

# STRAIGHTFORWARD AND UPRIGHT

*by Shlomo Katz*

## **Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz**

### **Bereishis**

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Today's Learning:

Bava Metzia 3:1-2

Orach Chaim 527:3-5

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 78

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Demai 6

R' Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin z"l (the "Netziv"; 1817-1893; rabbi and rosh yeshiva of Volozhin) writes: The book which we are now beginning, which we call Bereishit, was called by the prophets, "Sefer Hayashar." R' Yochanan explains in the gemara (Avodah Zarah 25a) that the term "yashar" / "straightforward" or "upright" refers to the Patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

Why were they called specifically by this adjective? We read in Ha'azinu (Devarim 32:4) that G-d is "tzaddik" / righteous and "yashar." In contrast, the generation of the destruction of the Temple consisted of tzaddikim / righteous people, but they were not yesharim. They did not act straightforwardly with each other; to the contrary, they harbored within themselves hatred of each other. When they saw someone whose way of fearing G-d was different from their own, writes the Netziv, they labeled him an apikorus / heretic. This in turn led to murder and to all of the other sins which eventually resulted in the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash.

What is praiseworthy about the Patriarchs is that besides being tzaddikim, besides loving Hashem to the greatest extent possible, they were yesharim. This means that they acted with love toward every person and they sought the welfare of all of mankind, as required for the continued existence of creation. Avraham, for example, prayed for the welfare of Sdom. Though he hated them and their king intensely, he nevertheless desired their continued existence. Like a father who desires the well-being of his wayward son, so the Patriarchs acted toward the wicked people of their time. This is why their book, the Book of Bereishit, is known as Sefer Hayashar. (Preface to the commentary Ha'emek Davar on Bereishit).

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*"Hashem Elokim said, 'It is not tov / good for man to be alone . . .'" (2:18)*

Our Sages state in Pirkei Avot (6:3), "There is no tov other than Torah." Accordingly, commented R' Moshe Hager shlita (the "Vizhnitzer Rebbe"), this verse can be understood as teaching that one should not learn Torah at home, alone. Rather, one should study in a bet midrash setting among other people. (Quoted in Sichot U'maamarei Kodesh, p. 106)

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*"But Noach found grace in the eyes of Hashem." (6:8)*

R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (the "Mirrer Mashgiach"; died 1936) writes: As his name suggests, Noach was a man of "menuchah" (literally, "rest"). Menuchah is a trait which the Torah holds in very high esteem. We read, for example (Bereishit 2:2), "On the seventh day, G-d completed His work which He had done, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work which He had done." This implies that something was created on the seventh day itself. What was it? Rashi explains: "What was the world lacking [at the end of the Six Days of Creation]? Menuchah. But when Shabbat came, menuchah came with it."

R' Levovitz continues: Noach was very concerned for the comfort of his generation. He not only prayed for their comfort, our Sages teach as well that he was an inventor. As hinted to in verse 5:29, "This one will bring us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands, from the ground which Hashem had cursed," Noach invented the plow and other farm implements. He did all this so that his generation could experience menuchah.

What is the purpose of menuchah? It is not, of course, so that a person can have more time to devote to foolishness. The answer is found in the Shabbat afternoon prayers, where the menuchah of Shabbat is described as follows: "A rest of love and magnanimity, a rest of truth and faith, a rest of peace and serenity and tranquility and security, a perfect rest in which You find favor . . ." Noach found grace in G-d's eyes and achieved immortality because he made such menuchah possible.

It is incredible, therefore, writes R' Levovitz, to think of the great reward that awaits all inventors who create things that make people's lives easier. Modern technology can help to bring menuchah and

all other good things to mankind. It is not an inventor's fault if man sometimes misuses his invention.

The gemara (Avodah Zarah 2b) relates that at the time of the final judgment, the Roman and Persian Empires will ask G-d to reward them for the roads, bathhouses, aqueducts, etc. that they built, ostensibly for the convenience of the Jewish people, so that the Jewish people will be able to study Torah and perform mitzvot. Hashem will respond, "You fools! You did it all for immoral purposes or to make money." The implication of the gemara, however, is that the world's road builders would have been rewarded had they done their work for noble purposes. It is terrifying to think of the opportunity that the Romans and Persians lost, writes R' Levovitz.

For our part, concludes R' Levovitz, we owe hakarat hatov / a debt of gratitude to all inventors and builders, even if their work was not motivated by altruism. After all, how much menuchah have we realized because of their efforts! (Haggadah Shel Pesach Rashei Yeshivat Mir p. 59)

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From the Midrash . . .

Rabbi Eliezer bar Chanina said in the name of Rav Acha: For 26 generations [from Adam to Moshe] the letter aleph complained before Hashem's throne. She said, "Master of the Universe! I am the first of the letters, but you did not create Your world with me." [The first word in the Torah, "Bereishit," begins with the second letter, bet.]

Hashem responded: The entire world and everything in it were created for the Torah. In the future I will give the Torah at Sinai and I will begin with you, as it is written, "Anochi" / "I am Hashem." (Bereishit Rabbah, ch. 1)

R' Shmuel Yitzchak Hillman z"l (1868-1953; rabbi in Glasgow and London; father-in-law of Israeli Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Herzog z"l) explains this midrash as follows:

Ordinarily one would have a purpose in mind for a building before he begins to build the building. One does not usually gather the materials and build the building before determining what the purpose of the building will be.

In this sense, the purpose of a building can be called its "aleph" and the construction of the building its "bet." The world, too, was created for a purpose, i.e., so that man could keep the Torah's laws. That was (and is) the "aleph" of the world.

Yet, Hashem waited 26 generations before giving the Torah. For 26 generations, man did not know what the world's purpose was. For 26 generations, the "aleph," the purpose, was ignored and the "bet," the construction of the world, was given primacy.

Why? R' Hillman explains that just as Torah cannot be taught to a newborn baby, so the earliest generations could not receive the Torah. True, some individuals, for example Avraham, did discover the world's purpose and did keep the Torah even before it was given, just as some precocious

children may be prepared to learn before their contemporaries are. However, not until 26 generations of development and maturity had been attained was the world as a whole ready for the Torah. (Derashot Ohr Hayashar, No. 1)

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Adam Harishon met Kayin. He asked Kayin, "What was the outcome of your judgment [for killing Hevel]?"

Kayin answered, "I repented and G-d compromised with me."

Adam responded, "The power of teshuvah is so great, and I did not know!" Immediately, Adam exclaimed (Tehilim 92:1), "A psalm, a song for the Shabbat day." (Bereishit Rabbah, ch. 22)

This midrash, especially Adam's response to Kayin, requires explanation. R' Yaakov Yosef z"l (see page 4) explains as follows:

There are two kinds of sins: those against G-d and those against man. Chazal teach that only the former type of sin, i.e., sins against G-d, can be atoned through repentance alone. Atonement for sins against man requires that the victim of the sin be appeased.

Kayin's sin of killing Hevel was a sin against man. Accordingly, Adam was surprised to hear that Kayin's repentance was effective. After all, Hevel was dead, so how could he be appeased?

Halachah teaches, however, that if the victim of one's sin has died, the sinner should ask for forgiveness at the deceased's grave. What does this accomplish? The answer is that man's soul is eternal and the fact that he has died merely means that he has shed the garments of this world (the body) and moved on to another world. He is still "alive" and able to grant forgiveness to those who have sinned against him.

When Adam heard this, he exclaimed, "A psalm, a song for the Shabbat day." This psalm refers not only to the seventh day of the week, but also, say Chazal, to "the day which is entirely Shabbat," i.e., to the World-to-Come. The fact that Kayin could be forgiven, Adam realized, was proof of the existence of the World-to-Come. (L'veit Yaakov: Drush 7)

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### **R' Yaakov Yosef z"l (Chief Rabbi of New York)**

R' Yaakov Yosef was born in 1841 or 1843 in Lithuania, and he held a number of rabbinic positions there. His last position was as a dayan / rabbinical judge and maggid meisharim / preacher in Vilna. (Since Vilna had no chief rabbi, R' Yaakov Yosef was effectively the rabbi of that city.)

In 1885, R' Yosef was appointed by the Association of American Orthodox Hebrew Congregations to the newly created position of Chief Rabbi of New York. As Chief Rabbi, R' Yosef was charged with

overseeing kashruth, appointing dayanim, approving the appointment of shul rabbis, and taking whatever other steps that he could to increase Shabbat observance and slow the rapid loss of the younger generation to Orthodoxy.

At first, R' Yosef met with much success, especially in testing shoctim and replacing those who were unqualified. He also was able to implement the visual inspection of the slaughtered animals' lungs, as dictated by halachah, and he directed that every shochet attach a lead seal (plumba) to identify the animals he had slaughtered.

R' Yosef also took an active interest in education, making periodic visits to the Etz Chaim Yeshiva to test the students. (Etz Chaim had been founded in 1866 and was the forerunner of the Rabbi Yitzchok Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University.) R' Yosef also aided immigrant Torah scholars by granting them semichah and helping them find rabbinic positions.

The Chief Rabbinate was not destined to last. R' Yosef's measures to strengthen kashruth meant that meat, chicken, and matzah prices increased. In addition, many local rabbis lost their income from kashruth supervision as a result of the new centralization. Finally, the chassidic communities in New York resented the fact that the Chief Rabbi and the dayanim all were of Lithuanian origin. To resolve at least this last problem, R' Yosef offered the position of av beit din / chief judge to a certain Galician scholar; however, that scholar felt that being one of the senior rabbis in America, he should be Chief Rabbi, and he soon declared himself the holder of the position. In 1893, yet another rabbi, a recent immigrant, declared himself Chief Rabbi of New York.

By 1893, R' Yosef was little more than the head of group of mashgichim / kashruth supervisors who paid his salary. This, too, ceased in 1895, leaving R' Yosef without an income. Soon after, the Chief Rabbi suffered a stroke, and he lived out his last years as a forgotten and penniless invalid. He died in 1902.

While still in Europe, R' Yosef published L'veit Yaakov, a collection of sermons and learned discourses. An excerpt from that work appears inside this issue.

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