

A SUPERIOR PRIMARY EDUCATION

by Rabbi Label Lam

The opening words of the Torah are too often misread, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth." That statement would imply that the Torah is communicating cosmology, as a science text book, and is interested in satisfying our curiosity about the order of creation. The Torah, Rashi relates, is rather a teaching book with a more important set of lessons to be learned in the first verse.

The first letter "Beis" taken as a prefix, meaning "for" or "for the sake of" when attached to the word "Reishis" means that the world was created for the sake of something called, "Reishis". Using the rest of Torah as a self-referential dictionary of sorts, Rashi qualifies and crowns two items with the title, "Reishis"-Primary. It is for their sake all is created. We are being told not "how" but rather "why" the world was created.

I have in mind a certain huge factory that I used to gaze at frequently when barreling down some New Jersey highway. The building was humungous. The Parking lot was jammed. The smoke stacks billowed constant smoke. I never figured out what it produced. I'm sure every car that pulls up in the morning represents another subset of activity at the plant. There's the accounting department, food service, janitorial crew etc.

There must be some prime product that justifies all the rest. It might be a slim vile of perfume or a variety of buttons but something of value must be exiting the assembly line that makes the entire complex worth its while.

Similarly, if I were to attempt to solicit from you a large donation to build a school building, you would be justified in asking a few questions. "Why do we need this school?" I'll answer, "We have a wonderfully unique curriculum." Then you might follow up and ask, "Who would attend this school? From where do you get your faculty?" Good questions!

Imagine the whole world is this school. Why is it here? What is it in this life that justifies the existence of all the world's parking lots? It may seem arrogant or ethnocentric to say so, but the Torah is saying it, right in the beginning, and not me. Why and to whom should we apologize? The curriculum is the Torah. The students and the faculty are Israel.

Together they produce something so valuable that the Talmud tells us that whole world was created for "this" alone. What is this "this"? Something else is also called "Reishis"- Primary. "The primary wisdom is fear of HASHEM!" This profound educational process is meant to inspire in its

students a sense of awe and ecstasy in relationship to The Creator.

And so over the course of centuries and millennium millions of worthy students have graduated from here and many with high honors too. It is for their great sake and for our blessed benefit as well that there has been made to exist this generously endowed and sophisticated school that offers such a superior primary education.

Good Shabbos!

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