

Parshas Bereishis in a Nutshell

(Genesis 1:1–6:8)

This week's kiddush is in honor of the Lebovic family, wishing them Hatzlacha on their move to Florida

תהלים
Tehillim - Psalms

Join us this Shabbos morning
October 17 at 8:30 am for
Shabbos Mevorchim Tehillim.

This week's Tehillim reading is
dedicated to
a refuah sh'laima for
Devorah bas Michoela.

Anshei Lubavitch Congregation
Rabbi Levi and Leah Neubort

Adult education:
Rabbi Avrohom and Rivky Bergstein

Youth Outreach:
Rabbi Eli and Ruty Steinhauser

Shabbos Schedule

Erev Shabbos – Oct 16 / Tishrei 28

Candle Lighting.....5:56 pm
Mincha6:00 pm

Shabbos Day – Oct 17 / Tishrei 29

Shacharis..... 9:30 am*
Torah Reading 10:30 am
Rabbi Drasha 11:05 am
Kiddush 12:00 pm
Mincha5:55 pm
Rabbi's Drasha.....6:25 pm
Shabbos Ends6:53 pm

**Latest morning Shema is now 9:53 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).*

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Minyan

Shacharis (Mon-Fri) 6:15 am
Shacharis Sunday.. 9:00 am
Mincha Sun- Fri.....1:45pm
Maariv Sunday – Thurs.....9:15 pm

G-d creates the world in six days. On the first day He makes darkness and light. On the second day He forms the heavens, dividing the "upper waters" from the "lower waters." On the third day He sets the boundaries of land and sea, and calls forth trees and greenery from the earth. On the fourth day He fixes the position of the sun, moon and stars as timekeepers and illuminators of the earth. Fish, birds and reptiles are created on the fifth day; land animals, and then the human being, on the sixth. G-d ceases work on the seventh day, and sanctifies it as a day of rest.

G-d forms the human body from the dust of the earth, and blows into his nostrils a "living soul." Originally Man is a single person, but deciding that "it is not good that man be alone," G-d takes a "side" from the man, forms it into a woman, and marries them to each other.

Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden, and commanded not to eat from the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." The serpent persuades Eve to violate the command, and she shares the forbidden fruit with her husband.

(continued next column)



"Also those who are far from G-d's Torah and His service . . one must draw them close with strong cords of love.
— Tanya

Because of their sin, it is decreed that man will experience death, returning to the soil from which he was formed, and that all gain will come only through struggle and hardship. Man is banished from the Garden.

Eve gives birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain quarrels with Abel and murders him, and becomes a rootless wanderer. A third son, Seth, is born to Adam; Seth's eighth-generation descendant, Noah, is the only righteous man in a corrupt world. ❖

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Halachic Zmanim
Shabbos, October 17
Eastern Daylight Time

Earliest Tallis 6:14 AM
Latest Morning Shema 9:53 AM
Earliest Mincha (Gedola) ..1:10 PM
Plag Hamincha5:07 PM
Earliest Evening Shema6:40 PM

Chassidic Masters

The First Creation"

*Based on the teachings of
the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Courtesy of MeaningfulLife.com*

"In the beginning," states the opening and perhaps the most famous verse of the Torah, "G-d created the heavens and the earth."

Rabbi Saadia Gaon, the great 10th century scholar and philosopher, explains that the term "in the beginning" implies the very first moment of time. Nothing preceded this moment, since with this moment G-d created time itself.

In other words, while time is itself a creation—a most basic principle of the Jewish faith is that every reality was created by G-d— it is the first and most primary of creations. Indeed, "creation" (beriah, in the Hebrew), which means bringing something into being out of a prior state of non-existence, implies a "before" and an "after"; so to say that G-d created anything is also to say that He first (or simultaneously) created time. To say, "In the beginning G-d created...," is also to say, "G-d created the beginning.

Rabbi Saadia Gaon applies this concept to resolve a philosophical problem regarding G-d's creation of the world. Since G-d is eternal and unchanging, we obviously cannot say that He "matured" to a certain state or had a certain idea "grow on Him." So why did He create the world only when He did?

Why not one year, a hundred years or a billion years earlier, since whatever reasons He had for creation were certainly just as valid then? But this question, is a non-sequitur. Time is itself part of G-d's creation. We cannot ask why the world was not created earlier, since there is no stretch of time that can be termed "before" creation.

The First Mitzvah

Time's status as the "first creation" sheds light on another point raised by the commentaries on the first verse of the book of Genesis. In his commentary on this verse, Rashi quotes the Midrash:

The Torah should have begun with, "This month shall be to you the head of months..." (Exodus 12), which is the first mitzvah commanded to the people of Israel. Why does it begin "In the beginning...?"

Torah means "law" and "instruction"; the function of the Torah is to instruct us on the laws of life, which it does via the 613 mitzvot (divine commandments) it addresses to the people of Israel. But the first such mitzvah appears only in the 12th chapter of Exodus, where G-d commands the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh — "the sanctification of the new month" — and the setting of the Jewish calendar. Why, asks the Midrash, does the Torah devote the first of its five books, and a good part of the second, to things other than its primary purpose? While there is many a lesson to be learned from

the Torah's account of the creation of the universe, the history of mankind and the lives of the Patriarchs, would it not be more appropriate for the Torah to begin with G-d's direct instructions to us?

The Midrash goes on to explain the Torah's reason for opening with its account of the creation — a reason whose deeper significance we have explored on another occasion. In this essay, we shall dwell on the Midrash's reference to the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh as "the first mitzvah to be commanded the Jewish people." Why, indeed, was this our first mitzvah?

Obviously, the setting of our calendar has a far-reaching influence on many other mitzvot — it determines when we will sound the shofar, when we will fast and atone for our sins, when we will conduct the Passover seder, as well as a host of other time-specific observances. But it would seem that there are a number of other, no less fundamental mitzvot. In what sense is the mitzvah of setting the calendar more basic to our service of G-d than mitzvot such as Torah study, charity or prayer?

Man and Thing

To understand the relationship between the first mitzvah and the first creation, we must first take a closer look at the dynamics of the mitzvah.

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There are two basic aspects to a mitzvah: its relationship to the person performing it, and its relationship to the materials and resources with which it is performed. In the terminology of the Talmudists, there is the *gavra* ("person" element) of the mitzvah, and the *cheftza* ("object") of the mitzvah.

Every mitzvah-act, by virtue of its being the fulfillment of a divine command, creates a link between the person doing the mitzvah and the One who commanded it; indeed, the word mitzvah means both "commandment" and "connection." In particular, each of the 613 mitzvot has its own particular effect on the mind, character and habits of the person. An act of charity contributes not only the fulfillment of the needs of the recipient but also to the making of a more sensitive and caring giver; putting on tefillin reminds its wearer of his special relationship with G-d and of his duty to commit his mind and heart to serve Him; eating matzah on Passover makes tactual the experience of the Exodus and increases the eater's awareness of the gift and responsibilities of freedom; studying Torah inculcates the mind of its student with the divine wisdom. It is of the "personal" aspect of the mitzvah that our sages speak when they say, "The Torah was given to refine the human being."

In addition, a mitzvah has a profound effect on the physical resources with which it is performed — the animal hide in the tefillin, the woolen threads of the tzitzit, the branches covering the sukkah. The act of mitzvah refines and sanctifies these physical substances, transforming them into "objects of holiness" — things whose form and utility express their subservience to the divine will.

On the face of it, it would seem that a mitzvah's effect on its "person" is far more significant than its effect on its "object." The person doing the mitzvah is perceptibly changed. Our sages note that "habit becomes second nature" — even a formal, routine act, with little or no conscious awareness of its significance, has an effect upon the mindset and character of the actor.

On the other hand, it would seem that nothing really happens to the object of the mitzvah, which remains a mute piece of matter. So what does it mean when we say that a thing with which a mitzvah is performed is "refined," "sanctified" and "transformed"? In what sense is a pair of tefillin "holier" than an ordinary piece of leather?

The Object

Common wisdom has it that the more abstract a thing is, the loftier and more worthy it is. Thus it is generally agreed that the ethereal is grander than the real, that idea is greater (more "ideal") than fact, that the spiritual is holier (i.e., closer to G-d) than the physical. Indeed, our sages refer to the physical world as the "lowliest" of G-d's creations.

Why is it that greater tangibility renders a thing lowlier and less divine? The Chassidic masters explain the un-G-dliness of the physical as due to its self-centeredness. "I am," proclaims the physical thing. "If you wish to search for a deeper meaning to my existence, be my guest. But as far as I'm concerned, I've no need for significance or definition beyond the self-contained fact of my existence."

This is in direct conflict with the cardinal law of reality, which is that "There is none else besides Him" (Deuteronomy 4:35) — that G-d is the only true existence, and that everything "else" is not "besides Him" but an extension and expression of His reality.

The first step to diffusing this contradiction is to impose function and purpose on a physical substance. When wood, wire and ivory are formed into a piano, the result is an "object" — matter with a manifest objective. Rather than simply saying "I am," a piano states: "There is more to me than the fact of physical matter of a certain quantity and shape: everything about me speaks of other, more transcendent realities. I convey the fact that there is music; that there are people who compose, play and listen to music; that there are

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craftsmen who assemble instruments to serve this end. My existence is a result of, and servant to, all these truths."

But this elevation from material to object is only a transcendence of a limited sort. True, a piano (or a book, or a hammer) bespeaks ideas and endeavors beyond its own brute substantiality; but are these ideas and endeavors more G-dly? Are they less in conflict with the truth that "There is none else besides Him"? Perhaps. Perhaps the music being played on the piano expresses a yearning for something beyond mere existence; perhaps it elevates its listener an increment above his animal self and its needs and wants and suggests to him a higher purpose to life. But not necessarily. Music can also be an expression of the ego and its most base aspirations, in which case its "spirituality" is nothing more than an idealization of the very fallacy we are striving to transcend.

But when a physical substance is formed and used as the object of a mitzvah, it becomes a vessel and an instrument of the divine. The "I am" of the physical now becomes, "I am nothing on my own; I exist to serve my Creator."

Time as Material

In this way, the 613 mitzvot of the Torah transform the physical world into what the Midrash calls "a dwelling for G-d" — an abode which houses and serves the divine truth. For every physical thing, force and phenomenon can be utilized to fulfill a divine command: brute matter (the animal hide of tefillin, the wool of tzitzit, the coin or banknote given as charity), the human body (the brain that studies Torah, the lips that pray, the feet that walk to the synagogue), physical energy (Shabbat and Chanukah lights), and the very essence of physicality — time and space themselves.

Every mitzvah is a physical action — an action transpiring in time and space. So every mitzvah "uses" a certain area of both time and space as component parts of its "object," thereby sanctifying them as instruments of the divine will.

Thus our sages have said that it is preferable to perform many "smaller" mitzvah-actions instead of one "big" mitzvah. A common application of this principle is the pushka, or "charity box," which is a prominent feature of the Jewish home: every day, one drops a few coins in the box; when the box fills, its contents are given to charity. In terms of the objective to aid the needy, nothing is gained by giving \$1 a day over 100 days rather than giving \$100 in a lump sum; but in terms of the mitzvah's effect on the person and the physical world, more acts of charity means more refining influences upon the person, and more utilizations of time in fulfillment of a divine command.

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov takes this a step further, saying that it is preferable to perform two mitzvot on two different days than to do two such actions on a single day. As stated in the first chapter of Genesis (verses 5 and 14) and other places, the cycles and divisions by which we measure and categorize time — the year, week, day, etc. — are not artificial impositions, but were woven into the very fabric of time by its Creator. So when a person does two mitzvah actions on two different days, two different time-units are refined and elevated through their participation in an act of mitzvah.

Man-Made Time

Torah law distinguishes between two levels in a thing's utilization by a mitzvah: as an "object of a mitzvah," or as "instruments of a mitzvah." A mitzvah's "object" is the thing or substance with which the mitzvah is actually performed, such as the leather boxes which the Jew binds on his head and arm as tefillin; a mitzvah's "instruments" are the resources which facilitate and enable the mitzvah's performance, such as the tools which fashion a piece of leather into tefillin or the food which provides a person putting on the tefillin with the energy to bind them on himself.

Time fills an auxiliary, "instrumental" role in the performance of every mitzvah.

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There is one mitzvah, however, in which time is the primary "object" — the resource which is actually shaped and formed in conformity with the divine will. This is the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh, "the sanctification of the new month."

The Jewish calendar is punctuated with what the Torah calls "callings of holiness" (Leviticus 23:4) — festivals and special days possessing special spiritual qualities. These are more than commemorations of historical events: the very substance of the time occupied by Passover is imbued with the quality of freedom, that of Sukkot with joy, of Shavuot with the revelation at Sinai, of Rosh Hashanah with G-d's annual resumption of His sovereignty over the universe, of Yom Kippur with teshuvah — the capacity to access the very quintessence of one's soul and its bond to G-d. And so it is with every festival and special day on the Jewish calendar — each has its unique "holiness" and divine quality woven into the very fabric of its time for us to "call forth" and actualize by observing the mitzvot of the day.

One would think that the spiritual character of time is fixed and absolute, established by the Creator when time itself was formed. Indeed, such is the case with the weekly Shabbat, which G-d blessed and sanctified by resting from His work of creation, thereby establishing the seven-day work/rest cycle which defines our week.

But with regard to the annual cycle of the festivals, G-d desired that these should be sanctified by human beings. The mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh is that we should fix the calendar based on monthly sightings of the new moon and our calculations of the lunar and solar cycles, and that these sightings and calculations should determine which day shall be a Yom Kippur, which days shall comprise the festival of Passover, and so on. The Torah goes so far as to state that even if those entrusted with the task of making these calculations err, it is their "mistaken" conclusions which create the holiness and specialty of the festivals.

This is "the first mitzvah commanded to the Jewish people." Mitzvot such as "to know and believe in the existence of G-d" (the first mitzvah in Maimonides' enumeration of the mitzvot), to "love your fellow as yourself" ("a great principle in Torah" according to Rabbi Akiva; according to Hillel, "This is the entire Torah—the rest is commentary), or to "study Torah day and night" ("the equivalent of all the mitzvot," according to Talmud, Peah 1:1) might be more fundamental in terms of the mitzvot's effect upon the person; but in terms of the mitzvot's transformation and sanctification of the universe, the "sanctification of the month" is the mitzvah whose "object" is the most basic element of the physical creation. ❖



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Haftorah Bereishis in a Nutshell

Isaiah 42:5-21

The haftorah of this week's reading opens with a statement by "the Almighty G-d, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who laid out the earth and made grow from it." This echoes the Torah portion's recounting of the creation of the world in six days.

G-d speaks to the prophet Isaiah, reminding him of his life's purpose and duty, namely that of arousing the Jewish people to return to being a light unto the nations, "To open blind eyes, to bring prisoners out of a dungeon; those who sit in darkness out of a prison."

The prophecy continues with a discussion regarding the Final Redemption, and the song that all of creation will sing to G-d on that day. G-d promises to punish all the nations that have persecuted Israel while they were exiled. The prophet also rebukes Israel for their errant ways, but assures them that they will return to the correct path and will be redeemed. ❖

From Our Sages

In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)

The Torah says: "I was the tool of G-d's artistry." An architect who builds a palace does not do so on his own; he has scrolls and notebooks which he consults regarding how to place the rooms, where to set the doors. So it was with G-d: He looked into the Torah and created the world.

-- (Midrash Rabbah)

G-d looked into the Torah and created the world. Man looks into Torah and sustains the world.

-- (Zohar)

The Torah's first word, bereishis, is an acronym for beit reishis—"two firsts" (the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, beit, stands for the number two). This is to say that the world was created for the sake of two things called "first" (reishis)—the Torah (Proverbs 8:22) and the people of Israel (Jeremiah 2:3).

-- (Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)

Good Shabbos to all!

שבת שלום גוט שבת!

