

# Shemini Azeret, Simchat Torah, Parshat Breishis

Moadim L'simcha

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Daf Yomi: Sanhedrin 98-100; Nach Yomi: Nechemiah 2-4

## Weekly Dvar Torah

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*Wishing Klal Yisrael a Chag Kasher V'samayach*

### **Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah**

Rabbi Chaim Lobel

Associate Member, Young Israel Council of Rabbis

*If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then shall you understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of G-d (Proverbs 2: 4-5).*

This verse refers to the study of Torah. The Medrash Rabba (Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:9) explains the verse through a parable. If a man loses a valuable stone within his house, he will make sure the house is properly lit as he continues the search until he finds the stone. If he would exert such effort for an object that can be enjoyed only in this world, it is reasonable to assume he would exert himself all the more for the study of Torah which benefits him in both this world and the world to come. The Medrash is not saying a person searches for Torah the same way he would search for a lost object. Rather, the parable compares a person's outlook between finding a valuable object and studying Torah.

When a person loses a valued object, he feels certain he will find his precious item if he continues to look longer and harder. So too, when studying Torah, a person should believe that by devoting time and effort, he will acquire the Torah's riches. To develop that mindset, however, a person has to learn to value the Torah and have faith that it will yield its riches to all those who persevere.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai says: "If you studied Torah, do not take personal credit, because this is the reason for which you were created" (Avot 2:8). Rabeinu Yona adds that a person cannot take personal credit for Torah study because the Torah is infinite – no one can fully grasp even a single aspect.

The Alter of Slobodka (Ohr Hatzaphoon; Chelek 1, pp 63-64) quotes the Talmud (Succah 42a): "As soon as a child learns to speak, he is taught 'Shema Yisrael' and the Torah." The Talmud asks: "Which section of the Torah is the child taught first?" Rav Hamnuna says it is the verse "The Torah that Moses commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Jacob" (Deuteronomy 33:4). The Alter explains that no prerequisites are required to study Torah. The moment the child learns to speak, he can begin to learn Torah, even if just on a simple level.

The Alter then cites the verse from Proverbs 22:6 – "Educate the child based on his ability, and even when he is old, he will not depart from it." The Alter explains there is no beginning or end to the study of Torah. Everyone has the capability to expand his knowledge and continue to grow.

The Medrash Rabba (Devarim Rabba 8:3) relates an incident in which a fool entered a house of Torah study and asked to be instructed how he could study and master the Torah and its laws. The students told him he must start with the basic foundations – the Five Books of the Torah, the Prophets, the General Writings, after which he moves on to the Mishna and the Talmud. Realizing the daunting task ahead of him, the fool gave up and walked out. Rabbi Yanai explains that the fool believed there was no time and no way to master so much information, so why try. A reasonable person might have said: "I will start slowly and do as much as I can each day so that, over time, I will have amassed a wealth of information that will allow me to persevere towards my final goal."

One may feel that Torah is distant and out of his realm because it contains too much detailed information. But with enough perseverance and consistency, success can be reached. Each small step towards understanding and observing Torah is a giant leap towards consistency; and consistency is the key to success.

Just as with that precious stone lost in the house, the Torah is a treasure waiting to be found by those who search for it. As the Torah teaches: “This commandment which I (G-d) command you today, it is not too hard for you, neither is it distant” (Deuteronomy 30:11). *Chag Samayach*.

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## **Simchat Totah/V'zos Habracha 5776**

### **"The Uniqueness of Yisrael"**

Rabbi Moshe Greebel z"l

This last Sidra of the Torah is not designated for a particular Shabbos, but rather, for the Torah reading on the Yom Tov of Simchas Torah, when it is coupled to the beginning of the Sidra B'raishis. Nonetheless, due to the many noble concepts contained therein, a weekly Sidra mailing of V'Zos HaBracha is made available to our readers.

In this Sidra we are told the following:

“Yisroel then shall dwell solitary in safety; the fountain of Ya'akov shall be upon a land of grain and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew.” (D'varim 33:28)

Now, the term for solitary in LaShon HaKodesh (holy tongue) in this Passuk (verse) is ‘Badad,’ which denotes something unique and special. Nevertheless, turning to M'gillas Aicha, which speaks of the destruction of Y'rushalayim after Yisroel grievously sinned, we find that the term ‘Badad’ signifies something punitive and degrading:

“How solitary sits the city, that was full of people; she has become like a widow; she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, has become a vassal.” (Aicha 1:1)

The Gemarah in Sanhedrin 104a explains the disparity in this manner:

“Rabbah said in Rabbi Yochanan's name, ‘HaKadosh Baruch Hu exclaimed, “Yisroel then shall reside solitary in safety; the fountain of Ya'akov shall be upon a land of grain and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. But now (that they have sinned), they shall sit (degraded in) solitary.””

Throughout Mikra (Scripture) we find the term ‘Badad’ used in both senses. In the more distinctive we have:

“For from the top of the rocks I see it (nation of Yisroel), and from the hills I behold it; lo, the people shall dwell solitary, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.” (Bamidbar 23:9)

Concerning the ostracized M'tzora (one suffering from the skin affliction of Tzoras), the language of ‘Badad’ is undignified:

“All the days when the disease shall be in him he shall be unclean; he is unclean; he shall sit solitary; outside the camp shall his habitation be.” (Vayikra 13:46)

On this theme of multiple meanings for the word ‘Badad,’ in the text *Mai'Ain Bais HaSho'Aiva* by Rav Shimon Schwab (1908- 1993) of blessed memory, who cited the celebrated Rav Shmshon R'fa'el Hirsch (1808- 1888) of blessed memory, we find the following observations.

There is a great difference between the expressions of dwelling solitary (Sh'chaina- which denotes among neighbors), and sitting (Yeshiva) solitary. Now, ‘sitting solitary’, explained Rav Hirsch, in LaShon HaKodesh signifies that which is desolate and inconsolable, whereby no one else wishes to affiliate with such a person (or nation) and none wish him any good. This is the meaning of ‘How solitary sits the city’ and ‘He shall sit solitary.’

However, the expression ‘Dwell solitary,’ which implies among good neighbors, means the opposite, whereby all nations wish to affiliate with him, as is written:

*“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of HaShem’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.” (Y’shaya 2:2)*

Yet, even though the other nations will desire to affiliate with Yisroel, Yisroel, the Am HaNivchar (chosen people), will still remain unique and special, as HaKadosh Baruch Hu designated:

*“And you shall be to Me a kingdom of Kohanim, and a holy nation; these are the words which you shall speak to the B’nai Yisroel.” (Sh’mos 19:6)*

Additionally, we witness this uniqueness and special status when it comes to the neighbors of Avraham Avinu:

*“And there came one who had escaped, and told Avram (his name at the time) the Ivri; for he (Avram) lived in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshkol, and brother of Aner; and these were confederate with Avram.” (B’raishis 14:13)*

Rav Hirsch explained that even though Mamre, Eshkol, and Aner were confederates of Avraham, and wished to partner with him, he did not necessarily wish to partner with them. For, in the eyes of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, the unique standing of Avraham was of a much higher spiritual level.

This then, concluded Rav Hirsch, is the meaning of ‘Yisroel then shall dwell solitary in safety,’ which is a lofty and extraordinary level above all other nations of the earth. Regrettably though, through the sins of our ancestors, we read in Aicha, ‘How solitary sits the city, that was full of people.’

Here conclude the words of Rav Hirsch as cited by Rav Shimon Schwab. One way or the other, we must at all times be cognizant that we stem from a great lineage which, through the merit of Torah, stands well above any other culture of this earth. The proof to such a claim can easily be seen by the simple fact that despite vicious persecutions in every generation against us, Jews not only still exist, but flourish as well. May HaKadosh Baruch Hu be with us throughout eternity.

*May we soon see the G’ulah Sh’laimah in its complete resplendence- speedily, and in our times. A G’mar Tov.*

### **Parashat Bereshis**

Rabbi Lawrence Teitelman

Mara D'atra, Young Israel of New Hyde Park

Nearly six millennia since the Creation, we still experience and enjoy much of G-d’s original handiwork: water and land, trees and plants, the sun and moon, fish and birds, animals and humans. Creation takes on a prominent and permanent position in our liturgy, in the reason behind Shabbat, and in our conception of G-d’s role in the universe. Yet, one component of the Creation story whose significance remains primarily historic (though also perhaps futuristic) is Gan Eden – that utopian but short-lived place in which mankind got off to its sinful start.

As a child, I used to scour our family globe hoping to determine exactly where this celebrated Garden was. I soon learned it was no simple matter to find its location. Just as the Garden was said to be surrounded by four rivers, its location was similarly surrounded by much speculation and controversy. Even discounting Missouri and Scotland (some of the outlandish hypotheses offered by later non-Jewish groups), within our sacred tradition there were widely differing sources – some placing the Garden of Eden in Jerusalem, rather than in the more geographically-compelling Persian Gulf.

The mystery of Gan Eden also carries over to its centerpiece, the *Eitz HaDa’at* (Tree of Knowledge). Curiously, when the Torah introduces us to this tree (2:9) it doesn’t identify its species. Subsequently, however, when Adam and Chava became aware of their exposure and improvised clothing out of fig leaves (3:7) Rashi famously tells us these fig leaves

came from the very tree, the *Eitz HaDa'at*, from which Adam and Chava had just eaten the forbidden fruit. Rashi further opines (basing himself on Midrash Tanchuma) that the Torah deliberately concealed the tree's identity from us to shield it from embarrassment. It should not be forever said that it was on account of this tree that the world was so severely punished. But it seems odd that neither the Midrash nor Rashi found it problematic to share information with us that the Torah consciously withheld from its students.

A conversation about this tree also appears in Midrash Ha-Gadol with four different views presented as to its identity. Rabbi Meir says it was wheat; Rabbi Yehuda bar Ila'i, grapes; Rabbi Abba de Akko, citron (etrog); and Rabbi Yosi, figs. Each cites logical arguments and Scriptural support for his respective opinion. Apparently, even though the Torah saw fit not to disclose the tree's species, the rabbis nonetheless seemed to have a clear tradition on the matter, and had no issue discussing it. This paradox is especially borne out with a parallel passage in Midrash Rabbah that first mentions the same set of four rabbinic opinions and then concludes with a statement of anonymity that echoes and expands upon the one cited above from Rashi: "Heaven forbid, G-d never revealed that tree to man and never will reveal it in the future." This latter version is especially ironic as it declares in one breath that, though G-d will forever maintain his secret about the tree, the four rabbis not only knew the secret with their mutually exclusive versions, but they blew it! The sensitive file on this tree was declassified and released as an enduring element of our Oral (and now written) Tradition.

How do we understand the position of these rabbis? It's one thing to speculate about the esoteric, but here they have seemingly become whistle-blowers on one of the Torah's earliest and classical secrets. Perhaps what we are encountering is the coming together of two perspectives on sinful behavior. The first recognizes it for what it is, at least most evidently: actions worthy of condemnation and as such, a source of humiliation. *Ashrei nesui pasha kesui chata'ah* – "Praiseworthy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Tehillim 32:1). Confession is a private affair. Sins, at least those between man and G-d, ought to remain between man and G-d. Even when others may suffer on account of their involvement, they need not necessarily be aware of the perpetrator's participation. So, despite the interminable adverse impact the tree might have upon human civilization, it was to be spared everlasting embarrassment.

At the same time, a phenomenal but fundamental principal in our concept of repentance is that transgressions, depending on whether pre-meditated (*zedonos*) or accidental (*shegagos*) – *na'asos lo ki-zekhuyos* – are transformed into merits (Yoma 86b). Metaphysically, this topic is just one of several features of repentance that make it a supernatural process. No wonder that *teshuva* is described as approaching *kisai ha-kavod* (the heavenly throne) because that is the only domain where it can be completely understood. On a rational level, however, we recognize that one's prior experiences, even if prohibited at that time, can guide the rechanneling of propensities and the redirection of future actions, thereby making a religiously stronger individual going forward.

Thus, it is appropriate to note that when the four rabbis identify the kind of tree, it is more than merely informational. Each of the four species mentioned takes on special significance in Halachah. The fig is a *shiur* (minimum size) for various food-related requirements in Jewish law. Wheat, as the pre-eminent grain, is the staple of human sustenance. It is the primary ingredient in *menachos*-sacrifices, the mainstay of a *seudah* and its concomitant *birkat ha-mazon* (grace after meals) and the predominant type of *matzas mitzvah*. The grape, once pressed into wine, is the sacramental beverage used in the weekly Kiddush and Havdalah, and many other religious ceremonies, as well as in the libations that accompanied the sacrifices. The etrog, while generally shaped and colored like an ordinary lemon, is the object of a highly sought-after Biblical commandment. The forbidden *peri eitz ha-da'as* ultimately became the requisite *peri eitz ha-dar*, at once perennial produce on the tree (*ha-dar mi-shana le-shana*) and a paradigm of glory (*hadar*). As the facilitator of the primordial sin, the tree that was once a source of consternation, is now the progenitor of a palette of mitzvot.

Parashat Bereshis, then, is not only the beginning of a new cycle of the Torah. It is also the happy conclusion to the two-month period of Elul and Tishrei. We leave duly informed that repentance, when done correctly, can take the skeletons out of the closet and dress them, not in fig leaves, but in the regal wardrobe of Torah observance.

*Shabbat Shalom.*

*Dedicated in memory of my father, Rabbi Binyamin ben Shmuel z"l, whose Yahrzeit was the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei. Meafar Kumi*

Rabbi Ronen Shaharabany

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איתא בגמרא (סנהדרין לח:): (אמר ריש לקיש, מאי דכתיב זה "ספר תולדות אדם") "בראשית ה, א, (מלמד שהראהו הקב"ה לאדם הראשון דור דור ודורשיו, דור דור וחכמיו. כיון שהגיע לדורו של רבי עקיבא שמח בתורתו ונתעצב במיתתו, ע"כ. הקשה ה"צמח דוד) "להרב יוסף דוד, (מדוע אדם הראשון נתעצב דווקא במיתתו של רבי עקיבא, ולא במיתת צדיק אחר?

אדם הראשון חטא באכילת עץ הדעת, ולמעשה עשה תשובה על חטאו. וכדברי הגמרא (עירובין יח:): (היה רבי מאיר אומר, אדם הראשון חסיד גדול היה, כיון שראה שנקנסה מיתה על ידו ישב בתענית מאה ושלישים שנה, ופירש מן האשה מאה ושלישים שנה, והעלה זרזי תאנים על בשרו מאה ושלישים שנה, עכ"ל.

כתוב במדרש (בראשית רבה כב, יג): (ויצא קין מלפני ה, "רבי חמא בשם רבי חנינא בר רבי יצחק אמר, יצא שמח. פגע בו אדם הראשון, אמר לו מה נעשה בדינך, אמר לו קין עשיתי תשובה ונתפשרתי. התחיל אדם הראשון מטפה על פניו, אמר כך היא כחה של תשובה ואני לא הייתי יודע, מיד עמד אדם הראשון ואמר "מזמור שיר ליום השבת) "תהלים צב, (ע"כ.

למה התכוון קין שאמר "עשיתי תשובה ונתפשרתי"? ונראה שפירושו על פי הגמרא (יומא פו:): (שעל ידי תשובה מיראה, זדונות נעשות לו כשגגות. וזה שאמר קין "נתפשרתי", "דהיינו שחטאו לא נשאר בגדר זדון אך לא נמחק, אלא נעשה בו "פשרה", ונהפך לשוגג. נמצא שתשובתו של קין הייתה תשובה מיראה. וממילא, אדם הראשון, שלמד לעשות תשובה מקין, גם כן עשה תשובה מיראה.

כתוב בגמרא (ברכות סא:): (בשעה שהוציאו את רבי עקיבא להריגה זמן קריאת שמע היה, והיו סורקים את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל, והיה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים. אמרו לו תלמידיו, רבינו, עד כאן? אמר להם, כל ימי הייתי מצטער על פסוק זה "ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל נפשך" - אפילו נוטל את נשמתך. אמרתי, מתי יבוא לידי ואקיימנו, ועכשיו שבא לידי לא אקיימנו? היה מאריך באחד עד שיצאה נשמתו באחד. יצאה בת קול ואמרה, אשריך רבי עקיבא שיצאה נשמתך באחד, ע"כ.

רבי עקיבא הוא סמל לאהבת ה'. כל ימיו הצטער מתי יוכל למסור את נפשו מרוב אהבתו העזה להקב"ה. וכידוע, יום המיתה הוא יום של תשובה, שהמיתה היא מזבח כפרה לחטאי האדם, ואפילו מכפר על חילול ה'. ומשמעות הדברים, שרבי עקיבא מת מתוך אהבת ה', מתוך תשובה מאהבה. ורבי שמשון מאוסטרופוליא (כתב) ניצוצי שמשון עמ' כד, (מה שאמרו שנשמתו יצאה ב"אחד", "אחד" ראשי תיבות אהבה הפיצה דביקות, שהם ג' לשונות של חיבה) (בראשית רבה פ, ז), (להורות שמיתתו של רבי עקיבא הייתה מתוך אהבה עזה שאין כדוגמתה. וכן "אחד" עולה בגימטריא "אהבה", "להורות שנשמתו יצאה מרוב אהבתו לה'.

ידועה הסתירה (יומא פו:): (אמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כשגגות, והאמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכויות. והתירוץ, כאן מיראה וכאן מאהבה. על ידי תשובה מיראה זדונות נעשות כשגגות, ועל ידי תשובה מאהבה זדונות נעשות כזכויות.

ענה נבין מדוע אדם הראשון נתעצב דווקא במיתתו של רבי עקיבא. איתא בגמרא (בבא בתרא עה:). אמר רבי חנינא, מלמד שכל אחד ואחד נכוח מחופתו (של חבירו, ע"ש. דהיינו, בעולם הבא, כשצדיק רואה שחלקו של חבירו בגן עדן גדול יותר משלו, הוא מתעצב שהוא לא זכה להשיג חלק כה גדול כחבירו. וזה שאדם הראשון נתעצב כשראה את מיתתו של רבי עקיבא, כי מיתתו הייתה מתוך תשובה מאהבה. ולרבי עקיבא חלק כה גדול בגן עדן, שהרי כל הזדונות נעשו לו כזכויות. אבל אדם הראשון, שחטא חטא כה גדול, ורק שב בתשובה מיראה, חטאו נשאר כשוגג, ונתעצב שחופתו כל כך קטנה לעומת חופתו של רבי עקיבא. אילו היה שב מאהבה, היה חלקו בגן עדן יותר גדול לאין שיעור.

ויש לרמוז, "אדם הראשון) "עם האותיות (עולה 616". רבי עקיבא בן יוסף "עולה 603, וההבדל ביניהם הוא 13, גימטריא "אחד", "אהבה". רמז שההבדל בין רבי עקיבא לאדם הראשון היה מידת האהבה – בבחינת "יצאה נשמתו באחד" – ובעבור אותה אהבה נתעצב אדם הראשון.

ומתוקים הדברים מדבש, שהרי התנא שאמר מימרא זו, שאדם הראשון נתעצב כשראה את מיתתו של רבי עקיבא, הוא ריש לקיש. וריש לקיש הוא גם התנא שחידש שתשובה מיראה זדונות נעשות לו כשגגות, ותשובה מאהבה זדונות נעשות לו כזכויות.

#### **מאמר החכם**

יראה בלי אהבה אינה שלמות.

אהבה בלי יראה – לא כלום.

NCYI Divrei Torah Bulletin **רבי מאיר אהרן מקרלין**

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