

DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN . . . THEN SHABBAT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bereishis

Deja Vu All Over Again . . . Then Shabbat

R' Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (the Shelah Ha'kadosh; died 1630) writes: Know that Shabbat alludes to the foundation of our emunah and our Torah, for it alludes to the beginning of existence, which, in turn, alludes to the presence of a Creator. That Creator is none other than He Who always existed and always will exist, and Who caused everything else to exist, as alluded to in His Name, Y-K-V-K, which (in Hebrew) hints at the statements: He is, He was, He will be, and He causes everything to be.

The Shelah Ha'kadosh continues: How does Shabbat allude to the beginning of existence? Shabbat marks the end of Creation, when G-d "rested." If G-d had not rested on the seventh day, He would have gone on creating forever. This would have suggested that He similarly had been creating forever and that there was no beginning to existence [as some Greek philosophers believed].

But, since He did stop creating new things, everything that exists is merely a re-creation of what He created during the six days of Creation. Each week is like the week before, which was like the week before it. In truth, G-d creates everything anew every day, but that is only a repetition of the act of Creation which He did in the beginning. This re-creation occurs constantly under Hashem's hashgachah / direction.

The Shelah Ha'kadosh concludes: Thus, Shabbat testifies to the world having a beginning, as we read (Shmot 31:17), "in a six-day period Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." (Shnei Luchot Ha'brit: Masechet Shabbat, Torah Ohr)

"In the beginning of Elokim's creating the heavens and the earth . . ." (1:1)

Rashi z"l writes: Rabbi Yitzchak said, "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,' for that was the first commandment given to Yisrael." [See the continuation of Rashi for his explanation of why the Torah

did not begin thus.]

R' Chaim Friedlander z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak) explains Rashi's question on a deeper level: Hashem created the world to be a place where mankind would serve him. Moreover, His intention was that the state of the world would be determined by the degree to which the Jewish People observe the mitzvot. Until the first mitzvah was given to Bnei Yisrael, the world did not earn the right to exist. Instead, the world existed thanks only to Hashem's kindness. When Hashem gave the first mitzvah to the Jewish People, He so-to-speak handed the reins of control over the world to them, thus fulfilling His purpose in creating the world. Therefore, it seemingly would have been fitting to begin the Torah with the first mitzvah if not for the reason that Rashi offers for why the Torah did not do so. (Siftei Chaim II p.260)

"Elokim said, 'Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. . .' (1:26)

The midrash Bereishit Rabbah (17:4) teaches: Rabbi Acha said: When G-d was ready to create man, He consulted with the angels and said, "Let us make man." They asked Him, "What will be the nature of this man?" He answered, "He will be wiser than you." G-d brought before the angels all of the birds and animals and said, "What is each animal's name?" but they did not know. Then He brought each animal before man and said, "What is each animal's name?" Man said, "This is an ox, this is a donkey, this is horse, and this is a camel." G-d asked, "What is your name?" Man answered, "I should be called 'Adam,' for I was created from the adamah / earth." [Until here from the midrash]

How does it reflect man's great wisdom if he called himself "Adam" because he was created from the adamah? R' Nechemiah Friedlander shlita explains:

The name "Adam" uniquely reflects the dual nature of man; he is physical, from adamah, but he can imitate the Divine ("adameh l'Elyon"). Man's greatness is in recognizing this dual nature.

R' Friedlander continues: The mishnah in Pirkei Avot teaches, "Do not dismiss any person." R' Menachem Azarya da Fano z"l (1548-1620; Italy) comments: Every person has that ability to emulate the Divine; therefore, do not distance him. (Mi'mishnato Shel Ramchal pp.41-46)

"Hashem Elokim called out to the man and said to him, 'Ayechah / Where are you?' (3:9)

The Midrash Rabbah identifies the word "Ayechah" (אֵיכָה) as conveying the same message as "Eichah" / "Alas! How has it happened?" (as in the opening verse of the Book of Eichah). But what do these words have in common other than the seeming coincidence of their identical spelling (with different vowels)?

R' Shmuel Yafeh Ashkenazi z"l (Turkey; 1525-1595) explains: The word "Eichah" is a cry: "How is it possible that you did something so senseless with no real benefit?" In the Book of Eichah it means: "After I brought you into a Land flowing with milk and honey, how is it possible that you committed the senseless acts that led to the destruction of the Temple?" Here, where Hashem called to Adam, it means: "Where were your thoughts? After I placed you in such a perfect place, how could you sin so senselessly?" (Yefeh Einayim: Devarim)

"To Adam He said, 'Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate of the tree about which I commanded you saying, "You shall not eat of it," accursed is the ground because of you; through itzavon / worry shall you eat of it all the days of your life.'" (3:17)

R' Eliyahu z"l (1720-1797; the Vilna Gaon) writes: There are two manifestations of a person's desires. Some people travel endlessly from country to country pursuing wealth. Other people never go anywhere; they just sit at home thinking without end about how to make money. The latter is called "itzavon," referring to the fact that such a person is never free of worry. (Be'ur Mishlei 5:10)

"All the days of Adam that he lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died." (5:5)

R' Moshe David Valle z"l (Italy; 1697-1777) writes: The phrase, "That he lived," seems superfluous. Moreover, this phrase does not occur in the Torah in connection with any other person. He explains: G-d had told Adam (2:17), "Of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad you must not eat, for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die." But, Adam ate of the Tree of Knowledge and did not die immediately. Rather, in G-d's kindness, he lived. This is emphasized by our verse: "All the days of Adam that he lived . . ."

On a deeper level, continues R' Valle, we may explain this phrase as follows: Adam was unique among all men in that he was never born in the way that we are born. As G-d's handiwork, he surely lived on a much higher plane than we do. Even after he sinned, the fact that he did not come from a "putrid drop" (in the words of Pirkei Avot) gave him a higher spiritual standing.

To what may this be compared? asks R' Valle. To a golden dinar, which remains a golden dinar no matter how damaged it is. Whatever one does to it, he will never make it silver or copper. Similarly, whatever Adam did, he could not change the fact that he alone was G-d's handiwork. Because of this unique aspect to his life, the verse says, "That he lived." (Ohr Olam)

Shemittah

This year is a shemittah / sabbatical year, when most agricultural activities are prohibited in Eretz Yisrael. Accordingly, we are devoting a portion of each issue to the mitzvah of shemittah.

This week, we begin to discuss the controversy surrounding the "heter mechirah," the sale of the Land to a non-Jew in order to eliminate, or at least ease, the shemittah restrictions. We begin with an historical overview based on "Ma'adani Aretz" by R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l and the book "Nachshonei Ha'shemittah," the story of the settlement Mazkeret Batya.

Prior to the late 19th century, Jews who moved to Eretz Yisrael settled almost exclusively in the urban areas of Yerushalayim, Chevron, Tzefat, Teveryah or Yafo. In large part, they were supported by charity from the Diaspora. Farming by Jews was virtually unheard of. In 1882, R' Shmuel Mohilever z"l (1824-1898), rabbi of Bialystok and one of the leaders of the Chovevi Zion / "Lovers of Zion" movement, persuaded Baron Edmond de Rothschild to finance the establishment of a farming colony in Eretz Yisrael. That colony initially was named Ekron. Later it was renamed Mazkeret Batya after the baron's mother. Several other farming settlements also were founded in the 1880s, with and without the baron's help.

As the shemittah year of 5649 / 1888-89 approached, confidants of the baron, including the then-Chief Rabbi of Paris, wrote to several of the leading halachic authorities of Eastern Europe seeking a way for the settlers to work during the shemittah year so that the budding settlements in which the baron had invested so heavily would not be devastated by a year of not producing. In response, four leading rabbis-- R' Mohilever, R' Yehoshua Trunk z"l of Kutna, R' Shmuel Zanvil Klepfisch z"l of Warsaw, and R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l of Kovno-- ruled that the Land could be sold to a non-Jew for the shemittah year, and that work on the Land thereby could continue during that year, subject to certain conditions. To be continued

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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