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8 years of Points to Ponder on Parashas Berashis

**Shabbbos Berashis** – Many have the custom to attach this Shabbos to the Yamim Noraim season. Why? **Rav Moshe Wolfson Shlita** suggested that the answer can be found in the idea that Shimon HaTzaddik noted that the world is based on 3 pillars. This means that even when the Anshei Kneses HaGedolah died out, there would be a future for Am Yisroel. This is the job of the Yamim Noraim and carried beyond.

**בְּרֵאשִׁ֖ית בָּרָ֣א In the beginning (1:1)** – Why did Hashem create this world? **Rav Schachter Shlita** noted that the Chochmei HaKabbalah say He created the world either to be meitiv (see beginning of מסילת ישרים), or to create a people so that He could be Molech(rule) over something. However, Rav Schachter would respond with the comments of **Rav Simcha Zelig, The Dayan of Brisk** who didn’t like this discussion -- you can’t discuss what motivated God to do something. Humans are motivated to do things because they’re missing things. You can’t say what motivated God since it implies he’s missing the ability to do something. All you can say is that it was His Ratzon.

**אֶת־הָא֖וֹר כִּי־ט֑וֹב Hashem saw the light that it was good (1:4) - Rashi** explains that this light was put away and is called the Or HaGanuz. **Rav Schachter Shlita** explained that in the same way that humans have layers -- a body and a soul, the Torah too has three layers. Tanach is the outer layer, the Gufei Torah add an additional level of interpretation and the soul of the Torah are those moments and bolts of inspiration that affect us from time to time and give us a taste of that Olam Haba. Only one who learns Torah Lishma gets a Zechus to experience that Nishmas HaTorah.

**יֹּ֣אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֗ים יְהִ֤י מְאֹרֹת֙ בִּרְקִ֣יעַ הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם לְהַבְדִּ֕יל בֵּ֥ין הַיּ֖וֹם וּבֵ֣ין הַלָּ֑יְלָה וְהָי֤וּ לְאֹתֹת֙ וּלְמ֣וֹעֲדִ֔ים וּלְיָמִ֖ים וְשָׁנִֽים  Hashem declared that there should be illuminaries in the Shomayim to separate between day and night (1:14) –** When the Russians landed the lunar rover, **The Brisker Rav ztl.**  was asked if there could ever be life on the moon. He cited this possuk in order to show that the moon was created to have impact on the calendar and on determining day and night but not for sustaining life.

**זָכָ֥ר וּנְקֵבָ֖ה בָּרָ֥א אֹתָֽם He created them as male and female (1:27)** – The Talmud (Berachos 62b) notes that there is a disagreement between Rav and Shmuel as to whether woman was created from man’s tail or whether he was created both male and female at the same time. Assuming the latter, was female back to back with him or facing the same direction? **Rav Schachter Shlita** pointed out that there are two opinions in the Zohar best hinted to, in the dual style of writing in Ksav Ashuris. In the Beis Yosef Ksav, the Tzadee (Sofis ) is like a second head facing the same direction as the original while the Ksav Ari looks like dueling heads pulling into 2 directions. **The Gra** explained that the difference is before the sin versus after. Rav Soloveitchik ztl. added that as he got older, he could not imagine two heads ever working in the same direction.

**וַיַּ֤רְא אֱלֹהִים֙ אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁ֣ר עָשָׂ֔ה וְהִנֵּה־ט֖וֹב מְאֹ֑ד Hashem saw all that He created and it was very good (1:31)** – If Hashem saw it as all good, how could Shlomo say it was all Havel Havolim? **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** answered that when a person can sum up all of creation in the manner that Shlomo did, Hashem saw that as Tov Meod. Then, it is not all worthless.

**וְהִנֵּה־ט֖וֹב מְאֹ֑ד And it was VERY good (1:31)** – The Midrash notes that Rav Meir explained that the VERY good was the creation of the notion of death. How could death be considered VERY good? **Rav Soloveitchik ztl** explained that the author of the comment was Rav Meir who lived an incredibly tragic existence. Lest one think that Rav Meir thought this world to have a dichotomy of leadership – good and evil – he did not think so. He noted that even something as foreign to goodness as death, can have a good element to it. Sometimes we just don’t understand how – or why.

**אֵ֣לֶּה תֽוֹלְד֧וֹת הַשָּׁמַ֛יִם וְהָאָ֖רֶץ בְּהִ֣בָּֽרְאָ֑ם This is the story of heaven and earth when they were created (2:4)** - The letter “Heh” is small here. **Rashi** notes that everything was created on the first day and this is the hint in the small 5 additional days. Problem is, we know that things were created all 6 days of creation so what is the message here? **Rav Aharon Soloveitchik ztl** explained that the “Heh” here is the “heh” of distinction — everything and everyone created needs to be able to consider that the world was created for him/her.

**גַּן־בְּעֵ֖דֶן מִקֶּ֑דֶם Hashem planted a Garden in Eden (2:8)** – There is no trup mark over the word Gan. **Rav Nebenzahl Shlita** explains why. He notes that Gan Eden was not any old Garden that happened to be in Eden. Rather, the secret to the Gan was that it was B’Eden near Hashem.

ו**ַיַּנִּחֵ֣הוּ בְגַן־עֵ֔דֶן לְעָבְדָ֖הּ וּלְשָׁמְרָֽהּ: And he placed Adam in Gan Eden to work it and guard it (2:15)** - Adam was given a dual task – to open and yet also to preserve mother earth. On the one hand, man is not meant to be ruled by nature but at the same time he is obligated not to waste it. **Rav Dr. Benny Lau Shlita** notes that we find the duality split between Adam’s children Kayin and Hevel – the former one who developed and opened the land up while the other worked to protect flocks already there. Kayin ultimately abuses the land to conceal Hevel and is ultimately punished. His future generations repeat history with Adah’s 2 sons Yaval and Yuval who work on opening themselves up more than the land while Tuval Kayin works the equipment and develops weaponry as well. Rav Lau notes that Kayin’s progency continue to mix with those of Sheis to guarantee that the duality of LOvda U’L’ Shomra continue to be fulfilled.

**וּלְאָדָ֕ם לֹֽא־מָצָ֥א עֵ֖זֶר כְּנֶגְדּֽוֹ And Adam did not find a mate for himself (2:20)**  – From the language of the text it sounds as if Adam was supposed to find a match among the other animals. Based on this, the English philosopher Milton suggests that man’s tendency for beastiality needed to be checked. However, **Rav Schachter Shlita** suggested that this was preposterous. Instead, he cited **the Raavad (intro to Sefer Baalei HaNefesh**) who notes that humans mate differently than animals do. Man seeks a fulfilling commitment forever while the animals only mate temporarily. Rav Schachter added the comments of **Rav Yerucham Gorelik ztl.** who added that the reason why man was created with woman attached was to demonstrate to man that his mate was NOT a foreign matter to him.

**תַּרְדֵּמָ֛ה עַל־הָֽאָדָ֖ם Hashem put Adam to sleep (2:21)** - When creating Chava, Hashem put Adam to sleep as **Rashi** explains, so that he should not be disgusted that she was created from a piece of meat that came from him. **Rav Yisrael Reisman Shlita** quotes from **Rav Moshe Braverman Shlita** that the lesson here is that when couples don’t see eye to eye and that there are times that a wife does something that a husband should simply cover his eyes, go to sleep or merely ignore it. Rav Reisman added that the idea of noticing and highlighting good things in a spouse is not to be considered a job but rather normal (hence there was no “job” for the Malach who came to make Avraham aware of his wife’s humility and dignity thus only 3 malachim and not 4).

**עַל־כֵּן֙ יַֽעֲזָב־אִ֔ישׁ אֶת־אָבִ֖יו וְאֶת־אִמּ֑וֹ Therefore man should leave his parents (2:24)** – The Talmud (Sotah 2a) notes that making matches is as tough for Hashem as the splitting of the Yam Suf. But can one say that Kriyas Yam Suf was “hard” for Hashem? **Rav Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi Shlita** explained that creating the Shidduch requires the efforts of maintenance and straightening the course of the couple. That is not guaranteed and requires as much attention as maintaining the world while breaking the rules of nature for Kriyas Yam Suf.

**וְהַנָּחָשׁ֙ הָיָ֣ה עָר֔וּם The Nachash was cunning (3:1) – Rav Nissan Alpert ztl**. notes that animals in general do not desire to live beyond their biological capabilities. In other words, normally a bear does not aspire to be a lion etc. for it was endowed with different talents and tools for living. There are 2 exceptions to the rule: The Nachash and Adam himself. The Nachash represented a barrier buster whose very existence toppled barriers of identity between lions and tigers and bears and the like. That nichush – was destructive in creation and ultimately led to a different definition of creature limitations – that of the end of life. Man uses the same Nichush to create and expand knowledge. But his role is not to be limited nor destructive – he is to use his abilities to expand the world based on his unselfish awareness of his capabilities.

**וְלֹ֥א תִגְּע֖וּ בּ֑וֹ Do not touch it (3:3)** – Chava knew the truth. How could she fib to the Nachash and ultimately get trapped by her own lie and ultimately sin? The **Steipler ztl.** suggested that it was her responsibility to think about why her belief (that touching was a problem) didn’t pan out as truth. Just because her belief system didn’t pan out, she needed to check why before throwing it all away and eating from the tree. Sin often stems from people seeing or hearing about things that shouldn’t or couldn’t happen and did. But if we bothered to check into it, we would understand why it is that Hashem’s ways are correct.

**לֹא־מ֖וֹת תְּמֻתֽוּן You will not die (3:4)** – How did it happen that Chava was willing to listen to the Nachash more than to Hashem who said that if you eat from the tree you WILL die (or so she assumed)? **The Alter of Novorhodok ztl.** explained that evil and the desire to do it, do not always go hand in hand. Sometimes something is not good for us and the knowledge that it is not good for us makes us want to do it while at other times knowing something is bad for us does not make us want to do it. (inhaling drugs versus drinking hot tar). Prior to the Sin, Adam did not have to contend with desire, even when knowing things were bad for him. After the sin however, he was newly challenged with the challenges of desire for things that were not good for him and that he was not going to be able to overcome all things bad for him. This was part of the enticement of the Nachash who told Chava that she needed to give herself more credit and would always overcome her desire. Alas as we know too well, that does not always work.

**יֹֽדְעֵ֖י ט֥וֹב וָרָֽע You will be like Hashem knowing good and Evil (3:5) - Rav Schachter Shlita** would point out to us that prior to the Sin, Adam and Chava were raised knowing right and wrong. They classified themselves and the world around them from a purely legal and logical perspective. However once they tasted Taavah, they now had to contend with what was “good” and “bad” and sometimes that which feels “good” is not necessarily right. The added consideration would prove to be difficult for them in the future.

**עַל־גְּחֹֽנְךָ֣ תֵלֵ֔ךְ וְעָפָ֥ר תֹּאכַ֖ל כָּל־יְמֵ֥י חַיֶּֽיךָ: You will crawl on your back and you will eat dirt all of the days of your life (3:14)** – If the snake were to have dirt available at his disposal all of the days of his life, was this really a curse – or a Beracha? Also, the Gemara (Bava Kama 16a) notes that one who does not bow at Modim becomes a snake. What is the connection between the snake and someone who does not bow at Modim? **Rav Betzalel Rudinsky Shlita** suggested that the ultimate blessing is the awareness that you are connected to the holiness and all-powerful Hashem. Thus, one who loses the connection to Hashem is cursed. If you have the chance to relate to Hashem even if to ask for your needs, you are still connected. If you are cursed and not given the chance to relate, there is no bigger curse than the abandonment and lonliness it brings on. Being unable to bow to thank Hashem at Modim makes us as cursed as the Nachash.

**וְק֥וֹץ וְדַרְדַּ֖ר תַּצְמִ֣יחַ לָ֑ךְ You will grow thorns and thistles (3:18)** – The Talmud (Pesachim 118a) notes that man was afraid that both he and the animals would be competing to eat the same foods. Why was this such a big deal? **Rav Belsky ztl.** explained that man was worried that there would be no objective difference between man and animal in the future as a result of sin. Man would compete with animals and would strive in life only as far as the animals do – to score their next meal. To that Hashem told him that he would eat by the sweat of his brow – that his distinguishing nature would be in the intellectual efforts he would put forward to sustain himself.

**בְּזֵעַ֤ת אַפֶּ֨יךָ֙ תֹּ֣אכַל לֶ֔חֶם** **Through the sweat of your brow you shall consume bread (3:19) – Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz ztl.** explains that man’s curse here is not in the toil and hard work. Rather it is in the potential to err that he lives by his hand alone. Prior to sin, everyone could see Yad Hashem. After sin, there was a gap in that awareness with the potential for the widening of that very gap. Man needs to live with the understanding that Hashem is involved in his every move.

**כִּ֛י הִ֥וא הָֽיְתָ֖ה אֵ֥ם כָּל־חָֽי**: **Adam called his wife Chava for she was the mother of all living (3:20)** – Why is she named here – after the sin? **Rav Pam ztl.** suggests that the ability to overlook mistakes and failures and highlight the positive are critical elements of successful marriage and living. Adam saw that Chava had just brought death into mankind. She would never be able to recover from that punishment. Still, Adam chose to gloss over that and name her – based on her positive virtues. In essence his message was clear - don’t amplify errors, don’t even talk about it unless there is constructive value in the conversation. This, said Rav Pam is a great segulah for shalom Bayis.

**וַיִּקְרָ֧א הָֽאָדָ֛ם שֵׁ֥ם אִשְׁתּ֖וֹ חַוָּ֑ה Adam called the Woman Chava (3:20)** – Immediately after this, the Torah tells us that the Malachim were worried that Adam could be like them and know both good and bad. What was their worry? And what is the connection to naming Chava? **Rav Dr. Nachum Rabinovitz Shlita** explains that after receiving his punishment, Adam does not seek to lay blame. Rather he accepts responsibility and even goes out of his way to see good in and encourage Chava by naming her. Ergo, the episode show Adam not only how to know Ra but also Tov. The Tov is the positive value of Gemillus Chessed that becomes the Derech Eitz HaChaim that needs to be preserved.

**וַיִּקְרָ֧א הָֽאָדָ֛ם שֵׁ֥ם אִשְׁתּ֖וֹ חַוָּ֑ה כִּ֛י הִ֥וא הָֽיְתָ֖ה אֵ֥ם כָּל־חָֽי: He called her Chava as she was the mother of all living things (3:20)**– Why does Adam name her NOW? Why with the recognition that she was the mother of all living things**? Rav Eliyahu Baruch Shulman Shlita** commented that while anger fleets, names remain permanent. We can choose to develop a perspective rather than to choose to highlight a memory that corrodes our past.

**וַיַּ֩עַשׂ֩ יְהֹוָ֨ה אֱלֹהִ֜ים לְאָדָ֧ם וּלְאִשְׁתּ֛וֹ כָּתְנ֥וֹת ע֖וֹר וַיַּלְבִּשֵֽׁם: He made them clothes of light (3:21**) – The Midrash notes that Hashem made them clothes that shown like lanterns. What type of lanterns were these? **Rav Shaul Yisraeli ztl.** explained that the light referred to here was the light of Chessed that illuminated from the moment that Hashem displayed his Chessed at the beginning of the Torah and all the way through until the end when he buried Moshe . Without the original sin, the illumination of Chessed would not have been as apparent.

**כָּתְנ֥וֹת ע֖וֹר וַיַּלְבִּשֵֽׁם: Hashem made them clothes of leather (3:21)** - If they fashioned clothes from fig leaves, why did Hashem make them clothes from leather? **Rav Sternbuch Shlita** learns that Hashem was teaching Adam that the main purpose for all things created was to serve man and if man needed clothing then he was to be able to utilize animals for that purpose. Hashem reminded Adam at this time that given this big power, Adam was to use it in the service of Hashem.

**מִגַּן־עֵ֑דֶן  He sent them from Gan Eden (3:23) - Sfas Emes** notes that this sounds like He sent them on a mission. Where were they to go? **Sivan Rahav Meir** suggests that the sending from Gan Eden was not just punishment, it was a purposeful mission to find the Gan Eden that exists in the entire world. In other words, Adam now had a mission to find the pieces of Gan Eden that were now scattered among everything in the world and to nurture it in order to turn the entire world into Gan Eden.

**וַיִּ֣שַׁע ה אֶל־הֶ֖בֶל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתֽוֹ Hashem listened to Hevel and accepted his Korban but he did not to Kayin and to his Korban (4:4-5)** – Why the double language here? **Sforno** explains that Hevel offered a Korban that was acceptable as he was accepted. Kayin was not accepted and neither was his korban. **Rav Wolbe ztl**. adds that getting close to Hashem is not a ceremonial thing. One needs to understand that he is bringing a piece of himself when he brings a korban to Hashem. Thus, if the korban is not offered appropriately it is a revelation that the person himself is also not appropriately prepared.

**וַיִּ֤חַר לְקַ֨יִן֙ מְאֹ֔ד Kayin was VERY upset (4:5) – Rav Nisson Alpert ztl**. compared this to 3 kids in a class with a teacher. One listens to the teacher and the others don’t. But only one of the non-listeners is punished and taken to a lower class. That one curses the teacher and becomes despondent. We are the students and at times we are in our rightful seats and at other times we get kicked out. But one thing we need to be mindful of, is not giving up on ourselves.

**לָ֚מָּה חָ֣רָה לָ֔ךְ וְלָ֖מָּה נָֽפְל֥וּ פָנֶֽיךָ: Why are you angry and why are you sad (4:6)**– We can understand why Kayin was angry – it was a result of the jealousy he must have felt after Hevel stole his idea and was more accepted than he. But why was he sad? **Rav Elya Svei ztl.** explained that the Torah is showing us the danger of a Nefilah – a depression. The depression can lead one to give up on himself and break too far. That is what happened to Kayin. He chose to notice Hevel and not his own talents. When one thinks that his using his own talents to achieve his personal spiritual goals does not matter, it is the perfect place for his to fall prey to his Yetzer HaRa.

**גָּד֥וֹל עֲוֹנִ֖י מִנְּשֽׂוֹא: My sin is too great to bear (4:13) - Rashi** comments that Kayin’s comment needs to be read as a question. He was asking Hashem how could it be that Hashem can carry the entire universe but cannot bear his sin. **Rav Nosson Wachtfogel ztl quoted Rav Yerucham Levovitz ztl** who learned an incredible lesson here — if one wants to carry a burden, he can carry it. If one does not, the burden will crush him/her.

**וַֽיְהִי֙ בֹּ֣נֶה עִ֔יר וַיִּקְרָא֙ שֵׁ֣ם הָעִ֔יר כְּשֵׁ֖ם בְּנ֥וֹ חֲנֽוֹךְ: Kayin had a child named Chanoch and he built a city which he called Chanoch like his child (4:17) – Rav Bernard Weinberger ztl.** explains that Kayin didn’t need to build the city – usually that is done when someone does not have children (See Rashi to end of Parshas Matos “Chavos Yair”) so he names a city in order not to be forgotten. Why would Kayin name a city after his SON? Rav Weinberger explains that Kayin gave up hope about his own future as a result of his sin. Therefore he sunk all of his Kochos into his son. The Torah is showing us that he was wrong – one must never give up hope on himself and should have started anew with himself as he did with Chanoch.

**And Adam lived 930 years that he lived (5:5)** – Why does the Torah add the modifier “Asher Chai” here more than with any other person? **Rav Chaim of Volozhin quotes the Gra** who explained that Adam didn’t live out all of his days as he dedicated 70 to Dovid Hamelech.

**כָּל־יְמֵ֤י אָדָם֙ אֲשֶׁר־חַ֔י The days of Adam that he lived (5:5)** – What is added with the words “that he lived”? **Rav Wolbe ztl.** explained that without Torah there is no life. So what sustained man and allowed him not to succumb to his Yetzer Hara? It was in discovering new realities with which to connect to Hashem. However, this system didn’t work after Adam until Avraham came along and reset the growth potential of man.

**Haftorah:**

**Haftorah: To open blind eyes to remove a prisoner from confinement (Yeshaya 42:7) – Rav Shraga Feivel Mendelowitz ztl.** once noted that the job of a Mechanech is to remove the stone from the hearts of the Jewish children covered by the spiritual darkness that blankets this land. Exposing our fellow Jews to the beauty of Torah learning, the Joy of Shabbos and Yom Tov and the study of the enlightening Torah, totally creates new vistas for people who did not see the light until then.

**יְהֹוָ֥ה חָפֵ֖ץ לְמַ֣עַן צִדְק֑וֹ יַגְדִּ֥יל תּוֹרָ֖ה וְיַאְדִּֽיר The Lord desires [this] for His righteousness' sake; He magnifies the Torah and strengthens it (Yeshayahu 42:21)** – How was Hashem not in violation of Baal Tosif when he was interested in being Mizakeh us in Torah u’Mitzvos? **The Netziv** (comments to Sheiltos) explains that Hechsher Mitzvos in the Torah get us Sachar even though they are only preparatory. **Rav Schwab ztl**. suggested that L’Hagdil torah refers to that which we understand and can explain. The L’Haadir refers to that which is beyond our comprehension but we still observe it lovingly.

**: יַגְדִּ֥יל תּוֹרָ֖ה וְיַאְדִּֽיר Hashem desires the expansion of Torah and its value (Yeshayahu 42:21) - Rav Shach ztl** would often note that the Rambam explains this possuk as referring to the fact that one only merits Olam Haba if s/he does a Mitzva as prescribed - PERFECTLY. The hope is that in the myriad of Mitzva chances that one gets in his life, he will do at least ONE correctly and wholly — without ulterior motive. Rav Shach would add that the things in life that are public are not able to illuminate. Only things with a sense of Tzniyus can properly enlighten (See Gemara Berachos about Rabbi Yochanan who uncovered his arm to light up an otherwise darkened home).

**When you pass through water I was with you and when you pass through rivers they did not flood you out. When you walked through fire, you were not burned (Yeshayahu 43:2) – Rav Shimon** **Schwab ztl** notes that this Possuk serves as the basis for the long V’Hu Rachum. It seems that 3 Talmidei Chachamim were to be tested by the Romans to see if they’d be saved in the same manner that Chananya Mishael and Azarya were. One dreamt a possuk with 2 keys and a lo. Another, who was a tanach expert, recognized it as this possuk. The men realized that they’d be saved and when they were, they composed V’Hu Rachum.