

Kinder Torah

בס"ד

Parashas Behaaloscha

Yotzer Ohr (1)

“Abba, I am so motivated to say *Kriyas Shema* and its *brachos* with great *kavannah* (concentration). Can you help me understand them?”

“My pleasure, Avi. Let us begin with the first *bracha* – “*Yotzer Ohr*”. We begin by declaring that Hashem is the eternal source of all blessing. He is our King who supervises His entire world. He forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates everything.”

“That is a bit puzzling, Abba. I can understand that we praise Hashem for forming light. The vision, warmth, and energy that light provide are indispensable to life on earth. However, darkness is just the absence of light. Why do we mention that He creates darkness?”

“That is an excellent question, Avi. The answer comes in two parts. Firstly, light and darkness are complete opposites. Throughout history, many people have made the mistake of thinking that each one has its own creator. Therefore they would worship two gods – the one of light, and the one of darkness. We come to refute this. We declare that there is only one Creator, Who created light, darkness, and everything!¹ Secondly, darkness is a creation which performs many important functions. The *Chovos HaLevavos*² explains that darkness is a time for man to stop and rest from his activities. Animals also would die very quickly were it not for the respite that darkness provides. Without night, there would be no beginning and end to every day. We would not be able to measure time in terms of days, weeks, months, and years. Therefore, there would be no time-dependent mitzvos – no Shabbos, no Rosh Hashana, no Pesach, etc. Even hours, minutes, and seconds, as divisions of the day, would not exist. People could not make appointments, meetings, simchas, or anything dependent upon time. In short, the world would be a shambles without the darkness of night.”

“That is incredible, Abba. I never realized that night is so important. Now I have another question. The statement that Hashem makes peace seems out of place in a *bracha* that speaks about the creation of light, darkness, and everything.”

“True, Avi. We have just learned that

darkness and light are two opposites. If left to their own, perhaps the world would be half dark and half light all of the time – a permanent gloomy gray similar to sunset. Or, perhaps light and darkness would come haphazardly – light for one hour, dark for ten minutes, light for 90 minutes, dark for four hours, etc. This situation would wreak havoc on any attempt to live an orderly life. Therefore we declare that Hashem made peace between these two opposites, arranging their dominions in an orderly fashion. So too, He created the entire world, in perfect peaceful balance between opposing forces. Everything co-exists to demonstrate His Glory.”

“What a magnificent world, Abba!”

“Indeed, Avi. We now speak about Hashem’s mercy in illuminating the earth for its inhabitants.”

“Abba, why does the land need light?”

“The Avudarhom answers your thoughtful question, Avi. Sunlight provides the energy to make plants grow and fruits ripen. He brings the light in a merciful way, making the sun rise slowly, gently illuminating the earth. The blessing continues by praising the myriad of Hashem’s creations, all formed with wisdom; the earth is filled with them! We then praise the Almighty, recognize Him

as our Savior, and ask for His mercy. Following this is a *piyut* (poem) of twenty-two words of praise whose beginning letters follow the *aleph-beis*. The *piyut* praises the both sun and the heavenly angels who continually extol the Almighty’s honor. The Medrash relates that Rebbe Eliezer HaKalyir, the author of this *piyut*, ascended to heaven before he began writing. He asked the angel Michoyel how the angels sing praises to Hashem, and how are they written? Michoyel answered, ‘in the order of the *aleph-beis*.’ And so, Rebbe Eliezer HaKalyir, wrote his *piyut* in the same style. The Avudarhom adds that the twenty two letters of the *aleph-beis* form all the words of the Torah. This *piyut* was written with these letters to teach us that heaven and earth exist only for the sake of the Torah.”

“Abba, this *bracha* has increased my appreciation of Hashem’s heavenly creations.”

“Excellent, Avi. B’ezras Hashem we will soon continue with the second half of the *bracha*.”

Kinderlach . . .

The beginning of the first bracha before Kriyas Shema praises the light and darkness. It explains that the Almighty made peace between these opposing forces so that they could co-exist in the world. He reveals His Glory in a similar way throughout all of the creation. He does it with great mercy, in a way that is good for plants as well as animals. We then continue to praise the source of light, however we do it in the same style as the heavenly angels – according to the aleph-beis. The entire creation, glorified with this aleph-beis, exists only for the Torah, which is written with the very same aleph-beis. Yotzer ohr – we see Your greatness Hashem through the light . . . and everything!

Love Those Mitzvos

One year had passed since the exodus from Mitzraim. The time had arrived to offer up the *Korbon Pesach*. This was a mitzvah that all of Klal Yisrael participated in. However, some were not able to bring this sacrifice. Those who had contact with a dead body had become *tomei* (impure). They were prohibited from taking part in the *Korbon Pesach*. “Why should we be lessened by not offering Hashem’s offering in its appointed time among the Children of Israel?” they asked (*Bamidbar* 9:7). Rashi relates that they requested the Kohanim to offer up the *Korbon* on their behalf. This would not help them because a *Korbon* may not be offered on behalf of one who is *tomei*. Yet they still wanted some share in this mitzvah. Why? Rav Moshe Feinstein points out their great love of mitzvos. Even when they were *potur* (exempt) from performing the mitzvah for legitimate reasons, they still longed to fulfill it.

Kinderlach . . .

The Jewish neshama (soul) craves Hashem’s mitzvos. We love them so much. There was once a Jew who did not begin learning Gemora until late in life. Still, he had an ambition to finish all of Shas. He was well on his way, learning up a storm. Then he became ill. He was weak and in pain. Yet he was more distressed by the fact that he did not have the strength to hold the Gemora. He wanted to learn so badly. Oh, how he loved the mitzvah.

¹ Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 59:1), Rabbeinu Yonah on gemora Brachos 12a

² Shaar HaBechinnah, chapter 5