

# *Parshas Bereishis*

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## ***1. The Relevance of The Attribute of Justice to Creation***

The Portion of Bereishis begins, “*Bereishis bara Elokeem ais hashemayim v’ais haaretz – In the beginning of G-d’s creating the heaven and the earth...*” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the Torah chooses the appellation of “Elokeem” (signifying the Attribute of Justice) to refer to G-d within the context of creation rather than “*Hashem*” (Y’K’V’K) (signifying the Attribute of Mercy). This indicates that G-d initially intended to bring about existence through the Attribute of Justice. However, G-d understood that existence could not continue within the context of the Attribute of Justice because Man is prone to fail, Therefore, He associated the Midas Ha Rachamim (Attribute of Mercy) with the Midas Ha Din (Attribute of Justice). Midas Ha Din is exacting and precise in Judgment and does not tolerate any degree of deviation.

Regarding the creation of Man, who is culpable for his behavior, it is understandable to associate the Attributes of Mercy and Justice in order to guarantee his survival. However what is the relevance of the Attribute of Justice to the rest of creation?

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us “During the first three hours of the day, G-d studies Torah and during the second three hours of the day, He sits in Judgment of the world.” The Gemara states that if one prays the *Mussaf Amidah (Additional Silent Prayer)* of Rosh Hashanah as an individual, not within the context of a minyan (quorum of ten men), he should not do so during the first three hours of the day because the most intense level of *Din* (Judgment) occurs during this period of time. However, if one prays within the context of a *tzibur* (congregation), there is no need to be concerned. This is because of the special merit of the *tzibur*.

The Gemara asks, “If G-d sits in Judgment of the world during the second three hours of the day, why should one not pray the *Mussaf* as an individual during the first three hours? It answers that because G-d studies Torah during the first three hours it is the most intense moment of Judgment. As King Solomon states in Proverbs (Mishlei) regarding Torah - “Acquire *Emmes (Truth)* and do not sell it.” Torah is unadulterated Truth. The Laws of the Torah are precise and exact. Thus, any degree of deviation would not be *Emmes (Truth)*. During the first three hours of the day when G-d studies Torah, which is synonymous with Truth, if one were to come before Him within the context of the *Mussaf* Service by himself, without the benefit of the *tzibur*, he would receive the most exacting level of Judgment. During the period of time when G-d engages in *Emmes*, there is no room for Mercy – which is not exacting. However during the second three hours, which is the time of Judgment, there is room for Mercy.

Rashi in his first comments on the Portion cites Chazal who explain that existence was created for the sake of Torah. The setting for the fulfillment of every aspect of Torah is existence. The Midrash tells us, “G-d looked into the Torah and created the world.” The blueprint of existence is the Torah itself. Since there are laws in the Torah pertaining to Kosher species of animals (whether it is relating to dietary laws or offerings), G-d needed to create them. These species also needed to have hides because the Torah

requires that tefillin, mezuzah, and the Torah scroll must be written on the hide of a Kosher species.

Just as the Torah itself is precise and complete, existence which needs to accommodate the Torah, must meet the criteria of precision. Thus, there is nothing superfluous in existence. As the Chinuch writes regarding the Negative Commandment of “Thou shall not add to the Torah – *“baal tosef,”* since the Torah is perfect and complete, any addition to it would be considered a detraction and a diminishment.

Thus, since creation was brought about to be the setting for the fulfillment of the Torah, which is exact and precise, it is understandable that G-d wanted to create existence with the Attribute of Justice. However since Man is prone to fail and could not survive that level of exactness, G-d associated the Attribute of Mercy with the Attribute of Judgment (*Hashem Elokeem*).

## ***2. Existence is an Expression of G-d's Unity***

The Torah states at the conclusion of the first day of creation, “And there was evening and there was morning, day one (*yom echad*).” After the second day of creation the Torah states, “And there was evening and there was morning, a second day (*yom sheini*).” Rashi cites Chazal who say, “According to the order of counting of the days of creation, if the second day is referred to as “*yom sheini* – second day” and the third day is referred to as “*yom shlishi* – third day” and so on, the first day of creation should have been referred to as “*yom rishon* – first day.” However the Torah refers to the first day of creation as “*yom echad* – day one.” Rashi cites the Midrash, which explains that on the first day of creation, G-d was the only spiritual entity in existence. The angels were only created on the second day. Thus, the Torah refers to the first day of creation as “*yom echad* - day one” rather than “*yom rishon* – first day” to indicate that G-d was the only One in existence.

Maharal of Prague z'tl explains that until the angels were created there was no question pertaining to the “unity/oneness” of G-d. It was only after the creation of the various echelons of angels (each one with a distinct character), that the unity of Hashem became less clear. The Gemara in Tractate Chagigah tells us regarding the *chayos ha'kodesh*, a classification of angel, that it takes 500 years to traverse the length of the thigh of this spiritual being. This is only an indication of the enormity and incomprehensibility of angels. The Midrash tells us that when Adam was created, he radiated with such a degree of holiness that the angels confused his radiance with that of Hashem. Thus anything that has a semblance to G-d's holiness causes the perception of reality to be slightly blurred– namely the indisputable oneness of G-d.

Ramchal z'tl explains that the mitzvah of “*yichud* – declaring the Oneness of G-d” through the recitation the Shema (once in the morning and evening) is something more

than a declaration of monotheism. The mitzvah of “*yichud Hashem*” is to believe that everything in existence is synonymous with G-d. Every aspect of creation exists only because G-d Wills it to be. Everything is an expression of His energy and thus there is nothing separate from Him. This is the mitzvah of “*yichud Hashem* .”

On the first day of creation, there was no other spiritual being in existence other than G-d. Thus, when the Torah states “day one” it literally means that the day is synonymous with G-d Himself. Thus, the identification of the first day as “*yom echad – day one*” rather than “*yom rishon - first day*” is an indication that it is not simply part of a sequence of “second, third, fourth, etc;” but rather the Torah is communicating to us that the first day of creation was indisputably an expression of the unity of G-d.

Every day in the Amidah (silent prayer) we say, “Hashem sustains life with kindness...” G-d does not only provide sustenance for every creature in existence, He provides every aspect of life at every moment to all existence. G-d Wills every nuance of existence from the subatomic level to the grand function of the universe. The Gemara in Tractate Chullin tells us, “One does not stub his toe in this existence without it being decreed by G-d.” The stubbing of one’s toe and every aspect of experiencing that pain are all expressions of G-d. This is the meaning of the unity of G-d.

### ***3. Why Does the Torah Begin with the Letter “Bais”?***

The Yalkut at the beginning of the Portion of Bereishis states, “Rebbe Akiva says, “There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet that encompass the entire Torah. They are etched with a writing implement made of fire on the crown of Hashem. When Hashem was about to create the world, each of the 22 letters of the alphabet came before Him and said to G-d, “Please use the spirituality which lies within us to create existence.” The first letter to come before G-d was the letter “tuf” (which is the final letter of the alphabet). The letter tuf said to Hashem, “Master of the Universe, if it be Your Will, create the world through me because it is through me that the Torah will be given to Moshe and the Jewish people. As it is stated, “*Torah tziva lanu Moshe* – the Torah was commanded to us by Moshe.” Since the word “Torah” begins with the letter “Tuf” and the Torah is the purpose of creation, the world should be created with the spirituality of the letter “tuf.”

Hashem responded, “No, because the letter “tuf” was written on the heads of those who perished at the time of the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple), which indicated that they were marked for death. Thus, it was through the letter “tuf” that tragedy came upon the Jewish people and many perished. Therefore the world will not be created with the letter “tuf.”

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that at the time of the destruction of the

Temple, G-d had instructed the Angel of Death to paint the letter “tuf” in red on the foreheads of all the *rashaim* (evil people) so that they should be marked for death. However, regarding the tzaddikim (righteous people) Hashem had said that the letter “tuf” should be written in black to indicate that they should be spared. Satan complained to Hashem that the tzaddikim should also be marked with the letter “tuf” in red (for death) because they did not intercede and protest when the *rashaim* were sinning. They remained silent. Thus they also deserved to die. Hashem responded to Satan that even if the tzaddikim had protested, their rebuke would not have been heeded. Satan responded, “Although it is true what You say, the tzaddikim did not know that their rebuke would have been ignored and fallen on deaf ears. Since they did not protest, the tzaddikim also deserve to die.” Hashem concurred with Satan. Thus even the tzaddikim had the letter “tuf” written in red on their foreheads.

It is interesting to note that the Torah itself is perfect in every respect; however, even the tzaddikim who adhere to the Torah meticulously did not internalize it properly – otherwise they would have protested the inappropriate behavior of the *rishaim*. This is an indication that they were deficient despite their special level of spirituality. If even the tzaddikim failed, despite their Torah, the world itself could not be manifested through the letter “tuf.”

The Yalkut continues, “The letter “tuf” left the presence of Hashem in a depressed state. After this all of the letters of the alphabet approached G-d to be the vehicle for the creation of the world. Each and every one of them was rejected. However, when the letter “bais” (which is the second letter of the alphabet) came before Him and said, “If it be Your Will to create the world through me because every day the Jewish people say, “Blessed is Hashem forever, Amen and Amen.” Because the letter “bais” represents “*Baruch Hashem* – Blessed is Hashem,” He chose it as the letter to bring creation into existence. As it is stated, “*Bereishis bara Elokeem...*”

After the letter “alef” (the first letter of the alphabet) saw that Hashem decided to use the letter “bais” to create the world, it had nothing further to say. G-d asked the letter “alef” “Why do you remain silent?” The “alef” responded, “Master of the Universe, I have no power to say a word in Your Presence because every other letter has more value than I because my numerical value is only “one” while the others have a greater numerical value...” Hashem said to the “alef,” “You are the leader like the King to all of them. You are “one” just like I am “one.” The Torah is “one” just as you are “one.” As it is stated “*Anochi Hashem Elokecha* – I am Hashem your G-d.”

Creation was expressed through the letter “bais” because the expression of this letter represents “*Baruch Hashem* – Hashem is blessed.” However the letter “alef” represents the “*yichud Hashem* – the oneness of G-d.” How do we join/reconcile both of these concepts?

The proper understanding of G-d's Unity is the recognition that G-d is everything and there is nothing that is apart from Him. This concept is manifested through the acknowledgement, "*Baruch Hashem* – Hashem is blessed." As Reb Chaim of Volozin z'tl explains in his work *Nefesh HaChaim* that "Baruch Hashem" is an acknowledgement and a recognition that everything emanates from G-d and He is the source of everything. Therefore we can understand why the world was created through the letter "bais." The letter "bais" reflects the fact that everything in existence is Hashem (*yichud Hashem*) and that Man has the ability to recognize this, namely through the declaration of "*Baruch Hashem.*"

During the reign of King David the Jewish people were afflicted with a plague and many perished. King David recognized that the plague was an indication that the Jewish people had failed in a spiritual matter and were being punished. He then enacted the laws of blessings which require every Jew to recite 100 blessings every day. Consequently the plague ceased.

The 100 blessings that every Jew comes upon each day is an acknowledgement that every aspect of our lives emanates from Hashem's blessing. When a Jew eats, drinks, awakens, etc. he recites a blessing. The Jew continuously thanks, recognizes, and acknowledges that everything in creation is Hashem. Before King David enacted the recitation of 100 blessings a day, the Jew did not have the opportunity to be continuously cognizant of G-d's role in existence. Because of this lack of continuous cognizance, the Jewish people were subject to plague. The essence of existence exudes G-d's blessing, which is an expression of His unity.

#### ***4. The Enigmatic Behavior which Exists Within Man***

The Torah tells us that Cain and Abel brought their respective offerings to Hashem. Cain, the elder brother, brought an offering from the "fruit of the ground" while Abel's was from the choicest of his sheep. The Torah tells us that Abel's offering was well received by G-d while Cain's was rejected. As a result, Cain developed intense animosity towards his brother which eventually led to murder.

It seems from the sequence of events, that Cain was actually greater than his brother Abel because he was the one who initiated the bringing of the offerings. However Cain failed because his offering to Hashem was taken from the dregs of the earth. As Rashi cites the Midrash, Cain brought an offering that was from the flax seed plant, which is considered an inferior species. Abel, after realizing the value of serving Hashem through his brother's example, was motivated to bring an offering from the best and fattest of his sheep. Cain had the sensitivity to appreciate serving a power greater than himself, which was a sensitivity that Abel did not initially have. However, after being shown by example, Abel took the opportunity to serve Hashem in the best possible way without any restraint.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that although Abel brought the most appropriate offering to Hashem, the fact remains that he did not have understanding and appreciation to initiate the bringing of the offerings. This is considered a claim against him. If Cain

realized and understood the value of serving G-d (as the Omnipotent being) and thus expressed his thankfulness to Him, then why did he not bring of his best? Cain's behavior is an enigma – on one hand he understood that he must serve his Maker, but on the other hand he offers Him the dregs of the earth.

Every human being is created with a conscience which gives him a natural sense of “right” and wrong.” Man's endowment of conscience and intelligence comes from G-d. If one has the sense that G-d is the Creator and that everything in existence emanates from Him, then what is one's duty to G-d? One must be subservient, thankful, and beholden because of everything that one has received. This sense is the basis for human conscience. Without conscience, man is more dangerous than the animal. An animal's behavior is dictated by its instinct while man is motivated by his conscience and understanding of right and wrong.

Cain had conscience. He acknowledged G-d as his Creator; however, because he did not fully appreciate the extent of Hashem's Goodness and Bounty and was not able to internalize this reality, he did not feel the need to offer more than the lowly flax seed plant. Abel, however, did not initially have any sense of appreciation of G-d, despite all that he had received. This is why Abel did not merit Divine Protection from his brother's envy and animosity - despite the fact that he had brought a superior offering.

We all offer our thanks to G-d and have conscience. However, the more we engage in Torah study we perfect the sensitivity of that conscience. Some people do not have the capacity to understand the difference between what is proper or improper. However, even those who have conscience very often hold back and are not able to act selflessly to express appreciation to their Maker. We very often hear people say, “I know that it is the right thing to do **...but...**” “ This was the conflict that was experienced by Cain.

## ***5. The Consequence of Succumbing to One's Conflicts***

The Torah tells us that Hashem told Adam that he is permitted to eat from all of the trees of the Garden except from the Tree of Knowledge - Good and Evil (*Etz HaDaas*). Adam was told that he will die on the day that he eats from the Tree of Knowledge. Prior to the sin of eating from the Tree, Adam was an eternal being; after his transgression he became finite.

Chazal tell us that before Adam's sin his dimension of spirituality was so great that his radiance had a semblance to that of G-d Himself. The angels in heaven had mistakenly begun singing his praises because they thought that this was the radiance of G-d. Adam had a level of clarity that gave him the ability to see from one end of world to the other. Despite his unhindered clarity, he failed and ate from the Tree of Knowledge when it was offered to him by his wife, Chava. After eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Chava sensed that she was diminished and would die. Consequently G-d would create another wife as a proper mate for Adam. She thus offered the fruit of the Tree to Adam so that he should be subject to death just as she was and would not assume another mate. Adam definitely understood and realized how the fruit of the Tree had compromised his wife's existence and appreciated the grave consequences of eating the fruit himself. Why did Adam acquiesce to his wife's request to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge?

Ari z'l explains that prior to the sin of the Tree, Adam's grasp of Truth was nearly absolute. He was able to do the Will of G-d without any difficulty because of his level of

understanding. Adam believed that by partaking of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil he would integrate within himself a level of confusion which was rooted in evil. The value of this diminishment was that he would be able to serve G-d at a more advanced level despite the conflict which he had created within himself. This is based on the principle of “*l’fum tzaara agra* –according to pain/difficulty is the reward.” If one succeeds to the Will of G-d despite the difficulty, one’s deservingness and level becomes advanced. Adam actually believed that by eating of the Tree of Knowledge and transgressing, he was ultimately doing a great mitzvah because of the result.

If G-d had emphatically and without any question commanded Adam not to eat from the Tree, how is it possible for Adam to turn something that is so wrong into a mitzvah? The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that there is a Torah principle that when one adds to the Torah one is actually detracting from it. Take for example the Positive Commandment of tefillin, which is comprised of leather box with four compartments. If one were to add an additional compartment it would no longer be considered tefillin – although the five would contain the four.

The Gemara tells us that regarding the Tree of Knowledge, Adam violated this principle. G-d commanded Adam not to eat from the tree; however, when Adam related this dictate to his wife he added that G-d also commanded them not to even touch the tree. When the snake approached Chava to entice her to eat the fruit of the Tree, he pushed her into it and said, “Just as you see that you did not die by touching it, so too you will not die when you eat of its fruit.” Chazal explain that Adam added the restriction of not touching the Tree (as G-d’s Commandment) because he believed that if Chava would touch the Tree, she would ultimately come to eat from its fruit. However, rather than informing her that the basis for not touching the Tree was only a fence (a precautionary measure taken to protect oneself from not transgressing the Word of G-d) he told her that it was G-d’s Commandment. Rather than enhancing and protecting the Torah, he detracted from it.

The basis for Chava’s failure was Adam’s miscommunication. Adam understood that he was the responsible for his wife’s failure and demise. Therefore, as a result of his sense of guilt in conjunction with the rationalization that is presented by the Ari z’l, Adam succumbed and ate from the Tree.

People often justify the means because of the end. They do the wrong thing because of the ultimate good that they believe that will result from their action. For example, a person may choose not to pray within the context of a minyan (quorum of ten men) because he needs to tend to his business which will enable him to give more charity. Man’s natural inclination causes him to make calculations which are incorrect and unjustified. G-d gave us Commandments at Sinai that are indisputable and non-negotiable.

The Gemara tells us in Tractate Yomah that King Saul had taken the livestock of the Amalekites, which was not permitted, and he did not kill their king Agag. He was commanded by G-d to annihilate Amalek (regardless of the stature of the individual) and destroy all of their possessions including their livestock. Because King Saul had failed, he lost his kingship. What was the basis for King Saul’s justification? The Talmud tells us that it was based on a Torah principle that was misapplied. The Torah tells us that if one finds a corpse on the outskirts of a city and the one who had murdered him is unknown to the community, the elders of the community must perform the ritual that is known as the *Eigla Arufa*. King Saul extrapolated from this law, that if one needs to perform this ritual for the murder of one individual, how much more serious would it be to annihilate an entire people.

After King Saul had made his decision based on this rationale, a heavenly voice called out and said, "Do not be too much of a tzaddik/ overly devout." Since Saul was commanded by G-d to annihilate the Amalekites, there is no basis for any hesitation, regardless of one's sensitivities and rationalization.

We must follow the Word of G-d precisely as it was transmitted to us at Sinai- and not allow own conflicts (despite their altruistic motives) to cause us to deviate from the path.