



Wembley Synagogue
בראשית

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Bereshit

בראשית ברא אלוקים

Why does the Torah start with a Bet and not an Aleph?

This question is dealt with by many commentators but one explanation is given that the Torah consists of two parts - the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The Written Torah starts with the word "Bereshit" and the Oral Torah starts with the word "Mei'eimatai Korin Et Hashema B'arvit" From when do we read the evening Shema (first word of Mishna Berachot). Thus the first letters of the Written and Oral Torah spell the word "bam". This alludes to what our Rabbis tell us in the Gemara Yoma 19b on the words "Vedibarta Bam" - "and you shall speak of them" that a person should use his speech and conversation for the study of the Written and Oral Torah.

(Source: Avraham Shmuel Meisels - Magid Taluma)

וירא אלוקים כי טוב

"And Hashem saw that it was good"

With regard to the creation of all the species, the Torah tells us וירא אלוקים כי טוב - (Vayar Elokim Ki Tov) Hashem saw that it was good. Every creature gets a *Ki Tov*. But the creation of man does not get a *Ki Tov*. Hashem examines His handiwork after each step of creation and pronounces it "good." But He makes no such statement after the creation of man. Rav Yosef Albo in his *Sefer Ha'Ikrim* (Book of Principles) explains that every element of creation is a finished product. When Hashem forms an insect or an apple tree, it becomes what it is and can therefore be declared "good." Man, however, is a work in progress. He is a vast bundle of potential whose final form is as yet unfinished. Will he blossom? Will he flourish? Will he rise to the high spiritual levels of which he is capable? These unresolved questions must be answered by each and every human being throughout a lifetime. There is, therefore, never a good time when he can be considered a finished product and declared "good." Man is always in a state of potential. (Source: Rabbi Frand quoting Sefer Haikrim)

את המאור הגדול לממשלת היום ואת המאור הקטן לממשלת הלילה

The greater luminary (sun) to dominate the day and the lesser luminary (moon) to dominate the night (1:15)

The Midrash relates that Hashem initially created the sun and the moon the same size. However the moon argued that "two kings cannot share the same crown." In response to this Hashem told the moon to decrease in size. The *Cham Hashemesh* notes that the moon was implying that one of the two luminaries would have to be reduced in size. Certainly it must have realised that Hashem might respond as He did, and that by raising the point it was putting itself at risk. Despite this, however, the moon still honestly reported the situation. The incident teaches us that one must tell the truth, even if we may ultimately have to bear the consequences for what we say. (Source: Something to Say)

ויעש אלוקים את שני המאורות הגדולים

And G-d made the two great luminaries (the sun and the moon)

There appears to be a contradiction in this verse since at first both the sun and the moon are referred to as great luminaries implying that the moon is also a great luminary. The Gemara states in Bava Metzia 12b that although the term *katan* usually refers to a minor, an adult who is not "self sufficient" and must rely on others for support is also called *katan*. This explains why the moon is referred to as both *gadol* (large) and *katan* (small). In physical size the moon is large and warrants the title *gadol*. The moon, however, does not produce its own light, but reflects the light of the sun. In this respect it is not "self-sufficient" and may be justifiably called *kattan*! (Source: Shabbos Delights)

נעשה אדם

Let Us Make Man (1:26)

Rashi and other commentators ask the famous question: Why is this statement written in the plural? After all, Hashem alone creates man, without any assistance. The Sfat Emet offers the following insight: Each individual is a partner in his own "creation." Hashem creates us with a wealth of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual potential all waiting to be developed. Hashem therefore says to each person, נעשה - let us work together. I have created you. Now do your job, make yourself the best person you can be. (Source: Something to Say)

ויכלו השמים והארץ

The skies and the earth were completed

Rav Chisda said in the name of Mar Ukva: whoever prays on Erev Shabbat and recites "Vayechulu", two ministering angels accompany him and place their hands upon his head saying "And your iniquity has been removed and your sin atoned for" (Isaiah 6:7)

It was taught that Rabbi Yose ben Rabbi Yehudah said: two ministering angels accompany a man home from the synagogue on Shabbat eve, one kind and one malicious. If he enters his house and finds the lamps lit and the table set, the kind angel says "May it be this way next Shabbat and the malicious angel is compelled to answer "Amen!" But if this is not the case, the malicious angel says "May it be this way next Shabbat as well" and the kind angel is forced to answer, "Amen!"

(Source: Gemara Shabbat 119b)

From the Tree of Knowledge we learn that it is forbidden to embarrass

Why did Hashem not reveal the name of the tree from which Eve ate the fruit? Rashi (3:7) answers that Hashem does not want to make any of His creations feel bad. People might have said "This is the tree through which the world suffered." We learn from this that if Hashem was careful not to embarrass a tree how much more so must we be not to embarrass a person.

המן העץ אשר צויתך לבלתי אכל ממנו אכלת

Have you then eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to eat from?" (3:11)

Question: In the first Hebrew word of this verse, "Hamin," the Gemara Chullin 139b finds an allusion to Haman who sought to destroy the Jewish people until Mordechai and Esther frustrated his plans and he was executed. "Haman" has the same Hebrew letters ה-מ-ן - as in "Hamin." What however, is the connection between Haman and the story of Adam's sin?

Answer: Haman did not learn from Adam's mistake. Adam was the only man in the world, ruling over all creatures; he lacked nothing and could have lived forever. Hashem's command not to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was to limit his domain marginally and to teach him to be happy with what he had. He was not to risk everything he had for what was not meant for him. Unfortunately, Adam did not learn this lesson and suffered the bitter consequences.

Haman, too, had everything - vast wealth, many children in powerful places and the highest position in the kingdom, second only to the king (Esther 5:11)

Nevertheless, he could not bear the fact that Mordechai the Jew remained the *only one* who refused to bow down to him. Not content with possessing almost everything, Haman risked all he had in an attempt to gain what he felt was missing - by planning the annihilation of the Jewish people.

Had he not been so greedy, he could have lived a life of wealth and royal honor. But he did not learn from Adam's mistake, and he, too, suffered the bitter consequences. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

ויולד את חנוך

And he gave birth to Chanoch

Cain may have called his son חנוך (Chanoch) for it would always remind him that his son needed חינוך - (chinuch) –education (note the similarity in the spelling). Cain also built a city and named the city חנוך (Chanoch) as well (see 4:17). The commentators say that it is not enough to educate your child; there must also be an environment and society in which they can live -an environment which appreciates and values what education teaches. (Source: Table Talk)

Shabbat Shalom!