

Parshas Bereishis

This week, we begin anew, with the reading of Bereishis. We never truly ended, as we read V'zos Habrachah on Simchas Torah, and immediately started reading Bereishis. Our lives are cyclically aligned, meaning we continually return to the same point, hoping to be somehow ahead, a concept that can be likened to a corkscrew (meaning although we've come back around to the same spot, we are hopefully ahead). In the past, I've focused on trying to make the Parsha of the week relatable to the events of our times, in that, since there is "nothing new under the sun", and the Torah is eternal. The blueprint for the entire universe, and most specifically our world, can therefore be found in Torah. This adage is evidenced by the story of R'Avner, who initially renounced the Torah but was proven wrong, leading him to return. The story is more focused on Parshas Ha'azinu, where Avner, Ramban's former student, called his Master on Yom Kippur to appear before him. Ramban came to Avner, who slaughtered a pig, roasted it and ate it on Yom Kippur. Ramban asked how it was possible Avner could fall so low, to which Avner responded, it was because of his master Ramban that he strayed so far. Ramban requested clarification, to which Avner said that it was in a class that Ramban claimed all names of every Jew and their fate can be found in the Parshas Ha'azinu, which Avner said was impossible. Ramban responded that it

was possible and prayed to Hashem for clarity in how to find Avner's name. After a few minutes, Ramban responded that the third letter of the words in the 26th posuk spells out R'Avner, and the posuk was explicitly talking about the Jews who would stray. R'Avner was despondent and begged his Rebbe to know whether he was too far gone to repent. Ramban took pity on his student and quoted further from the pesukim in Ha'azinu, stating that Hashem would scatter them until their memory was erased. This served as Ramban's antidote for R'Avner, prompting him to run away, which he did, and was never seen or heard from again. The point of sharing this anecdote is to illustrate that just as every Jew and their fate can be found in the brief Song of Ha'azinu, the same principle applies to everything else in the rest of the Torah's Pesukim.

We have just concluded the High Holidays and the Simcha of Sukkos, and we are now beginning the reading of the Torah again. The Torah begins with the lofty concepts of creation and the early world. These are not intended to raise doubts, as contradictory narratives exist regarding the early creation of the universe. However, none provide the clarity needed to understand what it means to be a Jew and what is required to succeed during our brief time on earth. When we read about creation, (and as I've explained in previous essays, that one of the purposes of reading about creation is

to get us to ponder the vastness of the universe, and how great Hashem is, and then perhaps have our own-healthy- bittul of Yesh so that we can serve Hashem clearly, in addition to the other ideas relating to the first Rashi). The great thing about learning about creation is that, as it is recorded in the Torah, it is a tool through which and for which we can succeed. If we use the words to substantiate our faith, and see how Hashem is infused in everything, and is everything, then we can become closer to him.

The Gemara in Chagiga 12a relates the argument between Hillel and Shammai on what was created first, Heaven, then Earth or Earth, then Heaven. The Chachamim say both were created together (and all supply their proof from the Torah). According to Zohar, either way, the Torah was used to make the world, and the Jews use the Torah to sustain the world.

Rashi explains on “Bara Elokim” that Hashem was originally going to create the world with din (strict judgment), but He saw that the world would not last if He did, so he gave mercy. The critical takeaway from this is that the method by which Hashem created the world had rules and logic, which, for an all-knowing entity, could predict the outcome of such an equation. That is, if the world were built on judgment (din), and humans are the way they are, then the outcome of a world built in this way could be

predictable. Adding in mercy (according to Chassidus, the pairing of all the extreme attributes that have a harmonious version of itself, such as Chesed and Gevura, to form Tiferes, or the level of Chesed and Gevura together and vice versa), the din can be curbed to a point of being balanced, making the outcomes “less predictable” and up to free choice. The system through which to make the “right choice” was given to us with the Torah. It is a method through which we can make a dwelling place for Hashem here on this earth, notwithstanding the external factors that could, heaven forbid, prevent such an outcome—seeing as we have been presented the subtext and secrets of the way the world works, (such as knowing that Hashem was going to create the world with Din, and that the world would not last in that context, assuming all other variables remained the same). If we spend the time analyzing the pairings that Hashem created and trying to understand what a world of only that extreme would look like, then we can use that to our advantage in understanding how we ought to be. For example, if the world were created only with Chesed, the world would also be destroyed. The balance of all 10 attributes is what makes the world function. We could only know this because of Torah and use this to our advantage. Applied to Shammai and Hillel (whose approach to Halacha stems from a similar place, Shammai being the stricter one, i.e. din, and Hillel

understanding that the world of Halacha requires a softness, i.e. chesed, and can be extrapolated based on their interpretation of what was created first). But comes the Chachamim, and they don't take an oppositional approach; instead, they take a blended "compromise" version, which is a model of the way the world was created, as explained by Rashi.

The Gemara in Chagiga expounds further that there were 10 things created on the first day; one of these pairings is darkness and light. According to the Gemara in Shabbos 77b, darkness came first, and light followed. This is an essential point that the Gemara differentiates, because it helps model what our mission is on earth. In the opposites of darkness and light, the two cannot co-exist. Meaning a description of something dark, it is a subjective view, but if you can see it, it means darkness has been penetrated by light. The absence of light is dark, in its pure form, not just a low light. Unlike mixing colours, where if you take one colour and add a different colour, you get shading depending on how much of one or another colour you have. With darkness, the moment there is even the tiniest light, the darkness is dispelled to some extent. The type of darkness that is the antithesis of light would be like how the Mepharshim describe the plague of darkness, where you cannot move because it is so dark. Chasidus explains that doing Mitzvos and keeping the Torah

is the light that dispels the darkness of the world around us, which means that the antidote to darkness, i.e. light, came "after" the creation of darkness.

Now that we've laid out all these principles, it stands to reason that the Torah has to begin with revealing the creation, so we can gain an upper hand in understanding the fundamental principles that comprise the world, and most importantly how Hashem is infused in, and included in all His creations, and that the Torah is the method we can dispel the darkness. As described in the Mamer "Zeh Hayom Techilas Masecha," the physical creations were all in potential until humans, specifically Jews, were created to fulfill the Torah, and use the Torah as a tool to make a dwelling place for Hashem.

May we continue this mission, as we inch closer, daily, to the coming of Mashiach.

Good Shabbos