

New Beginnings

Words of Chizuk for Shabbos Bereishis

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

It is customary in many shuls and yeshivot around the world to make a special kiddush on Shabbat Bereishit. The question is – Why? Why is making a special kiddush on this particular Shabbat such a widespread custom?

Those readily partaking in the *kugel* and *cholent* might just say “Why not?”, but there must be more to it than just indulging in gastronomical pleasures.

Some might posit the reason as a connection to Simchat Torah, or the ending and restarting of the Torah cycle. However, those events were already celebrated on Simchat Torah. If so, what is the deeper meaning of celebrating on Shabbat Bereishit?

I would like to preface the answer with a story I recently heard from Rabbi Yaakov Minkus, a *rebbe* in Yeshivas Beis Yisrael.

Once during the Simchat Torah *hakafot*, the Rabbi of a certain *shul* noticed two congregants just standing in the back schmoozing away the time. Concerned, he approached them and asked them to come join in the traditional dancing. They politely refused. “Rabbi”, they told him, “This dancing is not for us. For you, as the Rabbi, to dance with the Torah makes perfect sense. But not for us! You see, to tell you the truth, we didn’t learn anything this past year, nor did we set aside any specific time to learn Torah. Any time we had the chance to learn, we spent the time schmoozing and wasting time. So on Simchat Torah we are doing the same. We have no right to dance with the Torah.”

The Rabbi replied, “You are right and you are wrong. As you know, there are two different honors that are given out on Simchat Torah: that of the *Chatan Torah* and that of the *Chatan Bereishit*. The *Chatan Torah* is the *aliyah* where we celebrate the concluding of the Torah. This is customarily given to the Rabbi or another *Talmid Chacham* who has made great strides in his Torah learning over the past year. According to your own admission you are correct, you do not have much to dance for.

But there is another aspect to our dancing on Simchat Torah, and that is of the *Chatan Bereishit*. This is the *aliyah* where we celebrate the starting anew of the Torah. Anyone can receive this *kibbud* honor. So for this aspect of Simchat Torah you should also join in! It's a new cycle, a new starting point. So even if last year you fell short, now is the time to pick yourselves up and get dancing for all the Torah you *will* learn over the next year!"

This starting point, this new beginning is now – Shabbat Bereishit. We see it clearly in this week's *parsha* – Bereishit. Aside from reading about the actual creation of the world from nothingness, which in itself is an excellent example of a new start, there is also the story of Kayin and Hevel (Cain and Abel).

After Kayin murders Hevel in cold-blood, G-d confronts him about his crime. After first denying any wrongdoing or even knowledge of the murder ("Am I my brother's keeper?") G-d then metes out sentencing, and Kayin finally admits to the crime. He says just three words: (Gen. 4:13) "*Gadol Avoni Minso*" – meaning that "this sin is too great for me to bear".

We then find something astounding. G-d reduces his sentence in half! In verse 12, Kayin's sentence is that of "*Na v'Ned*" – wandering and exile in seclusion. Yet, after his admittance, in verse 16 it states that Kayin settled in the land of Nod – meaning exile and seclusion. What happened to the decree of constant wandering?

Chazal explain that we see that Kayin's *teshuvah* — even though it was half-hearted and was done only when confronted, and after he at first denied any wrongdoing, and even though he committed such a despicable act causing the potential for mankind for all time to be halved — nevertheless caused his punishment to be mitigated! Not only that, he merited to see seven generations of his own offspring! (One of whom, Na'ama, was a *tzaddeket* – the wife of Noach, through whom mankind propagated after the Flood.)

All due to those three words he said.

This is an powerful lesson to take from *parshat* Bereishit. The power of renewal and new beginnings.

This is the message we can glean, even from a *kiddush* on Shabbat Bereishet.

Even if last year we didn't accomplish as much spiritually as we could have or even should have.

Even if Elul didn't work out as well as we would have wanted.

G-d is giving us now a chance for a new start, potential for renewal. That is the reason *Klal Yisrael* celebrates on Shabbat Bereishit.

May everyone merit to utilize this message for the upcoming year, and on next Simchat Torah may everyone be able to say that the reason they are dancing is due to their own personal *aliyah* in learning, and are therefore worthy of being the *Chatan Torah!*

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel *ben* R' Yechezkel Shraga,
Rav Yaakov Yeshaya *ben* R' Boruch Yehuda.