

Derech Ha-Rif

Excerpts from the Torah discourse delivered by The great Rabbi Yoshiyahu Yosef Pinto Shlita

For the Torah portion of bereshit | Volume 45 | 29 Tishrey



First Shabbat Meal

"In the beginning, Hashem created the Heavens and the Earth (Bereishit 1:1)."

On the first Shabbat of existence, Hashem didn't allow the sun to set, thus sparing Adam from perishing.

In the Parasha of Emor (Vayikra 26:27) the Torah commands us about Yom Kippur, the most sanctified day in the Jewish calendar. "Behold, on the tenth day of the seventh month shall be Yom Kippur." Several verses later (Vayikra 23:32) the Torah seemingly contradicts itself in defining a different day for Yom Kippur. "It shall be a day of rest for you and self-affliction; on the ninth of the month, from evening to the next, you shall have a day of rest."

The contradiction is clear, in that at first the Torah tells us that Yom Kippur is on the tenth of the month, but then it states that it is on the ninth. How can there be such a blatant contradiction when tradition teaches us that every word, even the decorative "crowns" atop the letters are unerringly precise? Rabbi Akivah is said to have expounded a multitude of laws from each and every "crown" present throughout the entire Torah scroll. How then can there be such a discrepancy within verses of a single paragraph?

In formulating the answer to this question we experienced much joy and love for Hashem.

Adam was created on Rosh Hashanah which also turned out to be Shabbat. The very same day Adam was created, he consumed from the fruit of The Tree of Knowledge. On that very first Rosh Hashanah Hashem altered the laws of nature and prevented the sun from setting until the end of Shabbat. The Talmud (Berachot 60a, Yerushalmi) states that on that very first Shabbat, the sun did not set for 36 hours (12 hours of Friday and 24 hours of the entire Shabbat). After Shabbat, Adam produced two flint stones and created a fire (this happening is the basis of the blessing in Havdala of "Borei Meorei Ha'esh").

According to these details that occurred at the creation, the date of Yom Kippur can be calculated to occur on either the ninth or tenth of Tishrei. Given that Rosh Hashanah was the first day of creation, if we consider that on that first Rosh Hashanah the sun didn't set, then only nine nights have passed. This would justify the verse establishing the day of Yom Kippur on the ninth night of the month. However, if we count the number of days that actually passed until Yom Kippur, then we have ten days, and this value is also related in the Torah as the day of Yom Kippur. The Torah makes it clear however,

that the day of Yom Kippur is actually the tenth day, in elapsed time, and not the ninth day, in terms of night-day elapses.

Hence, the Torah, as always, is absolutely precise in its language.

As to why Hashem altered the laws of nature to not allow for the sun to set on that very first Shabbat, that was purely out of mercy for Adam. Hashem had instructed Adam not to consume from the Tree of Knowledge with the punishment of death on the very same day should he dare to do so. Hashem thus kept the sun in the sky for the entire Shabbat so that Adam would have the opportunity to realize his error, repent and live onwards.



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Soul Of the Rif

It is critical to instill the following understanding into children from a young age: the understanding that being alone is not necessarily a dangerous or negative thing. In today's age, people have become infused with the notion that being solitary is inherently negative, yet this is not the case. Of course, the importance of having friends, and feeling a strong kinship with those around one goes without saying, however one should not reach a stage whereby they feel so intertwined with others that the prospect of being alone terrifies them. Indeed, when one interacts with others, and pursues joint ventures with them, this should not come from a fear of embarking on those matters alone, but rather from a firm understanding that it is healthy in the circumstances to do the act together. The key is to recognize that if one is seeking to engage in activities with others, solely out of fear of doing them alone can be detrimental to one's continued welfare. Therefore, every person should pour their energies into the performance of Mitzvot, for the sake of strengthening the masses. This ought to manifest in strengthening people in the learning of Torah, the Zohar HaKadosh, the book of Devarim, and in good deeds.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"In the beginning, G-d created the Heavens and the Earth (Bereishit 1:1)"
Advice to overcome the Evil Inclination.

G-d allowed us to merit completing the Torah and starting again from Bereishit. With G-d's help, we will share a method which our holy teachers taught us of how a person is supposed to serve G-d.

The holy Torah starts with the letter 'Bet' in the word 'Bereishit.' Whilst the Oral Torah concludes with a final 'Mem,' as the Mishna concludes: The Holy One found no better vessel to hold blessing for Israel than peace, as it says "Hashem will give strength to His people, Hashem will bless his people with peace." (The Hebrew word for 'peace' being 'shalom' which ends with a 'final Mem.')

Our sages comment on the word 'bam' (consisting of a 'Bet' and final 'Mem') - 'about them' - as the verse says "and you will speak about them (bam)." They explain that this refers to how a person must speak about both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, as referred to by the Bet and Mem in this word. The following question must therefore be asked: How does a person finish both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah?

Our sages teach that from serving G-d with improper motives, one will come to do so for the right reasons. The method to overcome the Evil Inclination and overpower him is to fulfill the Torah, starting by doing so with incomplete motives before doing so for its own sake. The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 35:1) beautifully explains King David's statement: "I have considered my ways, and have turned back to Your decrees (Tehillin 119:59)." The Midrash explains that David was saying to Hashem, that everyday he would contemplate going to various places not necessarily conducive for his service of G-d, yet his feet would magically transport him to the synagogues and the study halls. This is the meaning of the conclusion of the verse, when it says that he "turned back to your (G-d's) decrees."

This is the method to be victorious over the Evil Inclination. If one tells the evil inclination that one is in fact doing the Mitzvah in question for a certain ulterior motive, then the Evil Inclination will leave the person alone assured that they will do the Mitzvah for that ulterior motive. At this moment, after which the evil inclination has departed, one must galvanize oneself to do the Mitzvah for the sake of Heaven, within minimal push-back.

Likewise, the Talmud in Rosh Hashanah (4a) says that if a person

declares "This coin is for Tzedaka in order that my son should live," such a person is considered to be a complete Tzaddik. The commentaries ask how it can be said that such a person is a Tzaddik, because surely the Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachot 1:5) says that if a person learns with intent not to fulfill what they learn, it would have been better that their fetus be turned over?

In light of this seeming contradiction between the two sources, what is the explanation of this first statement, how is it to be understood? The answer is that the person who says that he is giving for this specific purpose is really only doing so in order to confuse the Evil Inclination, but the truth is that he is giving for the sake of heaven, and this is the highest possible level of performance. Perhaps in light of this we can explain the statement of Rabbi Yitzchak in the Talmud (Bava Bata 25b): One who wants to become wise should go south and one who wants to become rich should go north.

The holy Torah starts with the letter Bet. The open side of the letter Bet faces the north. The start of the whole Torah represents acting not for the sake of heaven, for one who wants to become rich faces the north. It is as if a person says that they will learn Torah in order to profit, so that Hashem will bless them with income and success, as it were the opening of the Bet is towards the north. However, if a person starts not for the sake of heaven, yet continues to study the Torah with all their might, they must finish it with a final Mem, which is closed, representative of doing all for the sake of Heaven, for the sake of the Almighty.

Based on this, we can explain a great concept: "There are many thoughts in the heart of man, but G-d's plan will endure (Mishlei 19:21)." If a person begins with many plans, and starts performing Mitzvot and learning Torah not for the sake of Heaven, in the end, they will achieve. Indeed, in the original Hebrew, the words "the plan of G-d" are "Atzat Hashem," which can be read as an abbreviated mnemonic for 'Uri Tzafon Ubo'i Teiman' - 'awaken north, and turn south.' The explanation is that one who wishes to become wealthy should face north, to say that a person should start by acting not for the sake of heaven, and eventually this will turn and transform into action for the sake of heaven. Therefore, the Torah starts with the letter Bet, representative of acting not for the right reasons, and ends with a final Mem. This is how a person should start the Torah and thereby attain great achievements in service of G-d and fear of Heaven.

Q & A with the Rif



Question:

We would like to ask the Rav's opinion: We are looking to marry off our son, but are being faced with steep demands resembling a business deal. We are being asked to pay for half of the wedding expenses and to supply an exceptionally hefty dowry. What is the Rav's opinion about this?

Answer:

We don't like to hear things of this nature; it is unhealthy and not good. When looking to marry off one's children, one should seek to give with joy and within one's financial capacity. One should not be compelled to give a certain sum as if it were a business deal. On the contrary, viewing marrying-off one's child as a business affair is harmful for the young couple and for the future generations to come too.





3rd Shabbat meal

"In the beginning, G-d created the Heaven and the Earth (Bereishit 1:1)."

Within the Book of Bereishit, there can be awakened a special power and hidden wisdom which Hashem gave together with the giving of the Torah.

We start a new beginning, the Book of Bereishit, with new strengths which are buried in this book. The Talmud (Shabbat 88b) tells of an argument which took place between Moshe and the angels when he ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah. They objected and asked Hashem why He wished to give the Torah to Moshe. They invoked the verse "Place your glory upon the Heaven (Tehillim 8:2)," saying that He should give the Torah to them in Heaven. Hashem told Moshe to respond to them, he responded that he was worried that they would burn him with the breath of their mouths, and G-d responded to him that he should hold onto the Throne of Glory and respond to them. Moshe did this and told them that the Torah commands that one may not murder, commit adultery or theft, and questioned whether there is jealousy (which leads to any of the above) among them? Based on this, Moshe argued that they would not be able to do anything with the Torah. The angels immediately admitted that he was right and gave him gifts, even the Angel of Death gave Moshe a present. It is necessary to understand the argument between Moshe and the angels, what was the reason behind their objection?

It is necessary to be aware of a fundamental concept that each Jew needs to internalize and be aware of on a daily basis when learning Torah. What is the essence of the Torah which Hashem gave us? Hashem gave us the Torah for the sake of two things which we are obliged to do with it. The first is to study it in depth and discover its secrets which are not readily apparent to the eye. When a person learns Torah, it is not enough for him to simply see the Written Torah, the Mishnah and the Gemara. Rather, part of the study of Torah is to develop deep new concepts which are not written and a person cannot see; one needs to extract these ideas from the holy Torah.

The second aspect in which we are commanded in regard to receiving the Torah is what we mention every day when we make the Brachah (blessing) of the Torah. We say "Please sweeten the Torah, Hashem our G-d, in our mouths and the mouths of your people, Israel, and let us and our descendants and the descendants of Your entire people recognize Your Name and learn Your Torah for its own sake."

The angels wanted the Torah, though not its external, readily accessible components, such as the commandments not to steal and kill, but rather its deep secrets, the inner Torah. Moshe asked them how they could take the inner Torah without the outer parts. Since they do not have the challenges of the Evil Inclination and the hurdles of the temptations of sins, they have nothing to do with the Torah. Therefore, we must receive it because it was created for our sake. The angels accepted his claim and agreed that he should receive the Torah.

On this point, the Chatam Sofer brings a tremendous novelty which is a key concept for every Jew to know about the Book of Bereishit, and this power is renewed every year. He teaches that there is depth and wisdom available only to the Jewish people, which was given to them when the Torah was given. With this power, we are able to access the

depths of the Torah, understand one thing through another and discover new ideas in the Torah. We can access things which cannot be reached by ordinary intellect. Without this, a person cannot understand these matters. The Chatam Sofer teaches that these things were given only to the Jewish people, but not other nations.

Therefore, when a Jew maximizes the strengths of the Torah and succeeds in other matters, this is because he is taking the powers which Hashem gave us in the Torah and using them for other things. Thus he will be able to achieve great success which the nations of the world cannot attain through normal intellect.

Therefore, the Torah which we received at Sinai has two components, both the revealed and concealed Torah. The angels only wanted the concealed Torah, whilst Moshe wanted both the revealed and the concealed Torah. He subdued them with his winning argument and received the Torah, and together with the Torah, Hashem gave us a secret ability and closeness to Him. This ability is that through the study of Torah which appears to merely be a surface-level Torah, one can access deep things, attaining Torah secrets which were not given to any other nation, nor to the angels.

It is necessary to know that when we start the Torah anew from Bereishit, we are commanded to know both the linear and meta narratives respectively. It is necessary to develop new Torah ideas which have not yet been revealed. Through this unique strength which Hashem gave Moshe in secret, these concepts can be revealed and a person can attain tremendous achievements. This is the power which Hashem gave Moshe to transfer to the Jewish people. It was through this ability that Moshe countered the angels and convinced them to give the Torah.

This power is awakened in the Book of Bereishit, a special wisdom and extra understanding to attain great achievements. A person who knows how to take this Book with new strength, builds his soul and awakens it to the joy and uniqueness of the Divine Spirit which descended to us at the time the Torah was given. Through this, one fulfills that which Hashem commanded us when He gave the Torah, namely, that we must understand the unwritten secrets of the Torah and fulfill the Torah.



Treasure charms from the Rif



Our great teacher, the Chida, authored an exceptional Sefer (book), entitled 'Sefer Kaf Echad', in which he records various prayers and charms which one can draw on in certain situations. In this Sefer, he relates that after the morning prayers, one should recite the following verse:

"Give ear, O heavens, let me speak; let the earth hear the words I utter! May my discourse come down as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like showers on young growth, like droplets on the grass. For the name of Hashem I proclaim; give glory to our God! (Devarim 32:1-3)."

He continues that one should also recite the below: "May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that for the sake of Your mercy, and for the sake of the sanctity of these verses and the holy names in them, You make it such that we be loved and seen with favor by all those who behold us. Likewise, let our words be accepted as service for You, and all our actions be truly for the sake of Heaven. Finally, let us be successful in our studies and in all our endeavors. Amen - let this be Your Will."



If you are struggling, and feel you are suffocating, do not fear, as Hashem is with you
'I (Hashem), am with him in distress (Tehillim 91:15)' - Hashem is with every Jew during trying times.

It is recorded that the great Rabbi Yisrael from Ruzhin was in prison for three years. During the entire three years of the Rebbe's imprisonment, a secular Jewish guard, who the Rebbe did not know was Jewish, was responsible for guarding the Rebbe.

As the three years came to a close, shortly before the Rebbe was released, Rav Yisrael broke down in an unending fit of tears. The guard was taken about by the Rebbe's sudden outburst and approached him inquiringly. He asked the Rebbe: "Over the last three years I have not seen you shed a single tear, rather, you have remained a pillar of faith, strong like iron. Why have you started to cry only now?"

Rabbi Yisrael answered as follows. He explained that seeing as his time in prison was coming to end, he thought it proper to conduct a serious Cheshbon HaNefesh (self-introspection). During the introspection, he had contemplated his time in prison, and specifically who had accompanied him on his seemingly solitary journey. He concluded that although at times he had felt alone, Hashem had in fact accompanied him at every moment, for it states "I (Hashem) am with him in distress (Tehillim 91:15)." The Rebbe then turned to the guard with tears in his eyes, and said, I am not crying over the reality of me having been in prison, but rather over Hashem having been in prison. A similar idea can be gleaned from when Nebuchadnezzar exiled the Jewish people to Babylonia.

It should be noted that the exile was split in two, with approximately three thousand Jews being taken with Nechemia to Babylonia, and a further seven hundred and forty in the days of Nevuchadnezzar. During the collective exile, the Jews were herded onto ships and Nevuchadnezzar instructed his troops to count the specific number of Jews on each ship. The troops took a detailed count of each ship, noting that there were one hundred on this ship, seventy on this one, etc.

When the ships arrived in Babylonia, those receiving them proceeded to take a detailed account of the number of Jews on each ship to ensure it matched the number of those who had left Israel. However, to their surprise, they noticed that each ship now carried one more Jew than the number recorded at departure; the ship which had one hundred recorded, in fact had one hundred and one on board, and the one with seventy recorded, in fact had seventy one on board. Nebuchadnezzar got wind of this discrepancy and was perplexed. He approached the wise Jewish elders, and asked them how it could be that every ship contained one extra person?!

The wise elders turned to Nebuchadnezzar and smiled. They explained that the verse "I (Hashem) am with him in distress (Tehillim 91:15)" informs us that Hashem is with any Jew undergoing struggle. They continued to explain that the extra one on each ship could symbolically be understood to illustrate this idea, that Hashem in fact accompanied the Jews who were being shipped off to exile. Thus, we can see that any Jews who feels pained, can be assured that Hashem is with him.

In this light, we can understand the verse: "G-d will seek the pursued (Kohelet 9:15)" to mean as follows. That if one is pursued, and thus in trouble, then even if the pursued is a wicked person being pursued by a Tzaddik, Hashem will help the pursued, as He accompanies people in distress. This powerful mindset should serve to motivate us to surrender ourselves to Hashem, to fuel our Emuna (faith), safe in the knowledge that He is with us at every moment of every day.

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