

# NO DOUBT

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Bereishis

### No Doubt

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Today's Learning:  
Ketubot 3:5-6  
O.C. 646:9-11  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sukkot 49  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bikkurim 1

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Rashi's well-known comment at the beginning of Bereishit states: "The Torah which is the Law book of Yisrael should have begun with the verse (Shmot 12:1), 'This month shall be for you the first of the months,' which is the first mitzvah given to Yisrael. Why, then, does it begin with Creation? Because of the thought expressed in Tehilim (111:6), 'He declared to His people the strength of His works, in order that He might give them the heritage of the nations.' Should the peoples of the world say to Yisrael, 'You are thieves, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan,' Yisrael may reply to them, 'All the earth belongs to G-d. He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed, He gave it to them, and, when He willed, He took it from them and gave it to us'."

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and rosh ha'yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; died 1951) asks: Why does the verse say, "He declared to His people the strength of His works." Shouldn't the declaration that G-d created the world and gave

Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people have been made to the nations of the world? He answers: The midrash must speak first and foremost to the Jewish People because only when the Jewish People express no doubt that Eretz Yisrael is theirs will the nations of the world also recognize that fact. If the Jewish People have doubts, they can never hope for understanding from the nations.

R' Charlap continues: The same thing is true vis-a-vis all the mitzvot. This is why the snake asked Chava (Bereishit 3:1), "Did G-d indeed say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" All that was necessary to cause Chava to sin was to cause her to question her beliefs.

We read (Yishayah 60:21), "Your people, they are all righteous; forever shall they inherit the Land; a branch of My planting, My handiwork, to be glorious." Only when we consider ourselves glorious because we are His handiwork can the entire nation be righteous, explains R' Charlap. (Mei Marom VIII p.21)

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*"Hevel became ('va'yehi') a shepherd, and Kayin was ('hayah') a tiller of the ground."* (Bereishit 4:2)

R' Yisrael Friedman z"l (1797-1850; the Rizhiner Rebbe) observes: Our Sages say that "va'yehi" is an expression of sorrow, while "hayah" is an expression of joy. (The Gemara supports this interpretation from various sources.) Hevel was a shepherd, but he regretted it. He would have preferred to be serve Hashem without distractions. Kayin was a farmer, and he was happy. He preferred his work to serving Hashem. Perhaps this is why Hashem accepted Hevel's offering and not Kayin's.

(Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

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From the Haftarah . . . \*

\* These divrei Torah relate to the haftarah for Bereishit. However, most communities will read a special haftarah for Erev Rosh Chodesh this Shabbat.

*"Who is blind but My servant, or as deaf as My agent whom I dispatch; who is blind as the perfect one and blind as the servant of Hashem? . . . Hashem desires for the sake of his [man's] righteousness that the Torah be made great and glorious."* (Yishayah 42:19-21)

Many commentaries have struggled to understand these difficult verses. R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer z"l (1795-1874; rabbi in Germany and leading proponent of resettling Eretz Yisrael and reestablishing aspects of the Temple service) explains:

The hallmark of a true servant of Hashem is that he knows his limits. He knows that there is much he does not know. He considers himself to be blind and deaf. Our Sages have said that one should accustom himself to say, "I don't know," but a foolish person is unable to utter those words. Therefore Hashem says, "Who is blind but My servant, or as deaf as My agent whom I dispatch?" Hashem's servants and His prophets are not embarrassed by what they don't know.

R' Kalischer continues: Might you ask, "Why did Hashem create man so imperfect that he lacks knowledge of many things?" To this question the verse says, "Hashem desires for the sake of his [man's] righteousness." Hashem created man to struggle to become righteous and thereby earn reward for his spiritual accomplishments.

(Petach Ha'daat p.5)

R' Moshe David Valle z"l (1697-1776; Italian kabbalist) offers another interpretation of the above verses:

A servant of Hashem recognizes that, in times of trouble, he is blind in two respects. Firstly, he realizes that he has (hopefully, temporarily) fallen to a low spiritual level where he cannot apprehend spiritual matters clearly. In this respect, his blindness is involuntary. Secondly, he "blinds" himself voluntarily so that he will not be influenced by the negative spiritual energy that surrounds him in the time of his downfall. This latter idea is alluded to in a number of verses such as (Shmot 14:13), "Moshe said to the people, 'Do not fear! Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem that He will perform for you today; for as you have seen Egypt today, you shall not see them ever again'." [Moshe was not necessarily promising that Bnei Yisrael would never see Egyptians again. Rather, he meant that as a result of the miracle that Hashem would perform, Bnei Yisrael would be inoculated against any future negative influence from the impurity of Egypt.]

(Teshuat Olamim)

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*"Who delivered Yaakov to plunder and Yisrael to looters, was it not Hashem- the One against Whom we sinned . . ."* (Yishayah 42:24)

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Horiot 3:4) records that the sage Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah once visited Rome and was told that a Jewish child was imprisoned there. R' Yehoshua stood outside the prison and called out, "Who delivered Yaakov to plunder and Yisrael to looters, was it not Hashem?"

To this the child responded, "The One against Whom we sinned."

Hearing this, R' Yehoshua said, "Surely this child will grow up to be a great teacher." R' Yehoshua redeemed the child, and he grew up to be the sage R' Yishmael ben Elisha. (A slightly different version of this episode appears in Talmud Bavli Gittin 58a.)

Why did the child's response indicate to R' Yehoshua that the boy would grow up to be a Torah scholar and leader? asks R' Gavriel Ze'ev Margolis z"l (1847-1935; Chief Rabbi of Boston). He explains:

When we suffer, our natural tendency is to blame G-d. However, our Prophets and Sages have exhorted us to look inward. As the prophet Yirmiyahu wrote (Eichah 3:38-39), "It is not from the mouth of the Most High that evil and good emanate. [Rather,] of what shall a living man complain? A

strong man for his sins." Don't blame G-d for your troubles; blame your own sins.

The ability to practice Yirmiyahu's teaching requires strong emunah / faith and a high level of moral development. In this light, R' Yehoshua's quotation of part of our verse may be understood as a test for the young boy imprisoned through no apparent fault of his own. "Who delivered Yaakov to plunder and Yisrael to looters, was it not Hashem?" Was not G-d acting randomly?

No, responded the child. Our troubles are the acts of "The One against Whom we sinned." It is because we sinned that G-d has brought these troubles upon us.

(Ginat Egoz Al Ha'haftarot)

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## Diaries

This year we will occasionally present excerpts from the autobiographies, diaries and journals of famous rabbinic figures such as R' Yaakov Emden, R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai ("Chida") and R' Chaim Friedlander, as well as other personalities such as the philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore, who had a significant impact on life in Eretz Yisrael in the 19th century.

This week's excerpt is paraphrased from the introduction to Eleh Masei, subtitled "A Journal of the Journey of the Rabbis, Members of the Committee to Raise the Crown of Judaism in Our Holy Land, Who Toured All the Settlements of Shomron [Samaria] and Galil [Galilee] in the Winter of 5674 [1914]." While the journal itself was written by R' Yonatan Binyamin Halevi Horowitz, the introduction was written by the then-Chief Rabbi of Yaffo, R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, and it is signed by all the rabbis who participated in the tour, among them R' Kook, R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap, and R' Moshe Kliers.

Eleh Masei was intended to be distributed at the convention of Agudath Israel which had been scheduled for late 1914 and which R' Kook had hoped would be devoted to strengthening the settlement in Eretz Yisrael. However, the convention never took place, and the publication of Eleh Masei was delayed for two years. R' Kook begins the lengthy introduction by describing the suffering and privation in Eretz Yisrael as a result of the hostilities in Europe (i.e., World War I). He then writes:

In the depths of the darkness we find that Yisrael is alive -- thanks to the Name of Hashem, its source of strength and elevation, who redeems Yaakov in his time of trouble. Thus, we are confident that, alongside the significant natural tendency of the Jewish People to perform acts of charity, as exhibited even more than usual in light of the new troubles [i.e., the war], a major place will be reserved for supporting the eternal cause, the life of the world, those who are in the holy mountain [i.e., Eretz Yisrael]. The matter of Eretz Yisrael should come closer and closer to all hearts that are open to feelings of mercy and kindness, to fear of G-d and true faith.

All faithful members of Yisrael, wherever they live, every generous person, every person with pure

hands and a pure heart, should know the seriousness of the hour. Every person must know that, in the depths of the darkness, we cling to our nation's oath: "If I forget Yerushalayim, may my right hand wither." Above all our joys -- and all our sighs -- we will not forget the Holy Land and the work that we have to do there -- to elevate and sustain it.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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