

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

FIRST AND LAST

“In the beginning...” (1:1)

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

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

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

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

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

All this is true in the physical world. But on the spiritual plane, quality and quantity are identical: At the beginning and at the end.

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

Shabbos has to come after the six working days. And even if you get lost in the desert and forget which day of the week it is, you first count six days and only then keep a

INSIGHTS

day of Shabbos. Not the reverse.

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

• Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in *L'Torah U'IMoadim*

DE-CONSTRUCTION

“In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth...” (1:1)

You drive up to your dream home. It's been two years in the planning, and three to build it. You usher your guests up to the top of the west wing and proudly fling open the doors to the guest suite. The doors bang against their stops. Then a small shudder shakes the house. What sounds like a distant groan starts to get louder and louder and then, before your eyes, the entire west wing parts company with the house and falls away, crashing to the ground like some slow-motion movie. You and your guests are left wide-eyed in horror and disbelief, gazing into fifty feet of nothingness two inches from the ends of your toes.

The Torah is the blueprint of the world. Just as a builder takes great pains to study the blueprint of a house before a single bulldozer raises its claws in earnest; just as he measures and calculates and evaluates, slide-rule and calculator at the ready, so too Hashem creates the world from His blueprint - the Torah.

It stands to reason therefore, that a *Sefer*

Torah which lacks even one letter is *pasul* - invalid. For just as one missing line in the plans of a building may lead to the west wing crashing into ruins in front of your eyes, so too one letter missing from a *Sefer Torah* is as though vast tracts of the universe have been erased.

• Based on the *Chafetz Chaim*

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

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

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

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

Hashem always rewards us measure for measure. When a man honors his wife, he lightens the punishment that was decreed on her at the time of the sin of Adam and Chava “...and he shall rule over you.”

So if he lightens **her** punishment by not behaving like a despot, so Hashem also lightens **his** punishment - “*by the sweat of your brow you shall eat your bread.*”

Instead of having to work hard for a living, Hashem sends him riches, lightening the amount of sweat that it takes to put chicken on the table for Shabbos... and his credit card remains un-dented.

• In the name of Rabbi Mordechai Druck, heard from Rabbi Calev Gestetner

OVERVIEW

In the beginning, Hashem creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, Hashem rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbos, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava — the Human pair — are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing “sin” into themselves, Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain in childbirth.

Now begins the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the subject of the history of the world. Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to Hashem. Hevel gives the finest of his flock, and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel, and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain until the birth of Noach. After the death of Sheis, Mankind descends into evil, and Hashem decides that He will blot out Man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noach, finds favor with Hashem.

VARYING VOWELS

Case E. Krell

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wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can you answer a question for me? Some friends and I were sitting around yesterday discussing...well, something, and I mentioned — I don't remember why — there were no vowels written down in the Torah. Yet, I was at a loss to explain why. This is something I probably knew at one time, but have forgotten.

So, how come there's no vowels written down in Torah?

Dear Case. E. Krell,

Your question has two answers: A simple one and a Kabbalistic one.

The simple reason the Torah has no vowels is that the Hebrew alphabet **doesn't have any**. The vowel sounds are sometimes written as dots under the letters. But they aren't necessary. Just as you can read tricky English words like 'psychic' and 'queue' without looking in a dictionary, Hebrew speakers can read Hebrew without the dots.

Hence, the entire Torah, Prophets, and Writings, the Mishna and Talmud, and all the classic commentaries were written without any vowels. Even today, Israelis

read menus, soup cans and street signs with no vowels. That's just how Hebrew is.

But there is another answer to your question:

The Hebrew language is Holy, and the Hebrew alphabet is Holy. Even the shapes of the letters contain many lessons and mysteries. So too, the **absence** of the vowels has much to teach us. For example:

The letters of a word are like its 'body.' The vowels are like its 'soul.' Just as the soul is the life of the body, yet it is invisible, so the vowels remain unwritten and invisible, yet they breathe 'life' and meaning into every word.

The Torah is not just a book, but an interactive medium. The absence of vowels beckons us to become partners with the Torah; to breathe life into its letters. In return, the Torah breathes life into us, as it says "It is a Tree of Life to those who uphold it."

Just as one hammer blow shatters a rock into many fragments, so every word in the Torah has many meanings and secrets. Some of the hidden meanings of the Torah are derived by reading the words using various vowel combinations. For example, the words 'In the beginning' can be read to mean that G-d created a single 'stone' — the focal point from which the universe expanded.

According to *Kabbalah*, the primeval Torah which preceded the creation of the world was written 'black fire upon white fire.' It had no spaces between the words. Rather, it was a long string of letters. This Torah was composed entirely of various 'names' of Hashem. (One of these names has 72 letters.) This was the Torah given to Moses at Sinai, along with the explanation of how to break the letters into the words we have today.

Sources:

- *Tractate Succah 49a;*
- *Jerusalem, Eye of the Universe* by, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, chapter 8
- *Ramban's Introduction to Chumash*

MILK, MEAT AND FISH

<Noodnick9@aol.com> wrote:

I've had gefilte fish at orthodox homes, where the fish plate and silverware was removed before the meat was served. Why must the meat and fish be separated?

Joseph Matetiayu Karp wrote:

Could you please explain the prohibition of eating fish and cheese together. I would like to know where this law/custom is derived from as I have been told that it is a Chassidic custom. Also, if it is a Chassidic custom and, seeing as though I'm not Chassidic, even if I have been observing this custom for many years under the impression that it was mandatory, do I still have to continue with it?

Dear <Noodnick9@aol.com>

and Joseph Matetiayu Karp,

The Talmud prohibits eating fish and meat together, as it can be unhealthy.

As far as eating fish and cheese, the majority of halachic authorities rule that it's permitted. Therefore, you needn't continue observing this custom.

However, it's preferable that you 'annul' your acceptance of this custom. This is done by appearing before a 'beit din' of three observant Jews and saying, "I practiced this custom because I mistakenly thought it was the *halacha*. I wish to be exempt from this practice." They respond, three times "mutar lecha..." — "It is permitted for you..."

Teacher: Bobby, use the word 'officiate' in a sentence.

Bobby: A man got sick from officiate.

Sources:

- *Tractate Pesachim 76b*
- *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah chapter 116*
- *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 214:1*
- *Shemirat Haguf v'hanefesh I:1,2*

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SING MY SOUL

KI ESHMERA SHABBOS

"It is an eternal sign between them and Me..."

Shabbos is called a sign, explains the Shafetz Chaim, because it is the sign which a Jew hangs on his home to declare that here lives a Jew who believes that Hashem created the world.

A craftsman places a sign outside his shop to announce his craft. As long as the sign is there it means that he is still in busi-

ness even if he occasionally travels. But the moment the sign is removed it signals that he has changed his address.

In similar fashion, even if a Jew sometimes leaves his observance of some of the *mitzvos*, so long as he observes Shabbos this sign announces that he is still at his old address and loyal to Hashem. But if he neglects Shabbos he removes this sign, and announces that he has moved away from his faith. We therefore sing with pride that Shabbos is an "eternal sign" for us.

• CHULLIN 47-53

Weekly Daf

THE BLESSED BLESSERS

At the conclusion of the blessings which Hashem commanded the *kohanim* to bestow upon His people Israel, the Blessed One declares: “And I shall bless them.” (*Bamidbar* 6:27)

Who is the object of the blessing?

Rabbi Yishmael’s interpretation is that the reference is to the *kohanim*. The *kohanim* bless Israel and Hashem blesses the *kohanim*.

Rabbi Akiva, however, understands that this is Hashem’s way of affirming the blessing which His agents, the *kohanim*, have bestowed upon Israel. The Heavenly blessing for the *kohanim* themselves has already been indicated as the Divine promise given to Avraham: “I shall bless those who bless you.” (*Bereishis* 12:3)

The dispute between these sages, says *Iyun Yaakov*, can be thus understood:

Rabbi Yishmael holds that before they are themselves blessed by Heaven the *kohanim* are not capable of bestowing a blessing upon Israel. There occurs therefore a simultaneous process of blessing – Hashem blesses the *kohanim* so that their blessing upon Israel will be effective. This itself constitutes divine affirmation of the blessing being bestowed.

Rabbi Akiva sees the blessing bestowed upon the *kohanim* not as a means for making their blessing effective nor as a reward for their act. He therefore concludes that it is an affirmation of the blessing bestowed.

According to both views not only does Israel end up with a Heavenly affirmed blessing but the *kohanim* as well. The blessing the latter receive according to Rabbi Akiva would be theirs even if they were non-Jews blessing Israel, while the blessing according to Rabbi Yishmael is one only *kohanim* are capable of receiving. The Talmud therefore cites this as a case of “Yishmael the *Kohen* aiding his fellow *kohanim*.”

• *Chullin* 49a

qualifications. If the animal consciously jumped from the roof because it saw some food on the ground below, we assume that it made this leap without suffering any damage because it instinctively would not have undertaken a jump it could not sustain.

Another interesting exception is the case of thieves who throw the stolen sheep over the wall of the yard they have broken into. Here too we do not apply our suspicion of *treifah*. We assume that the thieves carefully toss the animals in a manner which will assure that they safely land on their fronts so that they can immediately begin running for a fast getaway. Such a fall eliminates the danger of serious damage which creates a condition of *treifah*.

What happens, however, if the thieves toss the sheep back over the wall? It all depends, rules Rabbi Menashe. If they did so because they were afraid of being caught, then we assume that they disregard the animal’s safety, and there is a suspicion of *treifah*. But if the motivation of these thieves was to mend their ways by returning stolen property, we assume that they want their repentance to be complete, and would therefore be as careful in returning the sheep as they were in taking them.

• *Chullin* 51a

BOUNCING BACK FROM A FALL

One of the eighteen categories of *treifah* (an animal terminally ill because of an organic defect) listed in the *mishnah* (42a) is the animal which has fallen from a roof. There is a suspicion that as the result of falling from a high place the internal organs and parts may have been crushed or dislocated.

Since this is the reason, there are

Parsha Q&A ?

1. What happened to the light that was created on the first day?
2. Why isn’t the word “good” associated with the second day?
3. How were the trees supposed to taste?
4. On which day were the sun and moon created?
5. Hashem blessed the birds to be fruitful and to multiply. Why did He not do so with the beasts?
6. In whose likeness was man fashioned?
7. Man was created to have dominion over the animals. What happens when he debases himself?
8. What kind of food did Adam eat?
9. Why is “the sixth day” written with the definite article?
10. At the end of the sixth day what was the world still lacking?
11. Why was man made from dust gathered from the entire Earth?
12. How is man superior to the animals?
13. Where do we learn that one must not add to a commandment from Hashem?
14. What does it mean that Adam and Chava “knew that they were naked”?
15. When was Cain born?
16. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd?
17. What was the marital practice of the generation who lived before the flood?
18. What did Tuval-Cain invent?
19. Why did Chanoch die at a young age?
20. What was the sign that Shem born with great propensity for righteousness?

I Didn't Know That!

The creation narrative begins with the letter *beis* (numerical value = 2) hinting at the two Torahs given to the Jewish People: the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. This teaches that the world was created for the sake of Torah and its study.

• *Ba'al HaTurim*

Bonus Question?

Rabbi Yitzchak said that the Torah should have begun with the first *mitzvah* given to Israel but instead began with creation. When the nations will claim that the Jewish People stole *Eretz Yisrael* we will be able to reply that Hashem created the world, and chose to take the Land from the Canaanites and give it to us (*Rashi* 1:1). If so why do we need all the other stories in *Bereishis* and *Shemos* prior to the giving of the first *mitzvah*?

Parsha Q&A

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

- 1:4 - Hashem saw that the wicked would be unworthy of it so He placed it in the World to Come for the righteous.
- 1:7 - Because the work with the water wasn't completed until the third day. Anything that is incomplete is not "good".
- 1:11 - The wood was to have the taste of the fruit.
- 1:14 - They were created on the first day and suspended in the firmament on the fourth day.
- 1:22 - He did not want the serpent, who was to be cursed, to receive a blessing.
- 1:26 - In the likeness of the angels.
- 1:26 - His status drops below that of the animals, and thus, they have dominion over him.
- 1:30 - Man was vegetarian until Noah emerged from the ark.
- 1:31 - "The" in Hebrew is the letter *hey*, which has a numerical value of five. Hashem created the world on the condition that it will endure only if the Jewish People accept the Five Books of the Torah.
- 2:2 - Rest.
- 2:7 - So that wherever he might die the Earth would receive his body.
- 2:7 - He was given understanding and speech.
- 3:3 - From Chava. Hashem commanded not to **eat** from the tree but she added not to **touch** it. Because she added to His command she eventually came to transgress it.
- 3:7 - They had been given one commandment and they had stripped themselves of it.
- 4:1 - Prior to the expulsion of Adam and Chava from *Gan Eden*.
- 4:2 - Since the ground had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.
- 4:19 - They took two wives, only one for bearing children.
- 4:22 - He perfected the work of Cain by making weapons for murder. Tuval comes from the word "*tavlin*" (spice).
- 5:22 - Though he was righteous, he was easily influenced; therefore Hashem took him before his time to protect him from sinning.
- 5:32 - He was born already circumcised.

Recommended Reading List

RAMBAN

1:1 The Need for Bereishis
1:14 The Sun and the Moon
1:26 Man
1:29 Vegetarianism
2:3 Shabbos
2:20 Names
3:16 Punishment of Chava
5:4 Length of Life

SFORNO

2:3 The Blessing of Shabbos
2:25 Naked and Unashamed
3:17 The Curse of Work
4:26 Calling Out in Hashem's Name
5:1 The Image of Hashem
6:8 Noah

RASHBAM

1:27 What's Missing?
2:23 The Birth of Chava

Bonus Answer!

If the Torah had only mentioned the story of creation, then the nations, knowing Hashem's righteousness, would see no reason why He should favor the Jewish People, and they would maintain that our claim to the Land was fabricated. Only upon teaching how the nations angered Hashem and how the *Avos* and their children came and served Him faithfully, does the Torah show clearly why Hashem chose to take the Land away from other nations and give it to the Jewish People.

• Gur Aryeh

HAFTORAH: Isaiah 42:5-43:10

The *Haftorah* takes up the *Parsha's* theme of creation. It stresses that the creation was not just a primordial event, but that Hashem creates the world anew every second. Without this constant re-creation, the world would cease to exist. Similarly, Hashem did not just create the world and then leave it to its own devices, like winding up a clock. Rather, He involves Himself with the smallest event in creation. The *Haftorah* also mirrors the creation of Adam, who is the key player in Hashem's purpose for creating the world, with the role of the Jewish people who are to be the key role-model for the world — *a light unto the nations*. And just as Adam sins and falls, and is given the opportunity to redeem himself in the *Parsha*, so too the *Haftorah* describes how the Jewish people falter and fall into sin, and yet, through Hashem's mercy, Israel is never abandoned since they are the agents of Hashem's original purpose.

SEA KNOWLEDGE

"Hashem desires, for the sake of His righteousness, that the Torah be made great and glorious" (42:20)

In the future *"the Earth will be full with the knowledge of Hashem like the water covers the sea" (Yishayahu 12:9)*. But that does not mean that this knowledge will be equal. The *talmid chacham*, who has labored to know the Torah, immersing himself in its wisdom day and night, will have a very different knowledge than someone who turned up at *shul*

only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. So just as the sea seems flat and equal on the surface, but there are places of immense depth where the water barely covers the bottom, so will be the difference in their knowledge of Hashem. In the future the knowledge of the Torah will envelop the world: *"The Torah will be made great" - all will know it - "and glorious" - Hashem will make the Torah a thousand times greater and deeper for those who labored and dedicated themselves to it even before it covered the world.*

• *The Chidah in Mayana shel Torah*

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