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Netiv Aryeh HaRav Avigdor Nebenzahl shlita
BEREISHIT 5777

WHAT WAS WRONG WITH KAYIN'S OFFERING?

"After a period of time, Kayin brought an offering to
Hashem of the fruit of the ground" (Bereishit 4:3). The

first person in the history of mankind which the Torah
relates that he wished to bring an offering to Hashem was
Kayin. The Ramban explains that Kayin as well as the
others who brought offerings in the early days of
civilization (such as Noach) understood the hidden power
of an offering and its ability to awaken the upper worlds.
With this in mind, the Meshech Chochma (beginning of
Vayikra) explains the reasons posited by the Ramban
and Ramban behind the mitzvah of bringing offerings, he
explained that the offerings brought on the bamot were
intended to prevent the Jewish nation from worshipping
avoda zara (see Rambam Moreh Nebuchim 3:22).
However the offerings in the Beis Hamikdash were to be
a pleasing offering to Hashem and to create unification in
the worlds above. According to the Ramban the word
korban implies a closeness, bringing the unification and
forces above close to us (Ramban Vayikra 1:4, see also
Rabaenu Bechaye there 9).

Some say that if we combine the words of Chazal
(Pirkei D'R' Eliezer 31) that Kayin, and Adam Harishon
and Noach as well, brought their offerings on Mt.
Moriah, the site of the Mikdash then we now learn the
initial ones to bring offerings not only understood the
deep meaning behind offerings and the pleasant aroma it
brings to Hashem but they also understand the most
auspicious place for it (see Meshech Chochma Bereishit
8:20).

If so, Kayin was the first of the brothers who felt an
awakening to bring a gift to the King of the world. Hevel
felt this awakening only at a later stage, as the pasuk
states: "and as for Hevel he also brought of the firstlings
of his flock and from their choicest (ibid. 4). The
implication here is that Hevel's offering was secondary to
Kayin's yet the Torah informs us: "Hashem turned to
Hevel and to his offering, but to Kayin and to his offering
He did not turn". Hashem accepted specifically Hevel's
offering however the Torah does not explain the reason.

On the surface we would explain that Kayin's offerings
should be more desirable for he was the one who
introduced the idea of giving to Hashem by giving
something to the One Whom "the heavens and the highest
heavens cannot contain" (Melachim I 8:27). Even though
we are already accustomed to the idea that Kayin was evil
and Hevel was the righteous one and therefore it is
obvious that Hashem does not wish to accept the offering
of an evil person, but we must realize that we are
speaking about an event which occurred prior to when

Kayin killed Hevel. At first glance it would appear that Kayin was greater than Hevel with regards to the idea of bringing an offering, which behooves us to try to understand why Kayin's offering was rejected (see Sichot Mussar 5732, essay 7).

Perhaps already from the first offering described in the Torah, Hashem wishes to teach us the most basic foundation in offerings and that is that the offering itself is not an end but only a means to an end. What is the goal of an offering? It is to elevate the spiritual level of man - Hashem has no desire for offerings in and of themselves unless it stirs a person to changing his ways. Since Hashem saw that Kayin's heart was not as pure as Hevel's he therefore preferred Hevel's, to teach future generations that Hashem desires the heart.

However based on the teaching of R' Yehudah Halevi in Kuzari (2:14), the answer to our question is very simple - the initiative to bring offerings did not emanate from an inner desire to come close to Hashem rather it was within the framework of a battle between two brothers over Eretz Yisrael. When time came to divide the world among themselves, each of them had a desire for Eretz Yisrael to be their portion. When they did not reach an agreement they decided to bring an offering to Hashem, whoever's offering Hashem will accept will be sign that he is greater than his brother and thus Eretz Yisrael will be within his share. Thus, explains the Kuzari, Kayin was so angry that his offering was not accepted.

Why then did Hashem permit Kayin to kill Hevel - for the lesser of the two brothers to take the life of the greater of the two? This is something which the human mind cannot grasp, but it is a question that has plagued many throughout history - why do the righteous suffer and the evil prosper?

Even so, perhaps we can sweeten this bitter fate with the teachings of the Kabbalists who taught that Kayin did not succeed in removing Hevel from the world. The good soul of Hevel did not disappear into thin air but returned in the guise of Sheis who was born after Hevel had already died. Chava therefore carefully chose her words when giving him a name: "because Hashem provided me another child in place of Hevel ..." (4:25). Sheis was not just any replacement for Hevel but he arose "in place of Hevel" - the soul of Hevel returned to the world within the body of Sheis. The soul of Hevel then returned within the body of Noach and in that manner although almost

the entire creation which had been destroyed following the flood, the lofty soul of Hevel continued to exist (see Zohar 1:55).

Furthermore, say the Kabbalists, this pure soul continue to reach higher and higher levels for it also merited residing in the body of Moshe Rabenu. Moshe Rabenu's name is spelled "mem, shin, hei" with the letter "mem" standing for Moshe, "shin" standing for Sheis, and "hei" for Hevel. These people were all reincarnated in the soul of Hevel. Interestingly, there is no "nun" representing the name Noach. The reason for this is that during the days of Noach Avoda Zara was rampant and thus his name should not be alluded to in the name Moshe whose entire purpose in life was to eradicate Avoda Zara and to publicize belief in a single G-d.

For this reason when the Tanach describes Moshe's grandson as worshipping Avoda Zara, the reason does not apply and thus the letter "nun" appears within the name Moshe in what is referred to as "tliya" - it is hanging and not on the same level on the line. Tradition has it that in this manner we are told about (Shoftim 18:30) Yehonatan son of Gershom, son of Menashe (spelled "mem" "nun" "shin" hei", thus the reference is to Moshe but a small "nun" is added to include Noach as well).

Returning to our opening question: although Kayin initiated the idea of bringing an offering to Hashem, Hevel's was accepted because he gave it with more heart - this is a lesson for generations that Hashem desires the heart.

Taking a look at the Torah's description of the offerings - Kayin's is described as "the fruit of the ground" without specifying they were the "choicest fruits" or something similar. Chazal explain that Kayin brought whatever was available, some say that he actually brought the worst portions (see Rashi). Perhaps both commentaries are providing the same message - Kayin did not intentionally choose the inferior fruits but took whatever came into his hand first without any sort of selection. This is a complete denigration of the offerings. Had he intentionally brought the worst of the lot then at least he would have been aware that he should be bringing the best, but his stinginess prevents him from doing so. A person who could not be bothered to even think about what to bring implies that he is mocking the idea of bringing an offering and he places no importance in it whatsoever.

If Kayin brings whatever comes into his hand by

chance, or according to one view he brought flax which can only be eaten under extenuating circumstances, then this implies that Kayin brought the worst for the worst thing a person can do is to pay no attention whatsoever and bring whatever comes into his hand.

On the other hand Helvel brought "of the firstling of his flock and from their choicest". Hevel understood that externals are important when it comes to offerings because they reflect a person's inner desire and what is his heart's true desire. The desire of the heart and proper feeling is the entire purpose behind offerings.

We find in the Messilas Yesharim that it is not sufficient to perform a mitzvah but it must be honored and glorified. What prevents this from happening - laziness, a person's laziness and desire not to work hard can convince him: "honor is only for people who are enticed by this nonsense, however Hashem has no need for honor He is above all of this, therefore it is sufficient to perform the perform the mitzvah meticulously following its details.

Kayin, explains Messilat Yesharim, felt this was a valid claim - does Hashem really need these fruits? Does He care if the fire burns a choice fruit or one which is blemished? After all, Hashem desires the heart and my heart was the first to offer is that enough.

However, had Kayin descended to the core of the matter he would have discovered that in truth YNA Newsletter Parshat Bereishit 3 of 4 Hashem is the Master and we must honor him even though He does not need our honor. Hashem does not need a choice offering but we must bring a choice offering because external honor that we bring to him is always a reflection of the inner relationship in our heart - the outer actions of the body reflect that which is hidden within the depths of our heart.

When David said: "I will prostrate myself towards My holy sanctuary in awe of You' (Tehillim 5:8), he is not taking pride over the fact that he is prostrating but rather that his fear of Hashem was to such an extent that his entire bent over in the Sanctuary of Hashem. Similarly, Ezra said: "My G-d, I am embarrassed and ashamed to lift my face to You" (Ezra 9:6) - he does not emphasize his face in the ground rather his great shame before the King Who is above all blessing. When his heart is filled with such shame than his face is unable to rise up and straighten and look ahead.

When the heart wishes to give to Hashem, then the feeling fills his entire being and expresses itself in

external activities. When a person goes to a wedding and wishes to give a monetary gift to the couple, he will make sure to place it in a nice envelope even though he is aware that they will tear the envelope and throw it out. However, the trouble he goes to portrays the joy he has in giving the gift and if he could he would give them even a larger gift. Such giving shows that the recipients are important in the eyes of the giver.

One whose mitzvah observance remains in a cheap envelope testifies the true way he views his relationship with the One Who commanded us to do mitzvot, his mitzvot are in a wrinkled envelope. The recipient has no desire for such gifts.

The One Who knows the thoughts of man understood that the flawed externals in Kayin's offering is testimony to his faulty internal motivation and thus his offering was not accepted.

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Parshas Bereishis

The Sun Pioneers Gevurah - Self Control

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1220 – Forgetting Mashiv HaRuach on Friday Night. Good Shabbos!

The Sun Pioneers Gevurah: Hearing an Insult and Keeping Quiet

Towards the beginning of Sefer Bereshis, the Ribono shel Olam created the sun, the moon, and the stars. The pasuk says, "And G-d made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night; and the stars." [Bereshis 1:16].

Rashi here alludes to a famous teaching of Chazal: At first the pasuk refers to the sun and moon as being "two great lights" and then suddenly they are referred to as the "greater light" and the "lesser light." Rashi explains that the sun and the moon were created equal however the moon was reduced in size after complaining "it is impossible for two kings to both use a single crown." The change was not only a change in the size of the moon – it was more than that. Today the moon only reflects the light of the sun. In the original act of Creation, the moon had its own independent light source. That is the full

meaning of the shift in the pasukim from “two great lights” to “the great light and the smaller light.”

There is a very interesting Daas Zekeinim m’Baalei haTosfos. They note that while the moon was reduced in size, the sun remained the same size. Why was that? It was because it did not say anything. Even though the moon was impugning that the sun should be reduced in size, the sun did not say “Hey! Why should I be reduced in size? – You should be reduced in size!” The sun retained its size because “It heard the moon’s complaint and did not respond.”

The Gemara [Gittin 36b] praises those who “allow themselves to be shamed without shaming back, who hear themselves being insulted and do not respond.” The Gemara records: About them Scripture writes (at the end of Shiras Devorah): “And those who love Him go forth like the sun in its strength.” [Shoftim 5:31]. What is the connection between the sun going forth in its strength and those who do not answer back when they are shamed?

The Daas Zekeinim explains beautifully: This is exactly what the sun did at the time of Creation. The sun did not say anything! It was insulted and nevertheless did not respond. This is what Devorah was referring to when she wrote “and those who love Him go forth like the sun in its strength.”

This is the definition of Gevurah. The popular concept of Gevurah suggests being muscular. Someone who works out on a regular basis is thought to be a Gibor. The concept of Gevurah in Chazal is epitomized by the Mishna “Who is the strong man (Gibor)? It is the one who conquers his evil inclination.” [Avot 4:1]

To be able to be in control of oneself and not always need to reflexively react to insults and put downs – requires true strength – “like the sun going forth in its strength”. Gevurah is the ability to overcome one’s natural instincts. The first manifestation of such Gevurah in the history of the world was the sun’s non-response to the impugned insult of the moon!

Why are School Teachers Like Stars?

The above cited pasuk [Bereshis 1:16] concludes with the words “v’es haKochamim” (and the stars). Rashi notes “Because He reduced the size of the moon, He made its hosts many, to conciliate it.” This is an amazing idea!

In the original Master Plan of Creation there was apparently only supposed to be a sun and a moon. But after reducing the size of the moon, the Ribono shel Olam

decided to create stars to accompany the moon in the night sky. Rashi explains that this was a sort of conciliation prize to the moon, who suffered a reduction in size and the loss of its own source of light. To assuage the feelings of the moon, G-d created stars.

Now, how many stars are there? There are billions of stars! No one knows how many stars there are in the heavens. Consider the Milky Way! The number is astronomical! And what is the whole purpose of the stars? They are to make the moon feel better!

The Tolner Rebbe of Jerusalem made a beautiful observation: Anyone contemplating a career in Chinuch (Jewish education) should take note and remember this observation! The truth of the matter is that every parent is a Jewish educator.

The Gemara comments on the pasuk “The wise (maskilim) shall shine like the radiance of the firmament, and those who teach righteousness to the multitudes (matzdikei haRabim) will shine like the stars, forever and ever” [Daniel 12:3]: The term Maskilim refers to Judges (Dayanim) who render true judgement and to charity collectors.” The term matzdikei haRabim (who are compared to the stars) refers to teachers of school children (melamdei tinokos). [Bava Basra 8b]

Everyone who ever wrote any type of homiletic drush always gravitates to this enigmatic Gemara. Why are melamdei tinokos like Kochavim?

The classic interpretation is the following: The average person looks at a star and see it as a tiny little object, a mere spec in the heaven. Chazal say “No!” They are k’Kochavim l’Olam Vaed (like stars forever and ever). Someone might mistakenly consider a Rebbe, a school teacher, as insignificant. He might think “Eh! A second grade Rebbe. What else can he do?” Our sages tell us this is not the way we should view it. They look small but their function and accomplishments are eternal! That is the classic homiletic teaching associated with this pasuk.

The Tolner Rebbe interprets differently. Just as the purpose of the stars was to make the moon feel good – to serve as conciliation for its decrease in stature, so too, that is the purpose of a Rebbe! The tachlis of a Rebbe is to make a Talmid feel good about himself. “L’hafis da’ato” – the whole creation of the stars was to make the moon feel better. You may be smaller, you may not have your own source of light but you are something, you play a significant role in the heavenly order. That is what a Rebbe must always have in mind when working with his

students. Make them feel worthwhile. This is what the pasuk means by the expression “Matzdikei haRabim (about which Chazal say ‘Elu melamdei tinokos’) k’Kochavim l’Olam va’ed.”

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2020 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org> (410) 602-1350

from: **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust**
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subject: **Covenant and Conversation**
The Genesis of Justice (Bereishit 5782)

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZT"l

There are words that change the world, none more so than two sentences that appear in the first chapter of the Torah:

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

The idea set forth here is perhaps the most transformative in the entire history of moral and political thought. It is the basis of the civilisation of the West with its unique emphasis on the individual and on equality. It lies behind Thomas Jefferson’s words in the American Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal [and] are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights ...” These truths are anything but self-evident. They would have been regarded as absurd by Plato who held that society should be based on the myth that humans are divided into

people of gold, silver and bronze and it is this that determines their status in society. Aristotle believed that some are born to rule and others to be ruled.

Revolutionary utterances do not work their magic overnight. As Rambam explained in The Guide for the Perplexed, it takes people a long time to change. The Torah functions in the medium of time. It did not abolish slavery, but it set in motion a series of developments – most notably Shabbat, when all hierarchies of power were suspended and slaves had a day a week of freedom – that were bound to lead to its abolition in the course of time.

People are slow to understand the implications of ideas. Thomas Jefferson, champion of equality, was a slave-owner. Slavery was not abolished in the United States until the 1860s and not without a civil war. And as Abraham Lincoln pointed out, slavery’s defenders as well as its critics cited the Bible in their cause. But eventually people change, and they do so because of the power of ideas planted long ago in the Western mind.

What exactly is being said in the first chapter of the Torah?

The first thing to note is that it is not a stand-alone utterance, an account without a context. It is in fact a polemic, a protest, against a certain way of understanding the universe. In all ancient myth the world was explained in terms of battles of the gods in their struggle for dominance. The Torah dismisses this way of thinking totally and utterly. God speaks and the universe comes into being. This, according to the great nineteenth century sociologist Max Weber, was the end of myth and the birth of Western rationalism.

More significantly, it created a new way of thinking about the universe. Central to both the ancient world of myth and the modern world of science is the idea of power, force, energy. That is what is significantly absent from Genesis 1. God says, “Let there be,” and there is. There is nothing here about power, resistance, conquest or the play of forces. Instead, the key word of the narrative, appearing seven times, is utterly unexpected. It is the word tov, good.

Tov is a moral word. The Torah in Genesis 1 is telling us something radical. The reality to which Torah is a guide (the word “Torah” itself means guide, instruction, law) is moral and ethical. The question Genesis seeks to answer is not “How did the universe come into being?” but “How then shall we live?” This is the Torah’s most significant

paradigm-shift. The universe that God made and we inhabit is not about power or dominance but about tov and ra, good and evil.[1] For the first time, religion was ethicised. God cares about justice, compassion, faithfulness, loving-kindness, the dignity of the individual and the sanctity of life.

This same principle, that Genesis 1 is a polemic, part of an argument with a background, is essential to understanding the idea that God created humanity “in His image, after His likeness.” This language would not have been unfamiliar to the first readers of the Torah. It was one they knew well. It was commonplace in the first civilisations, Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, where certain people were said to be in the image of God. They were the Kings of the Mesopotamian city-states and the Pharaohs of Egypt. Nothing could have been more radical than to say that not just kings and rulers appear in God’s image. We all do. Even today the idea is daring: how much more so in an age of absolute rulers with absolute power.

Understood thus, Genesis 1:26-27 is not so much a metaphysical statement about the nature of the human person as it is a political protest against the very basis of hierarchical, class- or caste-based societies whether in ancient or modern times. That is what makes it the most incendiary idea in the Torah. In some fundamental sense we are all equal in dignity and ultimate worth, for we are all in God’s image regardless of colour, culture or creed.

A similar idea appears later in the Torah, in relation to the Jewish people, when God invited them to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). All nations in the ancient world had priests, but none was “a kingdom of priests.” All religions have holy individuals – but none claim that every one of their members is holy. This too took time to materialise. During the entire biblical era there were hierarchies. There were Priests and High Priests, a holy elite. But after the destruction of the Second Temple, every prayer became a sacrifice, every leader of prayer a priest, and every synagogue a fragment of the Temple. A profound egalitarianism is at work just below the surface of the Torah, and the Rabbis knew it and lived it.

A second idea is contained in the phrase, “so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky.” Note that there is no suggestion that anyone has the right to have dominion over any other human being. In Paradise Lost, Milton, like the Midrash, states that this

was the sin of Nimrod, the first great ruler of Assyria and by implication the builder of the Tower of Babel (see Gen. 10:8-11). Milton writes that when Adam was told that Nimrod would “arrogate dominion undeserved,” he was horrified:

O execrable son so to aspire. Above his Brethren, to himself assuming. Authority usurped, from God not given: He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl. Dominion absolute; that right we hold. By his donation; but man over men. He made not lord; such title to himself. Reserving, human left from human free. (Paradise Lost, Book 12:64-71)

To question the right of humans to rule over other humans without their consent was at that time utterly unthinkable. All advanced societies were like this. How could they be otherwise? Was this not the very structure of the universe? Did the sun not rule the day? Did the moon not rule the night? Was there not a hierarchy of the gods in heaven itself? Already implicit here is the deep ambivalence the Torah would ultimately show toward the very institution of kingship, the rule of “man over men.”

The third implication lies in the sheer paradox of God saying, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” We sometimes forget, when reading these words, that in Judaism God has no image or likeness. To make an image of God is to transgress the second of the Ten Commandments and to be guilty of idolatry. Moses emphasised that at the Revelation at Sinai, “You saw no likeness, you only heard the sound of words.” (Deut. 4:12)

God has no image because He is not physical. He transcends the physical universe because He created it. Therefore He is free, unconstrained by the laws of matter. That is what God means when He tells Moses that His name is “I will be what I will be” (Ex. 3:14), and later when, after the sin of the Golden Calf, He tells him, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” God is free, and by making us in His image, He gave us also the power to be free.

This, as the Torah makes clear, was God’s most fateful gift. Given freedom, humans misuse it. Adam and Eve disobey God’s command. Cain murders Abel. By the end of the parsha we find ourselves in the world about to be destroyed by the Flood, for it is filled with violence to the point where God regretted that He had ever created humanity. This is the central drama of Tanach and of Judaism as a whole. Will we use our freedom to respect

order or misuse it to create chaos? Will we honour or dishonour the image of God that lives within the human heart and mind?

These are not only ancient questions. They are as alive today as ever they were in the past. The question raised by serious thinkers – ever since Nietzsche argued in favour of abandoning both God and the Judeo-Christian ethic – is whether justice, human rights, and the unconditional dignity of the human person are capable of surviving on secular grounds alone? Nietzsche himself thought not.

In 2008, Yale philosopher Nicholas Woltersdorff published a magisterial work arguing that our Western concept of justice rests on the belief that “all of us have great and equal worth: the worth of being made in the image of God and of being loved redemptively by God.”[2] There is, he insists, no secular rationale on which a similar framework of justice can be built. That is surely what John F. Kennedy meant in his Inaugural Address when he spoke of the “revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought,” that “the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God.”[3]

Momentous ideas made the West what it is, ideas like human rights, the abolition of slavery, the equal worth of all, and justice based on the principle that right is sovereign over might.[4] All of these ultimately derived from the statement in the first chapter of the Torah that we are made in God’s image and likeness. No other text has had a greater influence on moral thought, nor has any other civilisation ever held a higher vision of what we are called on to be.

Footnotes [1] What I take to be the meaning is of the story of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge is for another time. In the meantime, see Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, I:2. [2] Nicholas Woltersdorff, Justice: Rights and Wrongs (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 393. [3] John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, 20 January 1961. [4] Read Rabbi Sacks’ Introduction to his Essays on Ethics to understand his expanded thoughts on this notion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR BEREISHIT

- 1) What do you think the Torah intends for us to learn from the concept that we were each created ‘in the image of God’?
- 2) What was revolutionary about this idea during biblical

times? Is it still a radical idea?

- 3) How does this idea impact the way we live as Jews in a practical way?

From: torahwellsprings.com www.torahlectures.org/
Torah Wellsprings

Rav Meilech Biderman

Compiled by Rabbi Boruch Twersky

Parshas Bereishis

Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin taught: Everything in the Torah is contained in chumash Bereishis. [The average person will not recognize it, but concealed in the words of chumash Bereishis are all the halachos and lessons stated in the other four chumashim that follow it. Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin continued and said]: Everything in chumash Bereishis can be found in parashas Bereishis. And everything in parashas Bereishis is contained in the very first passuk of the parashah (Bereishis Bora etc.) Everything that’s in this first passuk is concealed in the first letter of Bereishis (the letter Beis). And everything that is in the Beis is found in a drop of ink at the edge of the Beis. And that drop of ink represents a Torah that is so high and so concealed...

Tzaddikim therefore studied the word Bereishis because this word alone contains the entire Torah. We will give a few examples:

1] The grandson of Rebbe Henech of Alexander zt'l had his bar mitzvah on Shabbos Bereishis. The Rebbe of Alexander told his grandson that Bereishis is gematriya Taryag. This grandson was bright, and immediately realized that Taryag and Bereishis do share very similar letters, and the Beis and Alef of Bereishis are gematriya Gimel. "But Bereishis also has a Shin?" the bar mitzvah bachur asked. The Rebbe replied, Gimel is gematriya Yetzer, the yetzer hara. Bereishis implies that when one rids himself from the Yetzer Harah, he will be able to keep the Taryag mitzvos. The Rebbe added that this is the meaning of the phrase we say on Yom Kippur, Labris Habeit vi'Al Teifen La'Yeitzer : Keep the Taryag mitzvos (which are gematriya Bris) by not paying attention to the yetzer hara.

2] The Chida teaches: Bereishis is roshei teivos of Amen Yehei Shmei Raba Mevorach Taaneh Bikol Answer menyehi shmei rabba out loud."

3] Bereishis means that for Reishis, for yiras shamayim (Reishis Chochma Yiras Hashem), Hashem created the

world (Bara Elokim Es Hashamayim Vies Haaretz. This one word teaches us the purpose of creation; it was for Reishis, yiras shamayim.

The first letter of the Torah, the beis (a Bayis, a house) also represents yiras shamayim, because the Gemara says, Chaval Al Diles Lei Dirah Vitara Lidirta Avid "Woe to those who don't have a house, and they build a doorway for the house...." (Shabbos 31). Torah and mitzvos are like the doorway, which lead to the home, to yiras shamayim. The purpose of Torah and mitzvos is to lead a person to yiras shamayim. Woe to those who build the doorway (they keep Torah and mitzvos) but they don't reach the home (yiras shamayim). So, the first word of the Torah, Bereishis, and the first letter of the Torah, Beis, both teach us that the purpose of the Torah is for yiras shamayim. As the Gemara concludes, Lo Bara HKBH Es Olamo Ela Kedei Sheyiru Milifanav "Hashem created the world, solely so people should fear Him" (Shabbos 31).

4] Logically, we would assume that the first letter of the Torah would be an Alef. But it isn't. It is a Beis. We can learn an important lesson from this as well. The Imrei Emes zy'a explains that the Torah begins with a beis, because the alef is yegiyah, to toil. The Torah teaches us lessons, but there is something that precedes it, and that is the alef, to be prepared to toil in Torah.

Rebbe Yochanan of Stolin zy'a told the following parable: An artist drew a beautiful painting that was sold for a lot of money. He also made prints of the painting, and sold those for a fraction of the price of the original. Why? The copies are just as beautiful as the original. Why were they worth so much less? The answer is, art isn't only about the beautiful work. It's about appreciating the effort that went into the painting, together with the artist's talent, training, and energies. Rebbe Yochanon of Stolin zt'l said that the same is with avodas Hashem. It isn't just the deeds that Hashem desires from us. The heart and effort that one puts into the mitzvos are what make them truly valuable.

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Parshat Bereshit — Reflections on the Divine Image

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Parashat Bereshit teaches us one of the most fundamental concepts of our faith. It is something we speak of often, and that is perhaps why we frequently fail to appreciate its depth and the magnitude of its influence. The concept of man's creation betzelem Elohim, in the image of God, is one of the most sublime ideas that man possesses, and is decisive in the Jewish concept of man.

What does it mean when we say that man was created in the image of God? Varying interpretations have been offered, each reflecting the general ideological orientation of the interpreter.

The philosophers of Judaism, the fathers of our rationalist tradition, maintain that the image of God is expressed, in man, by his intellect. Thus, Sa'adia Gaon and Maimonides maintain that sekhel, reason, which separates man from animal, is the element of uniqueness that is in essence a divine quality. The intellectual function is thus what characterizes man as tzelem Elohim.

However, the ethical tradition of Judaism does not agree with that interpretation. Thus, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, in his Mesilat Yesharim, does not accept reason as the essence of the divine image. A man can, by exercise of his intellect, know what is good – but fail to act upon it. Also, the restriction of tzelem Elohim to reason means that only geniuses can truly qualify as being created in the image of God. Hence, Luzzatto offers an alternative and perhaps more profound definition. The tzelem Elohim in which man was created is that of ratzon – the freedom of will. The fact that man has a choice – between good and evil, between right and wrong, between obedience and disobedience of God – is what expresses the image of God in which he was born. An animal has no freedom to act; a man does. That ethical freedom makes man unique in the creation.

But how does the freedom of the human will express itself? A man does not assert his freedom by merely saying "yes" to all that is presented to him. Each of us finds himself born into a society which is far from perfect. We are all born with a set of animal drives, instincts, and intuitions. If we merely nod our heads in assent to all those forces which seem more powerful than us, then we are merely being passive, plastic, and devoid of personality. We are then not being free, and we are not executing our divine right of choice. Freedom, the image

of God, is expressed in the word “no.” When we negate that which is indecent, evil, ungodly; when we have the courage, the power, and the might to rise and announce with resolve that we shall not submit to the pressures to conform to that which is cheap, that which is evil, that which is indecent and immoral – then we are being free men and responding to the inner divine image in which we are created.

The late Rabbi Aaron Levine, the renowned Reszher Rav, interpreted, in this manner, the famous verse from Ecclesiastes (3:19) which we recite every morning as part of our preliminary prayers. Solomon tells us, “Umotar ha’adam min habehema ayin,” which is usually translated as, “And the preeminence of man over beast is naught.” Rabbi Levine, however, prefers to give the verse an interpretation other than the pessimistic, gloomy apparent meaning. He says: “And the preeminence of man over beast is – ayin, ‘no.’” What is it that gives man his distinction? What is it that makes man different from the rest of creation, superior to the rest of the natural world? It is his capacity to say ayin, his capacity to face the world and announce that he will not submit to it, that he will accept the challenge and respond “no”. An animal has no choice – no freedom – and therefore must say “yes” to his drives, to the world in which he lives. But a human being can say “no” to that which is unseemly and beneath his dignity. And when he says “no” to all that is ungodly, he is being Godly. He is showing that he was created in the image of God.

Adam and Eve had to learn this lesson, and their descendants forever after must learn from their failure. We are nowhere told in the Torah that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was in any way different from the fruit of the other trees in the Garden of Eden. Yet when she was tempted by the serpent, Eve looked at the fruit, and in her mind’s eye its attractiveness grew out of all proportion to reality. It looked more luscious, it looked more juicy, it looked more appetizing. She even imagined that this was some kind of “intelligence food.” Her instinct bade her to do that which was in violation of the divine command. But counter to this she had the capacity, as a free agent created in God’s image, to say ayin, to say “no” to her instinct and her temptation. But she forfeited her opportunity. The first human couple did not know how to say “no.” This was the beginning of their downfall.

Abraham was a great Jew – the first Jew. Yet in our

tradition he is not famous so much for saying “yes” as he is for saying “no.” Abraham was the great iconoclast. It was he who said “no” to the idolatries of his day, who said “no” to his father’s paganism, who was the one man pitted against the entire world, shouting “no!” to all the obscenities of his contemporary civilization.

Moses was a great teacher. He gave us 613 commandments. When you investigate the commandments, you find that only 248 are positive – commanding us what to do. But 365 of them are negative – they say “no” to our wills and our wishes. For when we learn to say “no,” we are being free men and women under God. The famous Ten Commandments have only three positive laws; the other seven are negative. Indeed, it is only through these negatives that we can live and survive and thrive at all. Without “You shall not murder,” there can be no society. Without “You shall not steal,” there can be no normal conduct of commerce and business. Without “You shall not commit adultery,” there can be no normal family life. Without “You shall not covet,” the human personality must degenerate and man becomes nothing more than an animal, a beast.

“And the preeminence of man over beast is ayin” – it is this which gives man greater dignity and superiority over the animal – his power to say “no.” It is this freedom of the human personality taught by our Jewish tradition that we Jews must reassert once again in our own day.

The author Herman Wouk told me some time ago that a number of years earlier he was boarding a ship to go on a trip overseas. Several hours after he boarded, a cabin boy brought him a note from the apostate Jewish author Shalom Asch, asking Wouk to come to his cabin. There Asch complained to him and said, “I don’t understand you, Mr. Wouk. You are a young man – yet you are observant and Orthodox. When my generation of writers was young, we were rebels, we were dissenters. We rejected tradition, we rejected authority, we rejected the opinions of the past. What happened to you? Why do you conform so blandly?” Wouk gave the older man an answer that I believe is very important for all of us to know. He answered, “You are making a terrible mistake, Mr. Asch. You seem to forget that the world we live in is not a paradise of Jewishness. You seem to forget that the world we occupy has become corrupted, assimilated, emptied of all Jewish content. In a world of this sort, one does not have to be a rebel at all in order to ignore the high standards of Judaism. If you violate the Sabbath, if

you eat like a pagan, if you submit to the cheap standards of morality of the society in which we live, then you are being a conformist; you are merely allowing your own animal instincts to get the better of you. Today, if I and some of my contemporaries are observing the Jewish tradition, then it is because we are the dissenters, the nein-sagers. For we are the ones who say 'no' to the desecration of the Sabbath, 'no' to the creeping assimilation that ridicules all of Judaism and threatens its very life, 'no' to all the forces that seek to degrade our people and diminish the uniqueness of Israel that is its dignity and its preeminence. You are the conformist."

This is the kind of force, the kind of courage, the kind of conviction that has sustained us throughout the ages. It is that which has given us the power to say "no" to the threats of Haman, the cruelties of Chmielnicki, the genocide of Hitler, as well as the sugarcoated missionizing of more enlightened enemies of Judaism. We demonstrated the image of God when we exercised our freedom and said "no" to all this.

I am not suggesting that we ought to be destructively negative. It is, rather, that when we fully exercise our critical functions and faculties, then the good will come to the fore of itself. It is because I have confidence in the innate powers of the good that I suggest we concentrate on denying evil. "Depart from evil and do good" (Psalms 34:15). If you put all your energies into negating evil, then good will be done of its own accord.

It is this power to say "no" that we must exercise in our relations with our fellow Jews in the State of Israel. For, in addition to all our constructive efforts on behalf of the upbuilding of the land, we must also be able to call a halt to the creeping paganism that plagues it.

When we find that in our own Orthodox community in Israel certain things are done which serve only to desecrate the name of God, we must not be shy. We must rise and as one say "no" to all those forces which would compromise the sanctity of the Torah and the sanctity of the Holy Land.

In our own American Jewish community, we must, here too, be the critics. And when, to mention just a seemingly trivial matter, certain artists and entertainers who are Jewish, and who rely upon the community as such for acceptance of what they have to offer, elect to entertain on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, we must say "no." We must realize that it is no longer the domain of one's own conscience, when the matter is a public

demonstration of contempt for American Jewry. "And the preeminence of man over beast is ayin" – we must not sheepishly go along with everything that "famous people" are willing to tell us. We must be men, we must be human beings, we must use the freedom that God gave us when He created us in His image, and learn when to say "no."

I conclude with the statement by one of the greatest teachers of Judaism, a man who indeed showed, in his life, that he knew the value of "no." It was Rabbi Akiba, the man who was able to stand up to the wrath and the might of the whole Roman Empire and say "no" to tyranny and to despotism, who taught us, "Beloved is man that he was created in the image of God" (Avot 3:18). Beloved indeed, and precious and unique and irreplaceable is man when he has the freedom of will that is granted to him by his Creator. And furthermore, "Hiba yeteira noda'at lo shenivra betzelem" – a special love was given to man by God, it is a special gift when man not only has that freedom but when he knows that he has that freedom – and therefore uses it to combat evil and to allow the great, constructive forces of good, innate in himself, to come to the fore so as to make this a better world for all mankind.

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Insights Parshas Bereishis - Tishrei 5782

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moshe Chaim ben Avraham Aba. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Light and Darkness

God said "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good and God separated between the light and the darkness (1:3-4).

Rashi (ad loc), in his second interpretation of this verse, comments: "According to its simple meaning explain it thusly – He saw that it was good and that it wasn't proper for it (the light) and the darkness to be functioning in a jumbled manner so He assigned this one (light) a sphere of activity during the day, and the other (darkness) a sphere of activity during the night."

These concepts require an explanation. First of all, what does it mean that Hashem saw that the light was good? In Rashi's first (less literal) interpretation, light refers to a spiritual light that Hashem reserved for the righteous in the World to Come. This can be understood as being good. But in his more literal explanation of the possuk, what was good about light? It was a creation like anything else; what was particularly good about it?

Secondly, how are we to understand the original "jumble" of light and darkness? How is that possible and what was this separation that was created because Hashem saw that it was good?

The Gemara (Nedarim 64b) teaches us that there are four types of people who are considered as if they were dead; one who is blind, one who has lost all his money, one who has leprosy, and one who is childless. Why is a blind person considered as if he were dead?

Light gives us the ability to see objects and seeing is our way of connecting to objects. People who are obsessed with themselves are constantly looking at themselves in the mirror (and taking lots of selfies) because that is how they connect to themselves. When someone has an experience of losing something, he says, "I never thought I would see it again." In fact, this is what Yaakov says upon being reunited with Yosef after giving him up for dead for twenty-two years, "I can die at this time after having seen your face..." (46:30).

A person who cannot see his body isn't properly connected to himself. In fact, Rashi points out by Yitzchak, who was home bound because of his blindness, that he no longer had an evil inclination and Hashem was therefore able to associate His name with Yitzchak without fear that Yitzchak would sin. Seeing is a way to be connected and take ownership. If you cannot see something, you cannot sense it as being yours – so a blind person is as if he is dead because it is as if he has no body. This is why they no longer have an evil inclination. This is the difference between day and night. Hashem divided creation into day and night because they have two very distinct purposes. During the day a person is connected to his body, while at night a person is connected to his soul. This is what the possuk (Tehillim 92:3) means, "To declare your loving kindness in the morning, and your faithfulness every night."

We sense the kindness of Hashem and the opportunity to gain from all that he has created for us during the day. When night comes, we begin to feel alone and yearn to

seek a spiritual connection.

Originally, light and dark were created to be intermingled intermittently so that a person could connect to both parts of his psyche. But when Hashem saw that light would actually give a person the ability to sense himself, he separated the darkness, which would immediately limit man's sense of himself. He thus separated light and darkness into two distinct spheres of influence – a time to focus on one's physical body and a time to focus on one's soul.

The Great Satan

And God saw all that He had made and behold it was very good (1:31).

At the end of the sixth and final day of creation, the possuk says that Hashem reflected upon all that He had created and saw that it was very good.

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 9:6-9) has a fascinating discussion on what is meant by "and behold it was very good." There are several dissenting opinions, including: "Nahman said in the name of R' Shmuel this refers to the evil inclination [...] R' Zeira said this refers to Gehinnom [...] R' Shmuel ben Yitzchak says this refers to the angel of death."

These are not ordinarily considered wonderful additions to creation; what do Chazal mean by saying that the evil inclination, the angel of death, and Gehinnom are all part of what Hashem saw as "and behold it was very good"?

The Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) makes an odd statement: Hashem told the Jewish people "I created the evil inclination and I created the Torah as its spice." In other words, the very basis of creation is built on the evil inclination and the Torah is "merely" its antidote. What does this really mean?

The answer is that man was created with the ability to desire things for himself. In order to receive and fully appreciate the good that Hashem intended to bestow on mankind, man has to be in touch with his sense of self and what he wants to have. The evil inclination is the prime motivator for man to achieve. On the other hand, the more we focus solely on what we want the further we move away from Hashem. Thus, the yetzer hora is the basis to creation and the Torah, which is meant to guide us in the maelstrom of the physical world, is really the key to keeping us on track to receive the ultimate good that Hashem desires us to have.

Even though the evil inclination was the root cause of

Adam's original sin and caused a rift between man and Hashem, the desire for self-fulfillment is the basis for creation. The Torah is the guide for the road back to Hashem and the relationship with Him, which is the ultimate good, but creation is built on man choosing for himself.

Similarly, the angel of death can also be seen as a great kindness. Death really means that man now has an end time to his life cycle. Once man sinned and his spiritual soul could no longer sustain the physical body, it became necessary for man to die in order to expel the physical contamination to his body.

Man's life now has boundaries, and just like every physical object in the universe, boundaries provide definition. This is what Shlomo Hamelech meant when he said, "It is better to go to a funeral than a feast" (Koheles 7:2). If a person takes to heart that his life on earth is limited, it allows him to transcend the mere physical desires of this world and seek a deeper eternal existence.

Lastly, Gehinnom can also be seen as the ultimate expression of Hashem's love for mankind. Meaning, if a person is so far off the proper path and separated from Hashem that he cannot go to an eternal reward, he should just perish into oblivion. But Hashem, in his great love for man, wishes to rehabilitate his creations. The Mishna points out that there are only a few people who have no share in the World to Come. Thus, this pain of rehabilitation is really just a purification process so that a person can merit an eternal existence at some point, and this is, after all, the entire purpose of creation.

An Abel Proxy

After a period of time, Kayin brought an offering to Hashem from the fruit of the land, and Hevel also offered some of the firstborn of his flock. Hashem paid heed to Hevel and his offering; but to Kayin and his offering Hashem paid no heed. Kayin became furious and depressed (4:3-5).

This week's parsha recounts the famous story of the first conflict between brothers, which ultimately leads to the first case of fratricide. The Torah gives us the background on the source of the conflict: Kayin who had first conceived of bringing an offering to Hashem was outdone by his younger brother who seized on the same concept but prepared a much nicer offering to Hashem (see Rashi 4:3-4). Hashem accepts the offering of Hevel,

while Kayin's offering is all but ignored.

The Torah describes Kayin as "furious and depressed." One can only imagine how slighted Kayin felt; after all, he had the original idea to make an offering to Hashem but was outdone by his younger brother who merely co-opted his idea and improved on it. Kayin's fury is understandable, but why does the Torah also describe him as depressed? Being furious and being depressed are not complementary emotions; what is Kayin's state of mind?

Shortly thereafter, in what seems to be a fit of jealous rage, Kayin rises up to kill Hevel. Immediately, Hashem appears to Kayin and asks, "Where is your brother Hevel?" Kayin responds in a very strange manner – "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Why does Kayin take such an insolent position with Hashem to make the derisive remark, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Kayin could have simply responded, "I don't know." What point is Kayin trying to convey?

The Ten Commandments were written on two side by side tablets (as opposed to one long tablet listing the Ten Commandments in order). Chazal note that this is significant in that the Ten Commandments can also be read across; therefore the first commandment "I am Hashem..." is connected to the sixth commandment "Do not murder." Thus, the transgression of murder is also an attack on Hashem Himself, as it were. The reason for this is, as we see in this week's parsha regarding the creation of man, on the sixth day of creation Hashem says, "Let us make man in our image and likeness." Thereby an attack on man is also an attack on Hashem.

This is what the Torah meant when it said that Kayin was furious and depressed. He was angry at Hashem for ignoring his offering, but at the same time he also recognized that he had no way of expressing his anger at Hashem. This impotence to act caused Kayin to feel helpless and thereby depressed. Kayin's attack on Hevel wasn't motivated by jealousy or anger towards Hevel, it was a proxy attack on Hashem. He killed Hevel to get even with God.

Now we can understand his insolence towards Hashem when he said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" This was just a continuation of his attack on Hashem.

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