

פ' בראשית תשפ"ה

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DAAS TORAH

“In the beginning Hashem created” (1:1)

The Torah starts with the letter *beis*, which is open to the right, in order to allude to the message that Torah *shebichsav* should not be taken as something locked and sealed, but rather has to be “opened” in order to derive *daas Torah* from it regarding issues which are not expressly addressed in it. This concept is also known as the “fifth Shulchan Oruch”.

Of course, this process can only be undertaken by outstanding *talmidei chachomim* who have toiled in the holy Torah for many years with purity, employing the 48 means for acquiring Torah. The intellect of such exceptional individuals has become so pure, and their hearts so devoid of any personal interests, that they have become privileged to acquire *daas Torah*.

This idea explains the juxtaposition between the last *possuk* of the Torah and the first *possuk*. The Torah ends with “before the eyes of all Yisroel” (*Devorim* 34:12), which, according to Rashi (*ibid*), alludes to the incident where Moshe’s heart stirred him up to smash the *luchos* before their eyes. Moshe’s greatness in doing this lay in the fact that he used his *daas Torah* to make a *kal vachomer* from Pesach (see *Shabbos* 87a). This *severo*, which did not stem from anything contained expressly in the Torah *shebichsav*, was based exclusively on Moshe Rabbenu’s *daas Torah*, and was powerful enough to overcome the *luchos* and smash them, with Hashem approving his act (the *gemoro ibid*).

HERETICS

“In the beginning Hashem created” (1:1)

The *gemoro* (*Megila* 9a) says that in the Septuagint (the *targum hashiv'im* when 70 Sages were forced to translate the Torah by the Greeks) the words *bereishis boro elokim* were rendered as *elokim boro bereishis* in Greek lest anyone should think that *bereishis* is one divine power who created another one called *elokim* (see Rashi *ibid*). Why, in fact, did the Torah at the very beginning use an ambiguous phrase, which seems to leave open the possibility for a heretical interpretation?

Someone who used to be religious once met Rav Chaim Brisker and told him that he had various questions about Hashem’s conduct in this world. Rav Chaim replied that if he had questions, he would be willing to answer them, but he suspected that these so-called questions were not genuine ones, but rather excuses justifying his own conduct and lifestyle, and for such excuses he had no answers. In other words, heretics do not usually become what they are because of intellectual or theological doubts. It is rather a matter of character traits. Preferring to live an unbridled lifestyle without the yoke of Torah, they come up with supposed problems in order to justify their neglect or abandonment of religion.

Hashem wanted to start the Torah with a *beis* in order to teach us various lessons, and that was more important to Him than the danger of misleading potential *epikorsim*, because such *pesukim* are in any case not the real cause of their heresy.

Similarly, it says “Let us make man” (1:26), on which Rashi comments: “Even though they [the angels] did not assist Him in His creation, and there is an opportunity for the heretics to rebel, the Torah did not hesitate to teach proper conduct and the trait of humility that a great person should consult with and receive permission from a smaller one”.

The rule that a great person must consult with a smaller one is not limited to the judicial context. It teaches us that we should not live a self-centered existence, since we were created with talents, abilities, and positive qualities in order to share them with our fellow human beings, and assist them to the best of our abilities. Hashem considered this principle to be so important that it had to be emphasized, even at the risk of misleading potential heretics.

THE ORIGINS OF HERESY

The very existence of the sun and the stars, and the whole science of astronomy, point towards a Creator: see Rambam, *Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah*, end of chapter 4, but *epikorsim* (heretics) will still clothe

their views with an intellectual veneer. In reality, the source of their outlook is negative character traits. Deep down they feel the emptiness of their lives, and seek to justify licentious behavior by citing sundry intellectual “problems” they claim to have detected with regard to leading a religious lifestyle. Rav Yeshoshua Leib Diskin noted that heresy, which denies the existence of Hashem, claiming that the only reality is nature, is so irrational that it can only be explained as a supernatural phenomenon created by Hashem.

Rav Diskin added that much *siyata dishmaya* was needed to keep our distance from *epikorsus*, especially in the final period prior to the coming of *moshiach*, when the powers of *tumoh* increase, knowing that their end is near.

This week’s *parsha* teaches us that the entire creation is the handiwork of Hashem Who supervises our lives with individual divine providence. We are totally dependent on Him, and must do our utmost to acquire immunity to the heretical views that are so pervasive in modern society, and to non-Jewish and anti-Torah views as a whole, and live with the awareness that we are constantly creating ourselves and continuing Hashem’s initial work of creation.

RIGHTS TO ERETZ YISROEL

In the beginning of G-d's creation (1:1). Rashi: “Said Rabbi Yitzchok: It was only necessary to begin the Torah from “This month is to you,” (Shemos 12:2) which is the first commandment that the Jews were commanded, so why did He commence with “In the beginning?” Because of the possuk “The strength of His works He related to His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations”. For if the nations of the world should say to Jews, “You are robbers, for you conquered by force the lands of the seven nations,” they will reply, “The entire earth belongs to Hashem; He created it and gave it to whomever He deemed proper When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it away from them and gave it to us.”

Since the Gentile nations in question deny the validity of the Torah, why would they listen to this argument? It would therefore appear that the answer cited by Rashi is not directed towards them, but rather towards us. When the nations will come to quarrel with us, we must strengthen our own faith in Hashem and realize that *Eretz Yisroel* belongs to Hashem, Who gave it to us in order to keep His *mitzvos*. If we remain strong in our faith, the nations’ arguments will automatically fall away, because their power to oppose us depends on the degree of our faith, and if we remain strong and cleave to Hashem, they have no power to do us any harm.

Rav Elchonon Wasserman said that based on natural premises it is very dangerous to live in *Eretz Yisroel*, surrounded as we are by enemies who hate us and thirst for our blood. Only by leading a life of Torah and *kedusha* can we live without fear, and be saved from their machinations. If, however, we follow the advice of our erring brethren by living the lifestyle of the Gentiles, then we have no right under the Torah to live here, and will be exposed to great dangers from our enemies.

STORIES ABOUT GEDOLIM

The above Rashi seems to belittle the importance of relating stories that have no halachic significance. However, Rav Sternbuch’s *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rav Moshe Schneider, would often relate stories about the Chofetz Chaim and other *gedolim*. Dayan Abramsky opposed this, arguing that learning Torah on its own was sufficient to acquire fear of Heaven. Rav Schneider responded that the whole of *chumash Bereishis* consists of stories with moral messages, and we too should tell stories about *gedolim*, which arouse the desire to emulate them. However, Dayan Abramsky responded that the stories in *chumash Bereishis* have halachic significance. In any case, Rav Schneider told Rav Sternbuch that he was still of the opinion that it was important to relate stories of *gedolim* which strengthen *yiras shomayim*, and he continued with this practice.

FAITH AND HUMAN EFFORT

And G-d made the two great luminaries: the great luminary to rule the day and the lesser luminary to rule the night, and the stars (1:16). Rashi: They were created equal, but the moon was made smaller because it brought charges and said, “It is impossible for two kings to use the same crown.”

The moon’s punishment was measure for measure, because the basis of its sin lay in not having accepted Hashem’s conduct with unquestioning faith, and wanting the world order to correspond to its own understanding. Therefore, Hashem made the moon smaller in order to show what the world looks like when created beings do not accept Hashem’s conduct. However, although it became diminished, this punishment

itself was its rectification, because its diminution led to a sanctification of the divine name, serving as a symbol that the world must be conducted solely on the basis of Hashem's desire.

Even today, several millennia after creation, scientists have still not managed to get to the bottom of all the wisdom inherent in creation, and each generation reveals new details of Divine wisdom.

GRATITUDE

"And the stars": Because He diminished the moon, He increased its hosts, to appease it. (Rashi, ibid)

Even together with the stars, the moon's stature was still insignificant compared to the sun, so how was it appeased? The Ksav Sofer explains that by contemplating how small the stars are compared to itself, the moon was inspired to thank Hashem for not having been made as small as the stars. From now on, instead of feeling sorrow at its small stature compared to the sun, it felt grateful for not having been made as small as the stars.

Rav Moshe Schneider told Rav Sternbuch that he still remembered how when he (Rav Schneider) was young (some 120 years ago) the students of the Vilna Gaon's students would learn in the Vilna Gaon's *kloiz* day and night. Their wives agreed that they would only come home on Shabbosos. These great *talmidei chachamim* lived in abject poverty. Every Friday they would all visit the local hospital. In addition to praying for the recovery and welfare of the patients, and seeing how they could help them physically, the visitors also wanted to be exposed to people suffering from various diseases in order to increase their gratitude to Hashem for their own health, and thus strengthen their desire to pray fervently to Him to be spared such suffering in the future.

DOUBTS

"But of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, Hashem said, "You shall not eat of it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die" (3:3)

The snake said, "lest you die", as if the matter was open to doubt, whereas Hashem had said, "On the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die" (2:17). The evil inclination's main power lies in its ability to cast doubt and blur the truth, until eventually its victim sins due to a lack of clarity, and lack of conviction about the reality of sin and punishment.

Amolek has the *gimatria* of *sofek*, and indeed his method is to sow doubts in our hearts.

The importance attached to removing doubts from our consciousness is evident from the very first sentence of the *Mesilas Yeshorim*: "The foundation of piety and the root of perfect service [of G-d] is for a man to **clarify and become convinced** of his obligation in this world". If a person clarifies and becomes convinced of his duty this world, the evil inclination will not be able to persuade him to sin.

During this time of year, following the *yomim noro'im*, it is incumbent on us to follow up on the revolutions that we adopted, and not permit the evil inclination to penetrate any doubts into our hearts.

WICKED INTELLECTUALS

"And He said, "Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten from the tree (Hamin Ho'etz) of which I commanded you not to eat?" (3:11)

The *gemoro* (*Chulin* 132b) says, "Where is Homon mentioned in the Torah? 'Hamin Ho'etz'". What is the connection between the wicked Homon and the *Eitz Hoda'as*?

Contrary to common wisdom, which has it that intellectuals, scientists, artists and so on, are incapable of immoral behavior, in reality even someone who has imbibed wisdom from the *Eitz Hoda'as* is still capable of being a base murderer like Homon. In fact, an intellectual will only use his intellect to justify base character traits and evil actions.

Hence, *chazal* are telling us, "from where did Homon, the arch-murderer, who set out to annihilate the Jews, receive his wickedness? He received it "from the tree", meaning from the intellect, which the *Eitz Hoda'as* symbolizes. Not only did his intellect not prevent him from his desire to annihilate an entire nation, but he used it to justify and rationalize it.

In recent times too, Germany, the cradle of the Enlightenment, turned into a nation of cruel murderers, killing six million Jews, including two million children. The vast majority of the German population, hitherto considered to be the epitome of enlightened intellectuals, cooperated with the Nazis, or, at the very least, were willing accomplices, not raising a word of protest. Clearly then, wickedness is completely divorced from intellectual knowledge or ability.

DIFFICULTIES

“And dust shall you eat all the days of your life” (3:14)

Dust is readily available, so this seems more like a blessing than a curse. However, in truth, a trouble-free existence is not the type of life Hashem intends for us.

Rav Sternbuch recalls a *bochur* who asked the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Schneider, for a *brocho* before his wedding. Rav Schneider asked him what blessing he wanted, and the young man replied: “That everything should go smoothly in life.” Rav Schneider responded that that was no *brochoh*, and he blessed him instead that when he would be faced with difficulties, he would overcome them successfully.

Something attained effortlessly has little value, and it is only by surmounting difficulties that a person becomes elevated and realizes his potential.

PARNOSSO

Moreover, someone who has all his needs catered for, loses his connection to the Almighty, since he feels that he no longer needs to pray to Him. Accordingly, before the curse, the *nochosh* had some intellect and was dependent on Hashem - like man - but, after the curse, he lost his connection to the Creator.

Sometimes a wicked person finds it easy to make a living and becomes wealthy quickly, whereas a righteous person may find it difficult to even make ends meet. At a superficial glance, it looks as if the wicked person has been rewarded by Hashem, and the righteous one has received a punishment. However, the opposite may be the case: the wicked person may have been rejected by Hashem, and therefore been granted wealth as a punishment, so that he will not feel any connection to the Creator; and the righteous person may have been sent financial difficulties so that he will merit forming a connection with the Creator through his prayers.

Hence, those who have been granted wealth should live with the constant awareness that we are all equally dependent on Hashem, and without His constant assistance, we would not enjoy any sustenance even for a moment.

EASIER TO LOSE MONEY THAN ONE’S HONOR

“And Hashem said to Kayin, “Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen?” (4:6)

Why does the Torah seemingly repeat itself, saying: *Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen?*

Rav Yisroel Salanter pointed out that when a butcher’s animal is declared *treif* he will likely accept such a *psak* willingly, acknowledging the righteousness of divine judgement, but if the same person has a judgement handed down against him by a *beis din* this is very difficult for him, to the extent that he may even curse the *dayan*. It is much easier for him to accept a monetary loss than to accept a situation in which someone has won a dispute at his expense and impugned his honor.

Accordingly, Hashem was asking Kayin, *Why are you annoyed*, are you really bothered by the fact that I did not accept your offerings, or are you more concerned that *your countenance has fallen*, that your brother Hevel has got the better of you, and impugned your honor?

BOOK OF GOOD DEEDS

“This is the narrative [literally, “book”] of the generations of man” (5:1)

Rav Chizkiyohu Yosef Mishkovsky told Rav Sternbuch that Rav Chaim Eliyohu Meisels of Lodz once visited Rav Chaim Ozer Groszhinsky, and the latter gave him a copy of his *sefer* “*Achiezer*” as a present. Rav Chaim Eliyohu was very pleased and Rav Chaim Ozer said to him, “When will we merit to have the Rov put out a *sefer*?” He replied that he had one, and when Rav Chaim Ozer asked to see it, he told him to follow him, and he showed him promissory notes in which he had undertaken to support *talmidei chachomim*, widows and orphans in the city of Lodz. Rav Chaim Eliyohu said that this was his book, since it says, “This is the book of the generations of man”, which refers to the good deeds a person has performed, and I am so busy with this book that I do not have the time to write a book like Rav Chaim Ozer”.

Rav Chaim Ozer did not respond, but on his deathbed, he asked Rav Chizkiyohu Yosef Mishkovsky to come closer, and he told him that he now sees that Rav Chaim Eliyohu was right, the main book a person takes with him for eternity is the book of his good deeds.