005 4:54 AM To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column Subject: Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Bereishit by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin
Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Bereishit (Genesis 1:1-6:8)

By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel -- At the conclusion of the Sukkot Festival, just prior to the Sabbath when we begin reading the Biblical cycle once again with the portion of Genesis, we read the Scroll of Ecclesiastes (Kohelet); and strangely enough, there is a striking connection between what appears to be the pessimistic and even nihilistic message of Ecclesiastes and the Biblical tale of Cain and Abel. Commentaries throughout the generations have wrestled with the connection between a Scroll that iterates and reiterates the utter futility of life when assessed from the perspective of certain death – the one fate that is destined for all – and Sukkot, our festival of greatest joy. King Solomon, the wisest and wealthiest of Kings who is traditionally reputed to have authored Kohelet, impresses upon us with elegant cadences but nevertheless with the subtlety of a sledge-hammer how neither wisdom nor wealth nor material pleasures nor toil can bring ultimate satisfaction when “there is an evil about all things that go on under the sun: that the same fate awaits us all;... a live dog is better than a dead lion” (Ecclesiastes 9:3,4). Indeed, the word “hevel” (literally a breath or the whitish vapor which exudes from one’s mouth on a cold day, but usually translated as vanity because of the fleeting and non-substantive nature of this vapor) appears in this Scroll no less than thirty-eight times, and in the very opening verse seven times: Vapor of vapors (a double noun which counts for two), says Kohelet, vapor of vapors, everything is vapor” (Eccles 1:2). And no wonder! After all, according to the literal meaning of this scroll, “The dead know nothing at all; there is no more reward for them, their memory is forgotten. Their love, their hate, their jealousy have already perished – nor will they ever again have a share in whatever is done beneath the sun” (Ibid 9:5,6).

The traditional commentaries, most notably the Targum, emphasize the vapor-vanity aspect of life when it is viewed “beneath the sun” – beneath the sun rather than beneath a loving and eternal G-d, from the perspective of this mortal, finite and often unfair world rather than from the perspective of the infinite and true world – to – come. This understanding provides a logical tie-in to the Sukkah: when one views the entire desert experience from a purely geographical – historical

vantage point, the Sukkot were temporary huts which barely insulated us from the cold and heat and barely protected us from the rains and winds; but when we see the desert as the natural outgrowth of Divine miracle and loving intervention which freed us from Egyptian servitude, then the desert Sukkot become clouds and rays of Divine glory which symbolize the Sanctuary.

But even according to the simple meaning of the text, King Solomon – despite his initial pessimistic assessment of life as transient and inconsequential as the fleeting vapor of a breath – seems to make a fascinating turnaround. In the very verse following his pining over the futility of a life which must always end in the destruction of human love, hate and jealousy, he suddenly declares: “Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for G-d has already approved your deeds. Let your garments always be white and your head never lack oil. Enjoy life with the wife you love through all the days of the life of your vapor which (G-d) has given you beneath the sun all the days of the your vapor; for that is your compensation for your life and your toil which you toil beneath the sun. Whatever you are able to do with your strength, shall you do!, because there is neither deed nor accounting nor knowledge nor wisdom in the netherworld where you are going to there” (Eccles 9: 7-10).

What caused the switch in attitude, suggesting that it is precisely the inevitability of death and the briefness of life which ought spur you on to enjoy life to its fullness and accomplish as much as your strength allows? I remember my last visit to my maternal grandmother, the individual who had the most profound influence on my life, just a few days before her death. She lived in an “efficiency room” (combined kitchen and bedroom) within my aunt and uncle’s larger apartment; she was then ninety years old, and very ill, although not in real pain. As I entered her room, she gave me her very special smile. “Mein Liebes Kind” (My beloved child), she said. “That is exactly how I see my life – an opening and closing of the door, a brief instant in the eternal span of time. Make sure you utilize each moment. I know I’m dying, and I’m not afraid to die. I’m going home to G-d. I only pray I used the time I was given as best as possible...”

This, I believe, is the true meaning of King Solomon’s Scroll. Eitan Dorshav, in a most thoughtful article in Azure, Autumn 2004, provides the interpretation. It is the very beauty of life which ought serve to spur us on to actualize our potential and make the most of every moment we have in this world – before it’s too late. Were we to face a lifetime of infinity, there would be no necessity to do, to love, to relate; after all, why do today what you can always do tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, unless there may not be a tomorrow... And since we are such finite mortals, we must grasp onto every moment of joy and satisfaction, we must live each moment as fully as possible.

The opening portion of the Book of Genesis tells of Cain and Abel, Hevel, the shepherd whose very short life – a vapor, a breath – was cruelly snuffed out. However, the Bible tells us, “And Hevel also brought (a sacrifice to G-d) consisting of his first-born, fatted sheep; And the Lord looked with favor (gave salvation, Hebrew Yesha) to Hevel...” (Genesis 4:4). In the sum total of things, whether we live to be a 100 or 20, our lives are always too short and seem to pass as mere vapor. The most we can hope for is that the period of time we do live is devoted to G-d, to the eternal ideal of compassion, freely – given love and truth, and that we fulfill the human mission of being shepherds for those who require our care. The question can never be how long you lived, but rather what you made of whatever time was placed at your disposal. If you were a shepherd, and if your life was dedicated to G-d, then you will have achieved salvation.

On my desk in my Ohr Torah Stone office in Efrat is a clock which is modeled after the sun-clock put up in Jerusalem by Rav Shmuel Salant more than 100 years ago, instead of ciphers it has letters, twelve letters spelling out the verse, “our days are as a passing shadow.” (Ymnu Kztl Over). I have added beneath the clock a mediating verse, “In the shadow of Your Wings do I find sheltering comfort.” I do not find such a clock depressing; much the opposite, it inspires me to make each moment as momentous as possible.

Shabbat Shalom

<http://www.artscroll.com/Chapters/sg1h-004.html>

**Shabbos in the Chofetz Chaim's Home from
Stories My Grandfather Told Me** Volume 1 -- Bereishis Memorable Tales based
on the Weekly Sidrah
By Zev Greenwald

Shabbos in the Chofetz Chaim's Home
“G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it”
(Bereishis 2:3)

Leib, a 14-year-old boy, studied in a small yeshivah in Russia. On one occasion, he was due to return home for a visit. The train was scheduled to reach his station on Thursday afternoon. He would board there and travel to his home in Stuchin, Poland. Even if the train ran exactly on schedule, Leib knew that he would arrive home just hours before Shabbos.

As it turned out, the train did not arrive at the station until Thursday evening. By the time Leib had boarded, darkness had fallen. By Friday morning he knew he would never reach Stuchin before Shabbos. He would have to find another place in which to spend the holy day.

Leib asked a conductor for a list of the stations where the train was due to stop. He had decided that if he recognized one of the stops as a place where Jews lived, he would get off the train, in the hopes that someone would invite him home for Shabbos. To his joy, the conductor informed him that one of the cities was very close to Radin. Leib was quite excited at this news, because his aged great-uncle, the Chofetz Chaim, lived in Radin. Leib’s grandfather was the Chofetz Chaim’s brother. It looked as though he would be able to spend Shabbos at the home of his illustrious relative.

When the train came to his stop, Leib gathered his belongings and got off the train. He asked passersby the way to Radin, and quickly made his way to his great-uncle’s house. His arrival was greeted with joy by the Rebbetzin. She explained that her husband had already left for shul, adding that, as a rule, the Chofetz Chaim, as the Rav, went to shul early in order to learn with some of the congregants before davening. She advised Leib to rest a bit before going to shul.

Having spent the entire previous night awake on the swaying train, Leib was exhausted. He fell asleep immediately.

Upon awakening, the first thing he saw was the Chofetz Chaim seated at his Shabbos table, learning from a sefer. His uncle welcomed him warmly, then suggested that the boy wash his hands and daven Kabbalas Shabbos and Ma’ariv, after which they would eat the Shabbos meal together.

When Leib had finished davening, the Chofetz Chaim summoned his wife to join them at the table. The Chofetz Chaim made Kiddush, and the three of them -- the aged rabbi, his wife, and the 14-year-old youth -- sat down to their Shabbos feast. When the meal was over, the Chofetz Chaim excused himself and went to his room to sleep.

Leib prepared himself for bed as well. He tried to fall asleep again but to no avail. At last, he rose and went into the kitchen, where a clock stood on a shelf. Leib looked at it to check the time, then rubbed his eyes in disbelief. The clock appeared to be functioning and yet it showed 4 o’clock! How could it be 4 in the morning already? Shaking his head in bewilderment, Leib returned to his bed.

When he awoke in the morning, he again went into the kitchen, where this time, he found the Rebbetzin.

“Good Shabbos,” he began. Then he asked her the question that had been troubling him. “Last night, after the meal, I couldn’t fall asleep right away. I went into the kitchen, and saw that the clock showed that it was 4 in the morning! Does the clock work properly? What time did we finish the meal last night?”

“It was very late when we finished,” she answered.

“But the meal didn’t last that long! What time did we sit down to eat? Did I sleep so long when I first came?”

“I’ll tell you what happened,” replied the Rebbetzin. “When the Rav returned from shul, you were in a very deep sleep. I wanted to wake you so that you could hear Kiddush, but my husband stopped me. He said that you were tired from your long journey, and advised me to let you sleep. He said that he would wait, and make Kiddush when you woke up.

“When some time had passed, not wanting to make me wait any longer, he asked our son Aharon to make Kiddush so that my son and I could eat our meal.

Meanwhile, my husband sat and learned, waiting for you to wake up. We agreed that he’d call me when you did, and that we would sit down together to the Shabbos meal, in your honor.”

The Rebbetzin added, “You slept for hours, but the Rav was determined not to start the Shabbos meal without you!”

Had Leib not asked his question, neither the Chofetz Chaim nor his wife had planned to say a word about their extraordinary behavior that Shabbos night!

<http://www.artscroll.com/Chapters/u-covh-001.html>

Parashas Bereishes from
**Entering The Covenant An Anthology of Divrei Torah for Bris Milah and
Pidyon Haben**
By Dr. Mandell I. Ganchrow

Parashas Bereishes

Rabbi Dr. Moshe Tendler

"Just as he entered the Covenant so may he enter into the Torah, the marriage canopy and good deeds." This blessing is bestowed upon the happy parents of a son who has just been inducted into the Covenant of Abraham. It is more than an expression of good wishes by those assembled for the future development of the child. The word, "just as," adds an ancillary blessing – the blessing of the proper balance between nature and nurture during the formative years of this child.

The first Sidrah of our Torah records the tragic, horrifying fratricide committed by Cain. The Creator of Heaven and Earth, all contained therein, and of man and woman, demands of Cain, "Where is your brother?" Cain's response would seem to be the epitome of chutzpah and disrespect toward the G-d he knows so well. "Am I my brother's keeper?" evades the piercing question of Hashem. Cain knew very well that it meant "Why did you kill your brother?" Indeed, we must question why Hashem ordered Cain's response to be included in the sanctified text of our Torah. So brazen a response would seem not to deserve to be eternalized in our Torah text. Its inclusion in the Sidrah compels us to search for deeper meaning in Cain's irreverent retort. I suggest that it was a brilliant rebuttal of Hashem's accusation.

"Am I my brother's keeper? You, Hashem bear the responsibility. You gave me the nature, the genetic predisposition to be a murderer. It was within Your power to fashion mankind without the ability to murder members of their own species. Most infrahuman species were so fashioned by Your Hand!"

Cain's retort is recorded to reject Cain's genetic defense. No one is coerced by his genome to violate Hashem's laws for mankind. Indeed, people have different personalities and varying dispositions that expose them to temptation and to sin. Hashem had previously instructed Cain when he displayed anger and disappointment at the refusal of Hashem to accept his less than gracious sacrifice: ". . . the sin lies at the threshold and it is attractive to you, but I gave you the ability to master your desire to sin" (Bereishis 4:7).

How this new son of our people will balance the tensions between his genetic predispositions, the secular cultural forces he will confront during maturation, and the imperatives of a Torah life-style, will determine his success as a Jew and a ben Torah. Therefore, all assembled extend their blessing to his parents: just as today he has participated in the great mitzvah of Milah without the impact of the negative forces of a secular culture, so too, when he matures to a life of Torah and Mitzvos, the education he will receive from his parents will give him full mastery over all the negative influences, as he achieves his goal to live a life that finds favor in the eyes of G-d and Man.