

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Bereishis





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Parshas Bereishis

This week we study about Creation. What is the purpose of Creation? We look at the world and see wonders all around. But what is the purpose of it all? We will use an analogy to express our point:

A new complex was built on a well-kept, green campus. No one lived there yet, as the construction was only recently completed. A neighbor came by to explore the new complex and to discover its purpose.

This is what he saw:

One building had many modern suites. He understood that these were rooms for sleeping. There was also a large hall, with a kitchen next to it. A third building was a beis medresh.

The visitor concluded that the purpose of this complex is either a yeshiva, where students will sit in the beis medresh day and night, studying Torah. Or it might be a hotel, where people come to rest up and relax from the pressures of life.

These were the two possibilities that come to his mind, and the difference between these two options is vast. If it is a yeshiva, the main building of the complex is the beis medresh. The dormitory and dining room are so the

bachurim will have strength to study Torah.

But if it is a vacation resort, the primary rooms are where people can sleep and eat well. The beis medresh is of secondary importance for the vacationers, because even on vacation, they will learn a little, and daven with a minyan.

This is the dilemma people have when they study the wonderful world Hashem created. What is the purpose of it all? Is it all just for recreation, so people can indulge in the various pleasures of life, or is there a greater purpose: to serve Hashem, to study Torah, etc.?

Some think the world is for recreation. Others understand the world was created for serving Hashem.

Which approach is correct?

The Torah clarifies, בראשית and Chazal say, בשביל התורה שנקראת ראשית, the world was created for Torah, for serving Hashem. That is our primary goal, everything else is secondary.

Yiras Shamayim

The *parashah* begins with בראשית ברא, אלקים, and the *Zohar* teaches that this means the world was created for *yiras Shamayim* (which is called ראשית, as it states, ראשית הכמה יראת ה').¹ Therefore, our

1. Chazal (*Brachos* 6:) say, כל העולם לא נברא אלא לצוות לזה, "The world was created solely to accommodate those who have *yiras Shamayim*."

The reward for *yiras Shamayim* is immense. As it states (*Tehillim* 31:20), מה רב טובך אשר צפנת, ליראיך, "How great is the good that you concealed for those who fear You."

goal should be to increase *yiras Shamayim*, and to guard ourselves from all matters that can weaken it.

The snake told Chavah, אף כי אמר אלקים (3:1). The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains that the snake was telling Chavah, “So what if Hashem said you can’t eat from the tree?! Does that mean you have to listen? Must you obey everything Hashem says?” He was speaking *leitzanus*, making light of our responsibility and obligation to be loyal to Hashem’s decrees. The snake’s *leitzanus* influenced Chavah and brought her to sin. We see from this how careful we must be from hearing *leitzanus* (mockery, making fun of our devotion to Hashem). Such talk cools our *yiras Shamayim*.

And don’t think you hardly ever hear people speaking *leitzanus*, because in subtle ways, we hear people speaking that way, all the time. For example, if someone repeatedly praises those who are wealthy, and they never praise Torah scholars, concealed within their conversations is the mindset that success in this world is important while serving Hashem isn’t. That is covert *leitzanus*.

Similarly, when one doesn’t take seriously a Torah obligation, and when someone draws his attention to the prohibition he laughs and mocks the matter, that is *leitzanus*. His mockery resembles the snake’s claim, “So what if Hashem commanded?” It is *leitzanus*, which influences others, too.

Someone was offered a good paying job, but it would require him to work among people who didn’t have *yiras Shamayim*, which would certainly influence him and weaken his own *yiras Shamayaim*. He asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l* whether he should accept the position. The Chazon Ish replied, “*Kaltkeit* (being chilled, cold, not devoted) to matters related to *yiras Shamayim* is ירהג ואל יעבר.” This means it is preferable to die than to attain a callous attitude towards *yiras Shamayim*.

Becoming a Human Being

It states (*Koheles* 12:13), את האלקים ירא... כי, “Fear Hashem...for that is the essence of man.”

Reb Elchanan Wasserman *zt'l hy'd* (קובץ הערות יבמות p.150) explains that the *pasuk* is saying that without *yiras Shamayim* one isn’t a human being. He is just a human-like animal.

Reb Elchanan writes, “Don’t think fearing Hashem is a quality in mankind, and if someone lacks *yiras Hashem* he is also a human being, just he lacks an important quality. Rather, if a person doesn’t have *yiras Shamayim*, he’s an animal. He isn’t a person at all. As it states, את האלקים ירא... כי זה כל האדם ‘Fear Hashem...for that is the essence of man’ ...”

Reb Elchanan Wasserman continues:

“The greatness of a man is determined by how much *yiras Shamayim* he has — whether he has a lot of *yiras Shamayim* or a little. If he has a lot, he is a great person, and if he has a little, he is a small person. But if he doesn’t have *yiras*

Shamayim at all, he isn't a person. He's an animal, who appears like a human."

This matter doesn't need elaboration. We all know how a person without *yiras Shamayim* can act, and the types of ideas he can come up with. He is liable of committing the worst sins — against people and against Hashem — because nothing restrains him.

When Hashem created man Hashem said, נַעֲשֵׂה אָדָם "Let us make man" (1:26). Hashem, alone, created man! Why does it say נַעֲשֵׂה אָדָם in plural tense? (see *Rashi*).

The *Zohar* explains that Hashem was calling to the entire creation, commanding each aspect of creation to give a part of their essence to form man. This means within man there are the traits of bears, snakes, hawks, and all other wild and cruel animals. Since this is man's makeup, this means he has within him the potential to act like all the wild animals. One needs to tie down a person with iron chains, to restrain him from the harm and damage he can cause.

The iron chain is *yiras Shamayim*.

As Reb Elchanan Wasserman writes, "When Hashem created man He certainly created a chain to tie him up, so he won't destroy the world. What is that chain? It's *yiras Shamayim*. Only *yiras Shamayim* can control man that he shouldn't act like a wild animal. Nothing else can tame a person. Even if he is an extremely wise philosopher like

Aristotle, his wisdom won't control his *yetzer hara*.

"Avraham told Avimelech (*Bereishis* 20:11), רַק אֵין יִרְאָתָא אֱלֹקִים בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה, that only *yiras Hashem* was lacking [in Gror, where Avimelech was king]. This means the people living in Gror were wise, and they had *derech eretz*. However, that doesn't help at all if *yiras Shamayim* is lacking."

The Eyes

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 4:4) teaches that it is very hard to do *teshuvah* for not guarding the eyes, because people don't realize they did anything wrong. The Rambam writes, "There are five *aveiros* that one probably will never do *teshuvah* on them, since these sins are deemed light [and unimportant] in most people's eyes, and the one who transgressed them thinks he didn't do anything wrong. They are: ... [#3] Looking at *arayos* (women who are forbidden to him). He thinks he didn't do anything wrong [since he only looked, and he didn't perform any sin]. He doesn't know that looking at *arayos* is a very severe sin, because it leads to very grave sins. As it states, וְלֹא תַחֲוֹר אַחֲרֵי לִבְכֶּכֶם, וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם, 'Don't stray after your heart and after your eyes...'"

In this week's *parashah*, Chavah sinned because of her eyes. As it states (3:6), וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לַמֵּאֵל וְכִי תַאֲוָה הִיא לְעֵינַיִם, "The woman saw the tree was good to eat and it was desirable for the eyes."

Also, it states in this week's *parashah* (6:2), ויראו בני אלקים את בנות הארץ, "The בני אלקים saw the girls of the land..."

According to Rashi's second explanation, בני אלקים means *malachim*, angels.² They came to this world, sinned with their eyes, and sinned with people from this world. This resulted with the *mabul*. Because one can be extremely holy like the *malachim*, but if he isn't cautious with his eyes he will fall very low.

In contrast, ונה מצא חן בעיני ה', "Noach found favor in Hashem's eyes" (6:8) because he was careful with his eyes.

The Torah ends with לעיני כל ישראל, "before the eyes of the Jewish nation" and begins with בראשית, which indicates fear of Heaven (as it states, ראו את ה'). So the Torah ends with the eyes and begins with *yiras Shamayim*. This teaches us that guarding the eyes is *mesugal* for attaining *yiras Shamayim*.

Also, the connection between לעיני כל ישראל and בראשית teaches us that we should make the ideal of guarding the eyes, בראשית, a first and top priority.

The Or HaChaim (6:3) teaches that until the generation of the Flood, Hashem would speak with His creations directly, to rebuke them and to direct them onto the correct path. As it states (*Breishis* 3:14), ויאמר ה' אל הנחש, (*Bereishis* 3:16), ויאמר ה' אל הנחש, Hashem spoke with Adam and Chavah, with Kayin, and even with the snake. All creations were prophets, and

Hashem told them His messages. However, when people began sinning with adultery, this changed. As the Or HaChaim writes, "When they committed the disgusting and smelly sins of adultery... and Hashem is שונא זימה, hates adultery, He stopped speaking with them." *Keviyachol*, it became disgusting for Hashem to talk directly with mankind, so prophecy ended.

The Or HaChaim writes that this is the meaning of the *pasuk* (6:3), ויאמר ה' לא ידון, Hashem says he will no longer talk directly to mankind, and this is because of their sins.

The Or HaChaim adds that there were generations when Hashem spoke to the *tzaddikim*, the *nevi'im*, "But when the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, there is no more *nevuah*. Nevertheless, there was *ruach hakadosh*. But [in even later generations] when the eyes of the Jewish nation closed, we don't have ריח הקודש (a scent of holiness) and certainly we don't have רוח הקודש (a spirit of holiness). This is the greatest distress for Bnei Yisrael — there is nothing worse. They are craving a scent from our Father in heaven, to revive their souls. This curse started from the generation of the *mabul*." These words teach us how distant we should keep from *arayos*, and included in this warning, is that we should guard our eyes.

The *tzaddikim* of Chabad say, "A נבדל (the *neshamos* of *tzaddikim* in Gan Eden and the *malachim*) are jealous of a Yid

2. Rashi's first translation of בני אלקים is בני השרים והשופטים, "the children of the leaders and the judges."

who lives in this world, and struggles and strives to keep his eyes pure when he walks on the streets.”³

This week's *parashah* talks about the tzaddik, Chanoch (5:24). He was *niftar* at the age of 365, in a time when most people were *niftar* close to a thousand years old. The Torah writes, ואיננו כי לקח אותנו אלקים, “He was no longer [in this world] because Hashem took him.”

There are early sources that say Hashem took Chanoch and turned him into the *malach* מטטרון. Tosfos (Yevamos 16: ד"ה פסוק) quotes that opinion, and asks from other sources that state the *malach* מטטרון was around since the six days of Creation, long before Chanoch was born.

The Shlah HaKadosh answers that both sources are correct. During the six days of Creation, Hashem created the *malach* Mitatron. Some generations later, Chanoch was born. He lived in the generation of the Flood, when many people were committing severe sins. Despite the challenges and corrupt trends of the time, he remained loyal to Hashem. In that merit Hakadosh Baruch Hu united Chanoch with that *malach* Mitatron.

Tefillah

It states (2:5), וכל שיה השדה טרם יהיה בארץ, וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח כי לא המטיר ה' אלקים על הארץ ואדם אין לעבוד את האדמה, “The trees of the field didn't yet come to the earth, the grasses didn't yet sprout, because Hashem didn't yet bring rain to the world, since man wasn't [yet in the world] to work the land.” Rashi explains “Why didn't it rain? Because man wasn't in the world to work the land and no one was there to recognize the goodness of rain. When Adam came and he knew that the world needs it, he prayed, it rained, and trees and grass grew.”

Rashi explains that Hashem created the trees and the grass on the third day of Creation, and they were waiting, ready, under the ground, but needed rain to sprout. When Adam was created on the sixth day, he recognized the need for rain, he prayed and then all flora grew to their full height.

We learn from this that we need prayer for all our needs. The salvation is ready and waiting, and Hashem gives it to us after we pray and request it.⁴

3. Chazal (*Koheles Rabba* 1:32) say, אין אדם מת וחצי תאוותו בידו, “A person doesn't die with half his desires attained.” Tzaddikim explained that this phrase can mean, “No one ever died because he broke a *taavah*.”

Sometimes, people feel they simply must give in to their *taavos*, because the urge is so strong, and how can they control themselves? The Gemara calls the *yetzer hara* a mountain, because the *yetzer hara* makes it seem like it is impossible to overcome a temptation. But the Gemara reveals that nothing will happen, אין אדם מת, he won't die, וחצי תאוותו בידו, if he fights with his *yetzer hara* and refrains from his *taavah*.

4. In Shemonah Esrei we say ותן שכר טוב לכל הבוטחים בשמך באמת, “Give a good reward for

We can explain this with a *mashal*:

The babysitter gave a crying baby a bottle. The baby sucked on the bottle for a second or two and then pushed it away, crying hysterically. The babysitter doesn't know what she can do. Apparently, the baby doesn't want to eat. The baby is dry, so what could be the problem? She tried unsuccessfully for two hours to calm the baby.

When the mother came home, she showed the baby sitter that the nipple on the bottle was closed. It needed to be pricked with a needle for the formula to flow out. The baby was hungry, but the formula wasn't forthcoming.

The *nimshal* is, there is *parnassah* and good prepared for all Yidden, but it is up to the person to open the hole, so the bounty will come. It is opened with *tefillah*.

The first *pasuk* of the Torah, בראשית ברא, begins with a ב' and ends with a צ'. The final *pasuk* of the Torah, ולכל היר חוקה... לעיני כל ישראל, begins with a ו' and ends with a ל'. These letters spell בצלו, "with prayer". Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld זt'l said that this implies that for success in Torah studies one also needs prayers.

It states in this week's *parashah* (2:7), ויהי האדם לנפש חיה and Onkelus explains, "Man was a spirit that

spoke". The ability to speak is what makes mankind greater than the animal kingdom. The *pasuk* that calls Adam נפש חיה or a מכלל refers to when he was alone in the world. Chavah wasn't created yet. Nevertheless, he is praised for his unique strength to speak. But speak to whom? No one was around!

It must be that the specialness of man is his ability to speak to Hashem with *tefillos*. To ask Him for all his spiritual and material needs, and then Hashem will grant them to him.

Bringing Tishrei Along With you for the Entire Year

In the *zemiros* of Friday night (אומר) יהא רעווא קמיה דתשרי על עמיה (בשבחן) we say, which can be translated, "It should be His will that תשרי should remain with His nation the entire year". The inspiration, blessings, and *emunah* we acquired in this month should last for the entire year.

There was a Stoliner chassid who spent yom tov with the Beis Aharon of Stolin זt'l. When he returned home people asked him, "How did your yom tov pass?"

He replied, "The yom tov didn't pass. It went inside me."

In the yom tov *tefillos* we say, והנחילנו ה' אלקינו ... מועדי קדשך, "You gave us as an inheritance Your holy holidays..." An inheritance is something one takes with

all those who trust in Your name, truthfully." Why do we have to pray for them to receive a good reward? Reb Moshe Leib Sassover זt'l explains that since they have bitachon, they don't pray. But without prayer, one doesn't receive. Therefore, we pray for them that Hashem should fulfill all their needs.

him. Now that the holidays are over we are left with the inheritance, to take it along with us for the rest of the year.

עבותים means heavy ropes, strong cords. The word **עבותים** is stated twice in Tanach. It states (Tehillim 118:27), **אסרו חג בעבותים**, that we should bind the holiday to us with ropes so it doesn't depart. Another *pasuk* is (Tehillim 2:3), **וננתקה את מוסרותינו ונשליכה ממנו עבותינו**, "We will rip off the cords and throw off the ropes." The Imrei Emes *zt'l* explains that these *pesukim* describe two opposite kinds of people. After Simchas Torah there are those who say, "Let's throw off all ropes and rid ourselves from all exalted inspirations we experienced on yom tov. We want to be free." Others seek to bind the holiday to them, so it never leaves them.

The Pnei Menachem *zt'l* said, "People try hard to tie the yom tov to them. Actually, the yom tov never leaves us. The problem is that we leave the yom tov. Our goal should be to bind ourselves to the yom tov. This is the meaning of **אסרו חג בעבותים**, we should bind ourselves to the yom tov, and not seek to depart.

There was a foolish man called Mottel. Everyone called him **מוטל נער**, "Mottel the

fool." Mottel was engaged for marriage, and on the day of his chuppah people saw him crying.

"Why are you crying?" people asked him.

He replied, "Now everyone is calling me Mottel Chasan, but I know that in a week's time everyone will go back to call me Mottel the fool".

Rebbe Hirsh of Ziditchov *zt'l* told this mashal. The *nimshal* is: During Tishrei we became wiser, we did *teshuvah*, but soon afterwards, we return to our old, foolish ways. We need to exert effort to remain with the inspiration, growth, and with the *kabalos* we made, so they will remain with us throughout the year.⁵

Try, Try, Again

Chazal (*Bereishis Rabba* 3:7) state, "Hashem created worlds and destroyed them, until He created this world."

This is hinted at in the *pasuk* (Tehillim 105:8), **דבר צוה לאלף דור**. For a thousand years Hashem was creating worlds, but they weren't to His likings, until this world was created.

What can we learn from this?

Reb Chaim Shmuelewitz *zt'l* said that this teaches people to continue trying. Even

5. Someone driving along the highway stopped at a gas station to fill his car with gas. After his car was filled, he parked at the side of the gas station and said, "I like it here. It's a good place. People come and fill up their cars with gas... Why should I leave?" Someone explained to him, "The purpose of the gas is to travel further, not to stay in one place."

We just had a Tishrei, we did great mitzvos, and we climbed to higher heights. The purpose isn't to remain there forever. It's time to move on, and to use the inspiration we acquired for the rest of the year.

if you failed a thousand times, try again.
Perhaps this time you will succeed.

During the *yomim nora'im*, and Succos, many people made *kabalos*, good resolutions, that will help them become better people.

But it so much easier to revert to our old habits. Changes are hard. Often, when Shabbos Bereishis comes around, we realize that we aren't keeping up with all the resolutions and plans for improvement that we made at the beginning of the year.

But that doesn't mean our *teshuvah* failed. The process of *teshuvah* is to fall, and to pick ourselves up, and to try again. Perhaps this time we will succeed to make this *kabalah* a new routine. If we fall, we can raise ourselves a third time, and a fourth time.⁶

Shabbos by Minchah we read the beginning of the next week's *parasah*, but we don't finish the *parashah*. On Monday and Thursday, we begin the *parashah* again, but we don't finish it. On Shabbos we start from the beginning a fourth time and this time we finish the

parashah. This indicates that one should start over and over again. In the end he will succeed.

The Torah begins with בראשית. This means he should have ב' ראשית, two beginnings. If he wasn't successful with his first beginning, he should try again a second time. Perhaps this time he will keep to his resolves.

We can also explain that the Torah is hinting that even if one is up to ב'- stage two, because he tried once and failed, he should start again.

Readjusting

An English Yid owned many houses in the Golders Green neighborhood. He was cautious to rent them out to people he trusted would pay the rent.

Around eighty years ago, the economy was very slow and many of his apartments were vacant. He decided it was time to be less fussy about potential tenants, and he rented his homes to the lower class citizens too.

One tenant didn't pay the rent for three or four months, so he brought him to

6. Chazal say, "Whoever says שירה every day, I testify, is a ben Olam HaBa. He will merit learning and teaching Torah, and he will remember Torah. He will be saved from the *yetzer hara* and merit to see the era of Moshiach..." Why is saying שירה so special?

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa zt'l explains, "When a person sins, he loses his *tzelem Elokim* and he appears like a בהמה, *rachmana litzlan*. Sometimes he sins so much, until his appearance takes on the image of a rodent (שרץ) or other non-kosher animals. If he can sing to Hashem from that lowly level for all the kindness Hashem does for him, he deserves all the rewards Chazal list.

Because that is the highest level: to pick oneself up and to serve and praise Hashem, from no matter which level one falls to.

court. The court asked the tenant, “What do you have to say for yourself?”

The tenant replied, “I don’t owe him anything. The water in the house broke. The wallpaper began falling off the walls. When the winter began, we discovered the heating doesn’t work either. The landlord didn’t want to pay to fix the apartment, so I had to do so myself. I deducted what I invested in his apartment from the rent. That’s the reason I didn’t pay rent these past few months.”

The judge was inclined to agree with this tenant, and to absolve him from the debt. The judge said, “If you paid the rent at the beginning of your rental period, that means you were serious about renting the apartment, and only due to the circumstances you mentioned you stopped the payments. However, if you never paid rent, that means you never planned on paying, and you must pay all the rent due”.

Reb Elchanan Helprin *zt'l*, Rav of Radomishle, who lived in Golders Green, would repeat this story to teach the following lesson:

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur people did *teshuvah* and took on *kabalos* for the new year. But very soon they come up with many excuses to explain why they aren’t keeping their resolves. Hardships of *parnassah*..., the children..., my *chavrusah*..., the *kollel*, etc. etc. If in the beginning of the year you tried to stick to your commitments this means you were sincere when those *kabalos* were made, and perhaps your

excuses are valid. However, if from the very beginning you never kept your promise, that proves the *teshuvah* wasn’t sincere. It is evident that deep down, you never planned on keeping those *kabalos*.

It’s indeed true that sometimes a person has to readjust the *kabalos* that he made at the beginning of the year, to make them more practical. When he made the *kabalos*, he thought he could keep them. But in real life, he sees he can’t. Shabbos Bereishis, is a good time to readjust the *kabalos* to a degree you can keep.

Light from the Darkness

Hashem told Kayin, **אם תטיב שאת**, “If you improve, you will reach even higher levels”. People are upset when they fall from their *kabalos*, from the levels they aspired to attain. But they should know that this is the path of the world. If they keep on trying, they will reach very high levels. The darkness they are going through (their downs) will become a springboard towards attaining even greater levels, which they couldn’t attain if it weren’t for the fall.

As Chazal (*Zohar* vol.2 184.) says, **לִבָּא**, **נהורא דנפיק אלא מנו חשוכא**, “Light shines solely from darkness”. If it weren’t for the darkness, they wouldn’t get to the light.

The *parashah* begins, **תהו ובהו**, **וראשית... ויחשך... ויאמר אלקים יהי אור**. We can explain, at the beginning of one’s *avodas Hashem*, there is **תהו ובהו ויחשך**, darkness, emptiness, and confusion. He is just beginning serving Hashem, and he still has many bad ways and tendencies. The

Midrash (see *Bereishis Rabba* 23:5) says תהו ובהו וחשך represents the bad deeds of the *resha'im*. This is where he is holding at the beginning of his *avodas Hashem*. He still has a long way to go. But if he will continue serving Hashem, Hashem will say “Let there be light” and he will reach very high levels in his *avodas Hashem*.⁷

Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 8.) teach, “The day Adam was created, the sun set. Adam said, ‘Woe is my portion! The world is turning dark because of my sin. The world will revert to being תהו ובהו, void and emptiness.’ He sat and cried all night. But then daybreak came. He said, ‘This is the way of the world.’”

To explain this, we quote Reb Tzaddok HaCohen (*Tzidkas HaTzaddik* 11):

“We learn from the creation of the world that it is always night before day... Because man’s life is a mixture of darkness and light, day and night. This is the cycle, with darkness coming first, because the shell comes before the fruit...”

At the first sunrise of Adam’s life, he learned that the world runs with a cycle — and also *avodas Hashem* has a cycle. There are dark times, and there is light. Therefore, even if one fell he can lift himself up again.

We add that even when it is very dark, one should seek ways to bring light into that dark situation. We learn this from

Adam HaRishon. The first night of his existence he created fire and illuminated the darkness. As it states (*Yerushalmi Brachos* 8:5), “Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave intelligence into Adam’s heart. He took two stones and rubbed them together and a fire came forth, and he made a *brachah* on it.” Adam didn’t wait until daytime came. He made attempts to bring light into the darkness. Similarly, when one falls from his *avodas Hashem* it is possible to enlighten the situation by strengthening oneself to serve Hashem, doing what he can, from where he is. By doing so, he turns the darkness into light.

A Pasul Sefer Torah

On Simchas Torah תשע"ז, a congregation had only one sefer Torah, so they asked one of the *mispallelim* to bring his own, personal sefer Torah to the shul for the *hakafos*, so they could dance with it, and read from it, and he agreed to do so.

But during the *hakafos*, a person dancing with the borrowed sefer Torah accidentally dropped the sefer Torah. The joy that was in everyone’s heart quickly left them. The person who dropped the sefer Torah felt very sad. He left the beis medresh and went to mope at home, in his bed.

Then *kriyas haTorah* began. They first read תורת הברכה from the shul’s sefer Torah. Then they took out the borrowed sefer Torah to read בראשית. They saw the first three words בראשית ברא אלקים were missing from this sefer Torah! This

7. The Lechovitzer *zt'l* explained, ויאמר, one should pray and say יהי אור, “Hashem! Let there be light!” And Hashem will help him.

meant it wasn't a real sefer Torah. It was like a Chumash, because without the first three words, the sefer Torah was *pasul*. They immediately ran to tell the person who was moping at his home that he can come back to the beis medresh. He didn't drop a sefer Torah.

The owner of that sefer Torah asked his sofer, "How did you make such a mistake and leave out the first three words?"

The sofer replied, "When you ordered the sefer Torah, I told you that some people have the custom to leave out the first three words, so they can honor respected rabbanim to fill in those words. I asked you whether you want that, and you said you did..."

We can learn from this story an important lesson. After the *yomim nora'im* pass, and after the exalted days of Succos and Shmini Atzeres are over, people often feel exalted, distant from sin. Therefore when they suddenly fall from their levels, in their heart, they consider it like a sefer Torah fell. They ask themselves, "How could I have fallen so drastically?"

Every Yid is like a sefer Torah, as Chazal (*Shabbos* 105:) state, "Whoever is present when the soul departs from a person must tear his clothing, for it is comparable to a sefer Torah being burned." So when he falls from his levels he is sad; it feels as if a sefer Torah fell.

Their disappointment is because they don't recognize their actual level. They

think they are on a high level, but it isn't so. They are missing even the *בראשית*, the very beginning stages of being a Yid.

We should tell him, "Why do you cry? The sefer Torah was never kosher. You were born with faults, with natural tendencies that aren't good... and you still have those traits. You aren't a kosher sefer Torah, like you think you are, and therefore you shouldn't be shocked and surprised that you fell from your levels.

By every part of creation it states, *וירא* אלקים כי טוב, "Hashem saw it was good." But when man was created, the Torah doesn't say *וירא אלקים כי טוב*. The Yismach Moshe *zt'l* (ר"ה א"י ולי מה יקרו רעיד) explains that this is because a person wasn't created good. He has many faults. He must become good on his own, by improving his ways. Therefore, Hashem says, *ונעשה אדם*, "Let us make man." It is written in plural, because man must do his share in making himself into a man. With these thoughts in mind, he won't be so surprised when he falls from his levels, and this will give him encouragement to just pick himself up again and to try again.

In Yom Kippur Minchah we read *parashas Kedoshim* from the Torah, which tells about the prohibitions of *arayos*, forbidden marriages. Why do we need to be reminded of these matters, at this holy time? Presumably, at this exalted time of Yom Kippur, people don't have these kinds of tests in mind, so why must we discuss them?

The answer is, now he doesn't have a test, but what will be in a couple of months from now? Then it is likely he will have tests, and we encourage him to know that when he passes those tests, it sanctifies him as though it were Yom Kippur.

Another answer is simply because we should never underestimate the *yetzer hara*, and the reality of our levels. Hashem loves us, and accepts our *teshuvah*, but that shouldn't blind us from the awareness that our bodies and our *yetzer hara* can entice us at any day and at any time to do the worst. This can happen even on Yom Kippur. We didn't become angels. And therefore, tests should be expected.

Despair

As we've discussed, the world was created with day and night, light and darkness. Also in *avodas Hashem*, there are ups and downs. One shouldn't be afraid by a fall, because that is simply part of the growth process. If he picks himself up again he can reach high levels.

The greatest problem is when one falls

from his *avodas Hashem*, despairs, and feels he can never rise up from there. That perspective is very dangerous, because he might actually remain there, in his fallen state.

Reb Gad'l Eisner *zt'l* would say, "I'm not so afraid of an *aveirah*. I am more afraid of the *עבירה גוררת עבירה*, how one sin draws the next." Because after one sins, he becomes sad and upset with himself and now he is eligible to commit even worse sins.

The Yesod HaAvodah (vol.2, 6) writes in a letter, "Years ago, in a war, the general received a letter saying that the enemy was winning the war, and had broken through their military strongholds. The general became very down, and he told his wife about the letter.

"She replied, 'I also received a letter. It came just this minute. It tells of a greater loss than what you told me.'

'Really! What does it say?'

'It says that in addition to losing that fort, you lost your enthusiasm and spirit (your *מוֹדֵם*) and that is the greatest loss.'⁸

8. It states in this week's *parashah* (6:6), וינחם ה' כי עשה את האדם בארץ ויתעצב אל לבו, "Hashem regretted creating man on earth and his heart was sad." Whose heart became sad? Generally, we explain that it is referring to Hashem's heart. He was sad and upset that He made man. But this is difficult, because עוז וחדוה במקומו, before Hashem there is always solely joy.

The Beis Yisrael *zt'l* said that it is referring to man's heart. The *דור המבול* were very happy people because they weren't lacking anything. As the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 108.) says, "The generation of the Flood were haughty because of all the good Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave them. As it states (*Iyov* 21), 'There was no fear in their homes, and Hashem's punishment didn't come to them. Their bulls impregnated without fail, and the cows didn't miscarry. They

Even After Committing Severe Sins

Even if a person committed a severe sin, he shouldn't despair. He can still serve Hashem.

The Torah states (3:7) וַיִּתְּכּוּ עֵלֶיָּהּ תְּאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגוּרוֹת, “[Adam and Chavah] sewed fig leaves, and made belts for themselves.”

Rashi explains that only the fig tree permitted Adam and Chavah to cover themselves with its leaves, because the fig tree was the Tree of Knowledge, which they sinned with. Other trees didn't permit them to take their leaves.

Tosfos (*Sanhedrin* 70: ד"ה בה) elaborates that Adam tried taking the leaves from other trees, but those trees pushed him away, saying, “This is the person who sinned... He is a thief...” Only the fig tree allowed him to take the leaves.

Reb Ben Tzion Apter ז"ל explained that when the trees were ridiculing Adam, calling him a sinner and a thief, Chazal say he took from the fig tree. This hints that he put his thumb between his fingers and told them “אני פייג”⁹ I don't care what you say. I am not allowing myself to

become dejected because of your words. I will be happy and serve Hashem with a happy spirit.”

Similarly, the Divrei Shmuel ז"ל explains, וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגוּרוֹת, “They made belts” means they girded themselves (וַיִּתְּכּוּ). They didn't allow themselves to fall into the abyss of despair.

The Ruzhiner ז"ל told the following story:

There was a Russian Czar who suffered from a phobia. He was always afraid that people were chasing after him, seeking to kill him. Whenever he traveled, he had soldiers stand guard, to scout out the area. When the Czar came there, the soldiers would tell him the area was safe, and the Czar would ride through. Once, a soldier checked an area in a forest, and saw that there were no enemies of the Czar around. It was safe for the Czar to pass through. He waited at his post for the Czar's arrival.

The sun was shining brightly, and the soldier was very hot. There was a lake

send their children out like sheep, and the children would dance about. They raised their voices like drums and harps, and they rejoice to the sound of a flute. Their days were spent with goodness, and their years were pleasant.”

The Gemara says that this abundance of good led them to rebel against Hashem. They said to Hashem (*Iyov* 21), ‘Go away from us. We don't want to know Hashem's ways. Who is Hashem that we should serve Him, and what bad will happen to us if we rebel against Him?’ The Beis Yisrael explains that Hashem wanted to punish them, but there's a rule that when one is happy, nothing bad can befall him. Therefore, וַיִּתְּעַצֵּב אֱלֹהִים, Hashem made mankind become sad, and now affliction can befall them.

9. This is an expression people say while holding the thumb between the index finger and the middle finger. אני פייג means “a fig” and the expression is used to imply, “I don't care what you say.”

nearby. The officer took off his clothes and bathed in the lake, and drank from the water. He figured he could get back to his post in time, before the Czar arrives.

The Czar arrived when he was still in the river. Still undressed, he rushed to his post to tell the Czar that the coast was clear, and the Czar can ride safely by. The Czar was angry with the soldier. “Don’t you know that it is disrespectful to stand before me without clothing?”

The soldier replied, “I know that. However I figured that this shouldn’t prevent me from telling you that the coast is clear and you can ride by. Why should you wait, on my account?”

The *nimshal* is, we shouldn’t ever allow past sins to prevent us from serving Hashem in the present. Even if we became naked because of our sins, this doesn’t permit us to be lax from doing our service before Hashem that we are obligated to do.

Adam said to Hashem (3:10-11), את קולך שמעתי בגן ואירא כי עירום אנכי ואחבא, “I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I am naked, so I hid.”

He was also spiritually naked because of

his sin, and he didn’t feel worthy to stand before Hashem.

Hashem replied, מי הגיד לך כי עירום אתה, “Who told you that you are naked?”

Hashem was saying, “Who told you that this is a valid reason not to stand before Me? When I summon for you, you have missions to fulfill. Even if you are naked due to sins, that doesn’t exempt you from doing what is incumbent on you to do.”

Focus on the Future

The first letter of a sefer Torah is a ב'. The ב' is closed on three sides, and the open side is in front. This hints that one shouldn’t look back at what happened in the past. His focus should be on the future, to make the future better.

The ב' has an edge pointing backwards. This hints that one should look a back only a little bit, so he can learn from his past mistakes. But the primary focus should be to make the future better.

In this week’s *parashah*, Kayin was distressed because Hashem didn’t accept his *korban*. Hashem told him (4:6) למה נפלו פניך, “Why has your face fallen?”¹⁰

The Seforno explains, “[Hashem was telling him] when something doesn’t

10. Hashem’s name יהוה is on man’s face, in various ways (as this is described in *Zohar* vol.3 129: and other sources). One way is that each eye represents the letter יו, the nose represents a ו, together it is *gematriya* כ”ו, 26, the same *gematriya* as Hashem’s name יהוה. However, when one is sad, and it is נפלו פניך, the nose becomes long like a long נו. Now Hashem’s name isn’t on his face anymore.

work out well, it isn't proper to cry over the past. Rather, one should try to improve in the future."

On Simchas Torah we finish the Torah and we immediately begin reading *Parshas Bereishis*. The Abudraham explains that this is so the Satan shouldn't say, "Look at the Jewish nation! They are celebrating that they completed the Torah. They are happy to throw off their yoke of Torah from their shoulders." Therefore, we immediately begin the Torah again, to show we are happy with the Torah, and not that we are happy because we finished, and we don't have to study anymore Torah, *chalilah*.

Similarly, the Maharshah (*Avodah Zarah* 19 ע"ה מ"ה ס"ה) writes that at a *siyum* the custom is to immediately begin another *masechta*. This is so the Satan shouldn't claim we are rejoicing that we finished the tractate, and that we don't have to study Torah anymore. We immediately begin another *masechta*, to show we are happy with the Torah.

To express this in other words: The primary joy of a *siyum*, and of Simchas Torah, is that we are beginning another section in Torah. Our joy isn't that we finished, rather that we are beginning again.

Our joy is our focus on the future. If we look back, we may feel upset that we didn't study well enough. There were *parshiyos* of the Torah that we didn't study with *Rashi*, and there were pages of the Gemara that we didn't really

understand, etc. But when our focus is on the future, we can always be joyous.

Someone told the Kotzker *zt'l* that he doesn't have any reason to be happy on Simchas Torah because he doesn't study Torah. The Kotzker told him, "The primary joy is that we are *beginning* to study the Torah. No one can claim that he finished studying the Torah..."

The *meforshim* ask: Why is the calendar arranged that we read Bereishis on the Shabbos after Simchas Torah? Wouldn't it be more ideal if we would read Bereishis on the first Shabbos after Rosh Hashanah? As we begin a new year, we should begin with a new Chumash!

One explanation is we want to conceal from the Satan when the new year began, so he won't know that these are days of judgment.

The Shinover Rav *zt'l* and Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* gave another explanation for the custom to read Bereishis specifically after Succos. They explain that people look back at the days of Tishrei, and they are often upset that they didn't take advantage of these days as they could have. We tell them בראשית, don't worry about the past. You can begin now.

Ideally, the Jewish people should have immense fear of Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, deep remorse and *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur, ecstatic joy on Succos, and these emotions should last with us the entire year. But what should a person do if Tishrei passed without fear, *teshuvah*, and joy? The Arugas HaBosem *zt'l*

teaches that the regret one has when he wishes he had used those days better, brings those days back to him, so he can experience fear, *teshuvah*, and joy, any time in the year. He can be in the middle of Cheshvan, or at the end of Iyar, and he thinks back to the holy month of Tishrei, and he tells himself: Why didn't I use those days better? If only I had taken advantage of those holy times! Thinking in that manner, brings those holy days back. It may be Cheshvan or Iyar, etc., and he will experience the fear, *teshuvah*, and simchah that is typical for the month Tishrei.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 95:) states that Yaakov Avinu arrived in Charan and remembered that he didn't stop to pray on Har HaMoriah. He turned around to go back. Immediately, קפצה לו הארץ, Har HaMoriah jumped back and came to him. The Arugas HaBosem explains that a similar thing happens when one yearns for Tishrei. When one yearns for those days, and he regrets not taking advantage of them, the days will jump back to him, so he can have the holy emotions of fear, *teshuvah*, and joy, throughout the year.

Everything is for the Good

Motzei Rosh Hashanah, תשע"ו, Bnei Brak, 1:30 a.m. The #402 bus stop to Yerushalayim was full of people waiting to go home. The last bus was scheduled to pick them up at 1:15, and it was already 1:30, with no bus in sight. They feared they and their children may end up spending the night in Bnei Brak. Many of them didn't have any place to go to. A bus finally came by, but it was

#318, which goes to Rechovot. They were all disappointed.

Some people pleaded with the driver to have *rachmanus* and take them to Yerushalayim. At first the driver said that it was impossible, he has a route to follow, but then he said, "You know what, I agree." He changed the number of his bus to 402, and the crowd started boarding. As they boarded the bus they all blessed the driver for his kindness. They wished him a good year, a *g'mar chasimah tovah*, a good *kvittel*, and any other *brachah* they could think of.

On the way, one of the passengers asked the driver why he agreed to take them when he would probably get into trouble with the bus company. He replied, "The company was aware that there were many people waiting at the bus stop to go to Yerushalayim, and that the last bus out of Bnei Brak didn't leave, so they sent me to do the run. But I knew that when I will show up with a #402 everyone will be angry with me for coming late. You wouldn't know that it wasn't my fault, and that I was just sent. You would all curse me. I showed up bearing #318, so you would think I'm going to Rechovot, and that I changed my mind to help you. As you saw, everyone blessed me when they came onto the bus, instead of cursing me. I received so many *brachos* for the new year, I'm certain that it will be a good one!"

The lesson is to know that everything Hashem sends our way is for our benefit. When the people at the bus stop saw

#318, they thought it was bad for them, but even that bus was sent to bring them home. In the same way, there are episodes in life that appear negative, but in retrospect we discover that they were all for our good. ¹¹

Maavir Sidrah

Shulchan Aruch states (*Shulchan Aruch* 285): "Although one hears the entire *parashah* when it is read in the [beis medresh], he is obligated to read it himself, twice the *parashah* and once *Onkelus*... Someone who fears Heaven will also read *Rashi*..."

This is called to be *maavir sidrah*, to review the *parashah* that will be read on Shabbos. Twice the *pasuk* and once *Onkelus* will take about a half-hour or forty-five minutes. It isn't all that long, and the mitzvah is great. Ideally, one should study *Rashi* too.

Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zy'a* advised studying every day a portion of the *parashah* with *Rashi*. For example, Sunday, he should study the first *aliyah* with *Rashi*. On Monday study from שני שלישי, and so on. Reb Yissacher Dov taught that someone who follows this practice is guaranteed that he will not transgress severe sins that day. (Reb

Yissacher Dov would study the *parashah* this way, while wearing Rabbeinu Tam tefillin.)

The Or LaShamayim (from Rebbe Meir'l Apter *zt'l*) teaches that whoever is cautious to be *maavir sidrah* Friday morning, and he also cuts his fingernails *lekavod Shabbos* Friday morning, he's guaranteed that he will not transgress severe sins in the upcoming week.

At the beginning of *Parshas Shemos* it states, ואלה שמות בני ישראל. The Baal HaTurim said that these letters are *roshei teivos* for ואדם אשר לימד הסדר שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום בקול געים ישיר יחיה שנים רבות לעולם, "One who studies the *parashah*, twice the *pesukim* and once *Onkelus*, and sings it sweetly, will live a long satisfying life."

Why is this mitzvah alluded to at the beginning of *Parshas Shemos*? Wouldn't it be better to suggest it in *Parshas Bereishis*, so we can be cautious the entire year to be *maavir sidrah*?

Perhaps the Torah is teaching us that even if a few months have already passed since the beginning of the new year, and one realizes that he hasn't yet performed the mitzvah of reviewing the *parashah*, שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום, he shouldn't

11. This story also teaches a lesson for *askanim*, who think they accomplish so much with their attempts and strategies, and they forget that they are but a puppet in Hashem's hands, and ultimately Hashem does everything. The "*askanim*" in this story spoke with the bus driver, and they thought they convinced him to go to Yerushalayim, but they didn't do anything, since the bus driver's original plan was to go to Yerushalayim. Similarly, *askanim* think that they are accomplishing so much, when they are just enabling Hashem's original plan to go through. Although we appreciate their efforts, and they will be rewarded for being the *shaliach*, they should humbly be aware of how everything is from Hashem.

give up. He can start now, with *Parshas Shemos*. But obviously, fortunate are those who keep this halachah from the beginning of the year.

Shabbos

Reb Simchah Kaplan *zt'l* relates that as a *bachur* he learned in yeshivas Mir, and he would eat meals by a couple who had only one son.

One Friday morning, the *baal habayis* was getting ready to go to the marketplace for business. His wife told him, "Remember it's Friday. Come home early."

When Reb Simchah Kaplan returned home from the yeshiva, around noontime, he saw that the *baal habusta* standing at the window, anxiously waiting for her husband to return home.

"Why are you worried?" Reb Simcha asked her. "There are many hours left to Shabbos."

"Since you asked, I will tell you our story and you will understand why I'm so concerned. We didn't have children for many years. After many prayers and tears, our only son was born, but doctors told us that our baby was born with a hole in his heart. They said he wouldn't live long. The doctors advised us to go to Vilna, where there's a cardiac specialist. We traveled to Vilna. This renowned doctor gave us the same diagnosis: Our son has a hole in his heart, and there isn't a cure.

"We went to the Chofetz Chaim, and told him of our plight. The Chofetz Chaim

said, 'What do you want from me? I can't be *mechayeh meisim*?'

"The Chofetz Chaim's grandson was in the room at the time, and he pleaded for us. He said to his grandfather, 'This couple was childless for many years, and this is their first child. We can't just send them away without a solution.'

"The Chofetz Chaim told us, 'Accept on yourselves to bring Shabbos in early, and you will merit miracles.'

"My husband and I immediately committed ourselves to do so. While still standing in front of the Chofetz Chaim, we already perceived some improvement in our son. By the time we returned to Krakow, where we lived, he was completely well.

"The doctor in Krakow was shocked when he saw our baby. We told him that the Chofetz Chaim performed the miracle, in the merit of Shabbos. The doctor said, 'Please go back to Vilna, and show the doctor what happened to your son. It is simply a miracle. I will pay for your trip...'

"We went back to Vilna. At first, the doctor didn't believe that this was the same child. We explained to him that our son recovered in the merit of Shabbos and due to the Chofetz Chaim's blessings. The doctor said, 'the Chofetz Chaim made *יש מאין*.'"

The woman concluded, "Now I'm certain you understand why it's so important for me that my husband comes home early today."

Taking in Shabbos early is also a *segulah* for *parnassah*. Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz *zy'a* once said, "If people would listen to me, they would make *tosfos* Shabbos and then they wouldn't lack anything throughout the week."

The rabbanim of Minsk *zt'l* sent a letter to Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz *zy'a*, inviting him to join them for an emergency meeting. At that time, young Jewish children were being conscripted into the Czar's army, and the rabbanim

wanted to convene a meeting to search for a solution.

When the messenger carrying the letter arrived, Reb Mordechai was in the midst of saying emotional and tearful *Tehillim*. When he finished, Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz told the messenger, "Tell the rabbanim of the **אמ"ם** that if they can influence the Lithuanian Yidden to take on Shabbos two hours before sunset, I can annul all *gezeiros* against Bnei Yisrael."