

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BERESHIT

October 29<sup>th</sup> 2016 - 27 Tishrei 5777

**DEDICATION: In memory of Sophia Bat Bolisa – Sophie Jerome – Arayat Sunday Ahi Ezer**

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to [ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com)  
Newsletter archives now at [BenaiAsher.Org](http://BenaiAsher.Org)

**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4:00PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100 – Mincha– The most important tefilah of the day –Give us 11 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!**

## Editors Notes

**An amazing feeling .... At the end of our class this morning one of the guys came over to me and said, "I have been reading the weekly portion for the last fifty years and this class has given me a new perspective on the portion and on life itself,"**

The portion of Bereshit is by far the most difficult one in all the Torah to even begin to understand. Infinite secrets are to be found in the first word and even the first letter of the Torah, how is one to begin to fathom creation of the universe, creation of man and man's purpose? And while we get a full week to study most portions, Bereshit comes right after all the holidays and we typically have only a few days after we celebrate simchat Torah to delve into this Perasha.

In the mornings this week, we explored some questions that arise through the text and the midrashim and attempted to come up with an answer to explain them. We must remember the purpose of midrash is to teach us a life lesson.

It appears that Hashem creates Adam or primordial man as a single asexual unit (or both genders in a single body) capable of asexual reproduction and gives man a single command, "Be Fruitful and Multiply". Adam apparently does not appreciate this seeing that each animal has a mate and G-d separates the female from the male and thus we have two beings, man and woman. Adam names her ISHA or woman. Later on he will in essence change her name to Chava or Eve. Whats going on and why the name change?

We then have the story of eating from the tree. It seems there is some sort of Taavah or lust for the fruit. And when Adam is confronted, he places the blame on Isha – the woman? The Zohar explains that in fact it was Adam who had this lust for his own beautiful wife and instead of waiting for the wedding

on Friday night after Shabbat would set in, Adam could not control himself and slept with the Isha.

We then have the story of Kayin killing Hevel. The Midrash expounds that Hevel had two twin sisters while Kayin had only one. Why does Kayin kill his brother? Why do men go to war? It is often over jealousy. The two fought over Hevel's extra sister. (The Rabbis explain that the existence of the twins are indicated by the superfluous word "et" in 4:1 and 4:2 where Kayin's birth announcement is accompanied with only one "et", thus one twin, while Hevel's birth announcement has two appearances of "et" which to the Rabbis suggested two twins.)

Kayin is spared and will walk the earth. Then we hear of Lamech, a great grandchild of Kayin. We know that Lemach has two wives? Why two? We know that Lemach became blind? Why? And we are told that one day Lemach went out hunting, with his young grandson leading the way. We must again ask, why is he hunting as until the flood, man ate no meat. The child saw something that looked like a beast. Lamech bent the bow, [let go the arrow], and slew Kayin. The child sees that a man and not an animal was slain. Lamech cried out, "Woe is me! It is my great grandfather." In contrition, he clapped his two hands together, inadvertently striking the child's head and killing him. Lemach returns to his wives and tells them, "By a wound of mine [my blindness] I slew a man, and by a blow of mine [clapping my hands] a child".

The Midrash explains that Hashem showed Adam the history of mankind –each generation and its leaders. In the course of this "exhibition," Adam was shown the soul of King David and the fact that he was destined to live only 3 hours. Adam was very grieved at this loss of potential. He inquired whether he was allowed to bequeath some of his own years to David. The Almighty answered that Adam was destined to live for 1000 years, but that he would be allowed to give up some of those years to David. Adam then bequeathed 70 years to David, so that Adam lived for 930 years and David lived for 70 years. Jumping to the story of David, we are told that One night, David was standing on the rooftop of his palace and from far away, he sees a woman bathing. He finds out that this is Batsheva, the wife of Uriah, the Hittite. Because King David wants to marry Batsheva so desperately, he sent Uriah to war where he died. David then marries her. After the wedding, the

Prophet Nathan let David know how terrible his plot in the eyes of Hashem is. David admits his sin. The Gemara says there was no sin. Huh?

Back to Bereshit. The last chapter relates how man became corrupt and G-d decides he must destroy mankind. There is reference to the Benei Elokim seeing women. The Midrash relates that when the generation of the Flood went astray, Hashem began to regret having created man. Then two angels, Shamchazai and Azael, came before Hashem and said, "Did we not warn You before You created man, saying, 'What is man, that You should be mindful of him?'" Hashem replied: "Then what shall become of the world?" "We will suffice instead," they replied. Hashem answered, "I know that would you live on that world, the evil inclination would rule you just as much as it controls man, but you would be even worse." But the angels persisted, saying: "Let us descend to the world of men, and we will show You how we will sanctify your name." And Hashem said: "Go down and dwell among them." Sure enough, as soon as the angels descended, their evil inclination overpowered them. When they saw the beautiful "daughters of man," they became corrupted and sinned with them.

Let me suggest an answer based on what I heard from Rabbi Aderet many years ago and based on what I discussed with Rabbi Abittan, z"l many times.

Adam was created in the image of Hashem, as a single unit alone and commanded to reproduce. But Adam wanted to be like the animals and reproduce as they do. In the creation of woman, Adam should have seen a partner, the mother of mankind who would help him bring souls to the world. Through loving her, he would come to understand love and be able to truly love G-d. Yet Adam sees only WOMAN! He sees primarily through the eyes of Taavah or lust. And after the sin, he blames Isha. Just as she lusted for the fruit, he in naming her Isha, woman, a possession, lusted for her. This lust is where the sin lived.

We see again that lust of Kayin for the sister of Hevel leads to jealousy, war and murder.

Lamech has two wives. We must ask why. The midrash explains that Lamech took two wives, one for sexual pleasure and the other for procreation. One wife would be in his company adorned like a harlot, and he plied her with a drug that induced barrenness, so that she would not give birth; the other sat alone, like a widow. Why does he go blind? From the taavat eynayim, the lustful eyes.

Now let's jump to David. The gemara writes that 'Batsheva was destined for David from the day the world was created. But David took her before the necessary time came.'" The Radak suggests based on a midrash that David and Batsheva knew exactly who each other were; they knew that they were destined for each other for a good reason as from their union she would give birth to Shelomo Hamelech, from whose lineage Mashiach will come BBA. Just like Adam who did not wait until Friday night to be with his wife, David too failed in waiting for the proper time and there is where his "sin" lays.

Finally, it may be easy for us to stand up and criticize Adam, and Kayin, and Lamech and David. But the midrash explains that even an angel, even a heavenly being can succumb to lust and a lack of self-control. This is the ultimate test.

The greatness of the Avot, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is in this self control to the point of going against their very natures as we will see in the coming weeks. Noah is called a Sadik perhaps as Joseph who exhibited the ultimate in control is called a Sadik – a righteous person – and through Noah, the world will go on. (Still we see Noah fails after the flood).

Rabbi Abittan would teach us that the purpose of the misvot, of the Torah and all the laws is to teach us self-control. Shabbat is an antidote to the sins of Adam because through the laws of Shabbat we learn to control our wills and we learn to elevate the physical with spiritual purpose.

One hundred and thirty years after the sin, Adam returns to his wife and he seems to learn from the mistake. She is no longer simply Isha or woman. She is Chava or Eve, the mother of mankind. And Shet is born. Adam finally understands his purpose.

We are not commanded to become ascetics on a mountain drinking water and eating crusty bread, living alone and celibate while we sleep on a bed of nails. We are not told to shun the physical. We are told to elevate the physical through self-control and higher purpose. Every physical act, every moment of existence can be elevated to the greatest of spiritual relevance.

This is the lesson of Bereshit, of the beginning and of life.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

## Summary of the Perasha

### **Bereshit- Hashem creates the world, Adam sins**

- 1- The events of the first 7 days of creation
- 2- The creation of Adam and Gan Eden
- 3- The creation of Hava. Adam and Hava eat from the tree and are punished.
- 4- Kayin and Hevel are born. Kayin kills Hevel and is punished.
- 5- The descendants of Kayin
- 6- The generations from Adam to Noach
- 7- The generations from Adam to Noach continued. Man becomes wicked and Hashem decides to wipe out man and animal.

### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR**

**Visit [DailyHalacha.com](http://DailyHalacha.com), [DailyGemara.com](http://DailyGemara.com),  
[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)  
The Blessing of the Letter "Bet"**

The Midrash raises the question of why the Torah begins with the letter "Bet" ("Bereshit Bara Elokim..."). Intuitively, we might have expected the Torah to begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet – "Alef" – rather than the second letter, "Bet." The Midrash answers that God chose to begin the Torah with the letter "Bet" because it is the first letter of the word "Baruch" ("blessed"), whereas the letter "Alef" is the first letter of the word "Arur" ("cursed").

This comment of the Midrash requires explanation. Why does it matter that the letter "Alef" is the first letter of the word "Arur"? There are many, many words that begin with either "Alef" or "Bet," some with positive associations, and others with negative associations. What is the Midrash coming to teach us by associating the "Bet" of "Bereshit" with "Baruch"?

One Rabbi answered that the Sages here actually refer to the deeper significance of the letters "Alef" and "Bet". The letter "Alef" is unique in that there is nothing before it; this letter begins the entire alphabet, without following or building upon an earlier letter. The letter "Bet," by contrast, follows on the heels of the letter "Alef." The Midrash indicates to us that when it comes to Torah, we must always begin with "Bet," and not "Alef." The text of the Torah could potentially be misunderstood if it is approached with the mindset of "Alef," as though it is being studied for the first time and has never before been properly analyzed. When we sit down to learn Torah, we must come with the attitude of "Bet" – with the realization that there is an ancient tradition that dictates how it is to be studied and understood. Our Torah study is part of a process that began millennia ago. We do

not start with "Alef", ignoring everything that has been taught in years past, but rather with "Bet," drawing from and building upon our ancient Torah tradition.

For this reason, we must be very careful in deciding from whom we learn Torah. Unfortunately, there are many teachers and lecturers who explain the text without regard for our tradition, who come with the mindset of "Alef," rather than that of "Bet." Our Sages warn that if we study Torah with "Alef", without giving consideration to the traditional methods of understanding, then our study is "Arur", Heaven forbid. Torah learning becomes a "Beracha" only if we approach it with the perspective of "Bet," with the awareness of what has been said and taught in prior generations. When we approach Torah with this keen sense of Mesora (tradition), seeking to become part of a millennia-old scholarly tradition, then it becomes a true blessing for us, and not, Heaven forbid, a cause for "Arur."

### **VICTOR BIBI**

#### **SOD HAPARASHA**

**Will be distributed under a separate list  
If you want to receive this article every week,  
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

### **Rabbi Wein DOING BETTER**

In a recent article that appeared in the Wall Street Journal one of the opinion writers for that esteemed newspaper wrote a thoughtful piece about his feelings as he embarked on the annual fast day of holiness. The main thrust of his article was that American society can and should do better. It should produce better candidates for the presidency, it should be a more robust society, it should be a more tolerant society – in short, it should be a better society.

This idea should not be restricted to the United States of America or to politics and government generally. It should apply to all of us. We can all do better. We can be better parents and teachers, citizens and workers, scholars and leaders. The greatest restriction to our lives is when we believe that we are not capable of doing better and are complacent and accepting of our current situation and efforts.

The Talmud challenges us to always ask of ourselves: "When will my actions and behavior come to the level of those of our patriarchs and matriarchs?" Now, all of us know that we are not

Abraham and Sarah, but the challenge placed before us is to improve ourselves so that we come within hailing distance of the great people who brought monotheism to the world and founded the Jewish people. The Torah makes maximum demands upon us because it wants us to do better. We are encouraged to strive to reach our true potential and not wallow in the everyday excuses of life that so constrain us.

Every teacher has had the experience of the young student that openly tells him or her that he simply cannot deal with mathematics or physics or social studies or a foreign language. By so declaring, the student has put the teacher on notice that not much should be expected from that student during the course of the scholastic year.

Of course we all realize that this is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Stating that it is beyond my ability to do something automatically guarantees that I will not accomplish that goal or master that subject. It also provides the one who has made that statement with a comfortable zone of excuses that removes any sense of failure or disappointment.

The rabbis of the Talmud placed the emphasis on effort rather than concentrating on the result. "According to the effort, so will be the reward." For the effort invested instructs our desire to do better. There is a great phrase in Yiddish that describes the smug, self-satisfied, insufferably arrogant "pious" person: "A righteous person wrapped in a fur coat." Snugly comfortable in his own self, he will never see room for improvement and growth.

He is not interested in doing better because he is convinced that he is doing just fine as he is now. And that is a terrible trap that denies human beings the ability to grow and develop the inherent greatness that lies within each and every one of us. The tragedy of life many times is the untapped potential that is never exploited.

It is interesting to note that the nature of human beings is to strive to do better. Simply look at all of the billionaires who are constantly searching for another deal or opportunity to make even more money even though they realize that they cannot live long enough to spend all of the money they have already accumulated. Perhaps even more than the money is the thrill of the hunt that drives them, the ability to do better at what they are good at.

So too is it with musical and theatrical artists, sports champions and almost all other people engaged in professions or the arts. The Torah does not

disparage this drive of human nature. However, it does wish to channel it into spiritual and altruistic avenues as well. We can all do better in active kindness and charity and in our attitude towards others, especially when those others differ from us in appearance, dress and world outlook.

We can all do better in terms of devoting ourselves to study and knowledge, to erudition and scholastic achievement. This past month of Tishrei concentrated our minds and actions on essentially promising ourselves and our Creator that we can and will do better. We will believe in ourselves and in the justice of our cause and the holiness of our purpose. And we will strive to transmit that to others and to the world generally, with our words, actions, our behavior and influence.

### **Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Faith of God**

There is a deep question at the heart of Jewish faith, and it is very rarely asked. As the Torah opens we see God creating the universe day by day, bringing order out of chaos, life out of inanimate matter, flora and fauna in all their wondrous diversity. At each stage God sees what He has made and declares it good.

What then went wrong? How did evil enter the picture, setting in motion the drama of which the Torah – in a sense, the whole of history – is a record? The short answer is man, Homo sapiens, us. We, alone of the life forms thus far known to us, have freewill, choice and moral responsibility. Cats do not debate the ethics of killing mice. Vampire bats do not become vegetarians. Cows do not worry about global warming.

It is this complex capacity to speak, think and choose between alternative courses of action, that is at once our glory, our burden and our shame. When we do good we are little lower than the angels. When we do evil we fall lower than the beasts. Why then did God take the risk of creating the one form of life capable of destroying the very order He had made and declared good? Why did God create us?

That is the question posed by the Gemara in Sanhedrin:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create man, He created a group of ministering angels and asked them, "Do you agree that we should make man in our image?"

They replied, "Sovereign of the Universe, what will be his deeds?"

God showed them the history of mankind.

The angels replied, "What is man that You are mindful of him?" [Let man not be created].

God destroyed the angels.

He created a second group, and asked them the same question, and they gave the same answer. God destroyed them.

He created a third group of angels, and they replied, "Sovereign of the Universe, the first and second group of angels told You not to create man, and it did not avail them. You did not listen. What then can we say but this: The universe is Yours. Do with it as You wish."

And God created man.

But when it came to the generation of the Flood, and then to the generation of those who built the Tower of Babel, the angels said to God, "Were not the first angels right? See how great is the corruption of mankind."

And God replied (Isaiah 46:4), "Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient." [Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38b]

Technically the Gemara is addressing a stylistic challenge in the text. For every other act of creation in Genesis 1, the Torah tells us, "God said, 'Let there be' ... And there was..." In the case of the creation of humankind alone, there is a preface, a prelude. Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness ..." Who is the "us"? And why the preamble? In their seemingly innocent and childlike – actually subtle and profound – way the sages answered both questions by saying that with (to quote Hamlet) an enterprise of this pith and moment, God consulted with the angels. They were the "us".

But now the question becomes very deep indeed. For, in creating humans, God brought into existence the one life form with the sole exception of Himself, capable of freedom and choice. That is what the phrase means when it says, "Let us make mankind in our image after our likeness." For the salient fact is that God has no image. To make an image of God is the archetypal act of idolatry.

This means not just the obvious fact that God is invisible. He cannot be seen. He cannot be identified with anything in nature: not the sun, the moon, thunder, lightning, the ocean or any of the other objects or forces people worshipped in those days. In this superficial sense, God has no image. That, wrote Sigmund Freud in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, was Judaism's greatest contribution. By worshipping an invisible God, Jews tilted the balance of civilisation from the physical to the spiritual.

But the idea that God has no image goes far deeper than this. It means that we cannot conceptualise God, understand Him or predict Him. God is not an abstract essence; He is a living presence. That is the meaning of God's own self-definition to Moses at the Burning Bush: "I will be what I will be" – meaning, "I will be what I choose to be." I am the God of freedom, who endowed humankind with freedom, and I am about to lead the children of Israel from slavery to

freedom.

When God made humanity in His image, it means that He gave humans the freedom to choose, so that you can never fully predict what they will do. They too – within the limits of our finitude and mortality – will be what they choose to be. Which means that when God gave humans the freedom to act well, he gave them the freedom to act badly. There is no way of avoiding this dilemma even for God Himself. And so it was. Adam and Eve sinned. The first human child, Cain, murdered the second, Abel, and within a short space of time the world was filled with violence. In one of the most searing passages in the whole of Tanakh, we read at the end of this week's parsha: God saw that man's wickedness on earth was increasing. Every impulse of his innermost thought was only for evil, all day long. God regretted that He had made man on earth, and He was pained to His very core. (Gen. 6:5-6)

Hence the angels' question, the ultimate question at the heart of faith. Why did God, knowing the risks and dangers, make a species that could and did rebel against Him, devastate the natural environment, hunt species to extinction, and oppress and kill his fellow man?

The Talmud, imagining a conversation between God and the angels, is suggesting a tension within the mind of God Himself. The answer God gives the angels is extraordinary: "Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient." Meaning: I, God, am prepared to wait. If it takes ten generations for a Noah to emerge, and another ten for an Abraham, I will be patient. However many times humans disappoint Me, I will not change. However much evil they do in the world I will not despair. I despaired once, and brought a Flood. But after I saw that humans are merely human, I will never bring a Flood again.

God created humanity because God has faith in humanity. Far more than we have faith in God, God has faith in us. We may fail many times, but each time we fail, God says: "Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient." I will never give up on humanity. I will never lose faith. I will wait for as long as it takes for humans to learn not to oppress, enslave or use violence against other humans. That, implies the Talmud, is the only conceivable explanation for why a good, wise, all-seeing and all-powerful God created such fallible, destructive creatures as us. God has patience. God has forgiveness. God has compassion. God has love. For centuries, theologians and philosophers have been looking at religion upside down. The real phenomenon at its heart – the mystery and miracle – is not our faith in God. It is God's faith in us.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL**

It's hard to remain sensitive to the importance of things we take for granted. And what do we take for granted more than light itself? Yet the Torah's opening words declare that light is of the utmost importance. In the simple and yet profound statement that light is "good," Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt"l, found a world of meaning. Light's intrinsic "goodness" stems from the role it plays in the foremost human occupation: recognizing Hashem.

"The light...was good" (1:4).

The word "good" occurs many times in the Torah, but it is of extreme significance that the very first "good" in the Torah is said concerning the light.

This comes to teach that the true goodness of any phenomenon is made possible solely because of the goodness of light. Because light enables us to see and to recognize the goodness of everything, therefore light is the chief good.

Although heaven and earth were created by the first dictum (Rosh Hashanah 32A), this dictum is not written in the Torah, and no statement is made specifically that they were "good." Hashem omitted this first dictum of the creation of heaven and earth in order that the dictum of light should be the first in the Torah and that the dictum of light should be the first "good." Because without light (i.e. without seeing), heaven and earth are valueless.

What does wealth avail a man who is ignorant of his wealth? Seeing heaven and earth, and recognizing the greatness of the Creator from His Creation, causes heaven and earth to fulfill their purpose. By seeing and appreciating the Creation, men fulfill Hashem's purpose of Creation. Because our father Abraham was the first to fully utilize heaven and earth to fully recognize the Creator, he was chosen by G-d as the man for whom heaven and earth were created. The true Good is gratitude to the Creator and recognition of His plan and purpose, His power and wisdom, and His kindness.

By means of light, we see - and we therefore achieve the true good. From the fact that the men of the Great Assembly (who instituted the blessings and prayers - Berachos 33A) equated the light with the holiness and the glory of Hashem, we gain awareness of the function of the light.

In the blessing "Yotzer Ohr" the angels are quoted as exclaiming "Holy, holy, holy is Hashem of hosts" (Isaiah 4:3), and "Blessed is the glory of Hashem [which emanates] from His place" (Ezekiel

3:12). Although nothing in the original contexts (ibid.) indicates that the light is the holiness and the glory that elicits the ecstasy of the angels, yet the composers of the berachah demonstrated that it is the phenomenon of light that is Hashem's holiness and glory which fill the world: "And for the luminaries of light which You have made they praise You forever."

This is how these early sages understood these verses, and they thereby teach us that the endless song of the angels dwells on this phenomenon (light) more than any other matter. This is revealed to us as a model to emulate, so that we, too, should sing endlessly the Creator's praise and we, too, should forever continue to study His greatness because of the creation of light.

Because awareness of Hashem's greatness is the highest good, the light is the first Good in the Torah, because light is the chief cause of awareness.

We must note, in this connection, that the lengthiest berachah in our prayer book is the berachah on the Light ("Yotzer Ohr"), which demonstrates its importance. Thus, like Hashem and like the angels, we too should always continue to say "the light is good."

(From The Beginning/Rabbi Miller ZT"L)

Parts of this newsletter are courtesy of Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Project Genesis, and refer to [learn@torah.org](mailto:learn@torah.org) and <http://www.torah.org/>. Both the authors and Project Genesis reserve certain rights. For full information on copyrights, send email to [copyrights@torah.org](mailto:copyrights@torah.org).

Shabbat Shalom From Cyberspace E Mail Edition is published each week since 1995 and is distributed to 18,000 readers. Our goal is to spread torah knowledge. Articles are downloaded from sites and from e-mail forwarded to us. We encourage you to reprint the newsletter and distribute it to co-workers, friends and family. You can retransmit copies by fax, mail or by hand. Be a part of the Mitzvah of spreading torah. It takes so little to make copies and distribute them. And with E Mail it just takes a click to send this along. To subscribe directly or have us send to a friend or family member Send a request to [ShabbatShalomNewsletter@Gmail.com](mailto:ShabbatShalomNewsletter@Gmail.com) with your name, phone, fax and E-Mail Address