



Parshas Bereishis

For the week ending 29 Tishrei 5757
11 & 12 October 1996

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.

Insights

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 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'Moadim

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.

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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

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*



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

KI ESHMERA SHABBOS - TBa vrnat hf
"IF WE OBSERVE SHABBOS..."

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

אות הייא לעולמי עד
בינו וביני

os hi l'olmay ad,
bayno uvayni

Shabbos is called a sign, explains the Chafetz 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 business 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.

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