



תורת חיים Torat Chayim

בס"ד

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Bereishit

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This issue of Torat Chayim is dedicated to the soldiers of the IDF, and the hostages and the wounded.

Ramban on Our Parshah: Starting from Bereishit

Why does the Torah start with the story of Creation? What is the value of history in a book dominated by law?

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra saw practical lessons in the Torah's history segments. For example, when the Torah presents the story of Noach's intoxication and his betrayal by his son Cham and grandson Canaan, Ibn Ezra wrote, "This teaches that both were bad, and as the ancestors do, so the children will do." (Commentary to Bereishit 9:18) This was our introduction to the Middle East.

A well-known midrash tackles the question of why the Torah begins with history. Rabbi Yitzchak asked: Why did the Torah begin from Bereishit, instead of starting with the first mitzvah, which is found in Shemot 12? And he responded by quoting Tehillim 111:6, "He told His nation the power of His deeds, to give them the portions of nations" (Yalkut Shimoni 187). What was Rabbi Yitzchak's answer?

Rashi contended that Rabbi Yitzchak meant that Hashem started with Bereishit in order to teach the nations that He created the world. When Hashem chose to give the Land of Israel to the Jews, He was exercising His right as Crea-

tor. This is a second answer to our question: we begin with Bereishit to justify our receipt of Eretz Yisrael.

Ramban read Rabbi Yitzchak differently; his message was not about ownership of Israel, but about Hashem's system for running the world. By beginning with Bereishit, Hashem communicated to us how Adam and Chavah, were evicted from Gan Eden for their sin. Hashem told us about the Mabul, and about how Noach's righteousness enabled his family to survive. Hashem taught us about the Tower of Bavel and their dispersion, and so on.

This approach fits well with the context of the sentence from Tehillim. The previous sentence reads, "He has given food to those who revere Him; He will always remember His covenant." And the next sentence in Tehillim reads, "His deeds are true and just; His laws are all faithful." The passage speaks to Divine justice.

In Ramban's view, all of Bereishit, continuing into the beginning of Shemot, is recorded to teach humanity that Hashem is an active part of our world, and our actions matter to Hashem.

Parshah Riddles for Kids: Bereishit

Age 4-8: True or false: Adam and Chavah's sons were named Kayin, Hevel, and Ringo.

Age 8-12: One of the people in this parshah is described as "walking with Hashem." What was his name?

Age 12+: What was Adam's punishment for eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?

Journey Through Tanach: Yehoshua: An Introduction

*We expect to learn Tanach, chapter by chapter.
We begin with Sefer Yehoshua.*

The book of Yehoshua, the first book in the "Prophets" section of Tanach, records the national life of the Jewish people as they entered Israel and spent their first 28 years in the land. The Talmud (Bava Batra 15a) credits authorship to Yehoshua and a small group of contemporary sages who outlived him, but the text also includes certain later wars and conquests. [For more on the inclusion of later events, see Rashi to Yehoshua 19:47; Abarbanel, introduction to Yehoshua; and Rav Tzaddok HaKohen, *Or Zaru'a laTzaddik* pg. 40.]

There are five parts to the book of Yehoshua:
Chapter 1 - Yehoshua takes over as leader
Chapters 2-5 – The nation's first steps in the land
Chapters 6-12 – War with the Canaanites
Chapters 13-21 – Distribution of land
Chapters 22-24 – The end of Yehoshua's era

The central theme of the text is our first extended look at the land of Israel; indeed, the Talmud credits this book with teaching "the value of the land" (Nedarim 22b). But

the book also teaches the consequences of fulfilling or violating Divine commands, through events like Achan's theft of spoils from Jericho (Ch. 7) and Kalev's receipt of a special portion of land (Ch. 14-15). Further, the book is valuable in that it demonstrates the challenge for the nation in moving on after the death of Moshe Rabbeinu, and the challenge of forming our own identity as a diffuse population spreading out across a new land.

Forming our own identity meant more than following the Torah and refusing to assimilate into Canaanite culture. Generations of slavery, and distance from our patriarchs and matriarchs, had cost us our heritage. We needed to see ourselves, once again, as descendants of Avraham and Sarah. This happened, in particular, surrounding our first Pesach in the land. As recorded in Chapter 5, we observed a national *brit milah* for all those who had not been circumcised in the wilderness. [See Yevamot 71b-72a for more on the lack of circumcision in the wilderness.] We observed the Korban Pesach. And the supply of manna ended, and we began to eat the produce of our own land. With these three steps we lost "the shame of Egypt," as stated in the text; we made it clear that we were not escaped slaves, but Israelis returning home.

The 613 Mitzvot: #1—Procreation

We expect to learn through Sefer haChinuch, mitzvah by mitzvah, each week.

The first Divine commandment to humanity recorded in the Torah is “Bear fruit and multiply” (Bereishit 1:28); this is the first biblical affirmation that G-d’s creations are worthwhile, and that Life is objectively good. Per Sefer haChinuch, it is the Torah’s first mitzvah.

Along the same lines, the Torah explicitly prohibits permanently neutering any bird, animal or human being, saying, “You shall not perform this in your land” (Vayikra 22:24). Sefer haChinuch records this as the Torah’s 291st mitzvah. Popular thought approves of neutering animals rather than allowing them to breed beyond their means, but this is also included in the Torah’s prohibition. For more on this, see an article by Rabbi Howard Jachter at http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/english/halacha/jachter_1.htm.

It is generally understood that the mitzvah of procreation is fulfilled when parents biologically produce one boy and one girl (*Yevamot 61b-62a; Mishneh Torah Hilchot Ishut 15:4; Shulchan Aruch Even haEzer 1:5*), but some authorities suggest that adoption may also fulfill this obligation. Writing in the 19th century, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (*Chachmat Shlomo to Even haEzer 1:1*) pointed out that we are taught, “One who raises an orphan is considered as though he had birthed the orphan.” He concluded that adoption is considered a partial, and perhaps even complete, fulfillment of this mitzvah of procreation.

From Israel’s Chief Rabbis: Biblical Warriors, Rav Avraham Y. Kook

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook was born in Latvia in 1865. He learned in the Volozhin Yeshiva and was close with the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv). At a young age, Rav Kook served as Rabbi in Zaumel and then Bausk. In 1904 Rav Kook moved to Israel and became Chief Rabbi of Jaffa. He was in Europe during World War I; soon after returning home, he was appointed as the first Chief Rabbi of “Palestine”. He served in that role until his passing in 1935.

Rav Kook believed that World War I would be the last war, and that in a modern, civilized world, all battles would be spiritual. In that vein, he wrote the following about how we view the warriors described in the Torah. He hoped that we would see a world in which we could emulate those warriors’ spiritual traits rather than fight physical battles as they did. May this world come soon.

This is from Orot haMilchamah #2:

We look at the early generations described in Tanach, the generations involved in war – and these are the selfsame giants whom we treat with adoration and holy splendor.

We understand that the spark in their souls is the foundation [for their deeds]. The state of the world in those days was that war was so necessary that it caused to appear [in our world] these souls, whose inner sensitivity was perfect. The war of their survival, of the nation’s survival, the war of Hashem was [fought] with that inner sensitivity. They were of bold spirits, and they knew [even] in the depths of darkness to choose the good and to steer away from the evil, “Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”

When we contemplate them, with all of their evident spirituality for which we yearn, we yearn for their courage, for the power of life that was so sculpted and solid and strong that lived in them. As a result of this longing, our spiritual power will be strengthened and our [physical] might will be softened, and those mighty souls will return to live in us as they did long ago.

Upcoming Learning!

All classes are open to men and women and free of charge, unless otherwise noted

7:30-9:00 PM Monday October 23

Medical Ethics: Ozempic, Wegovy and the New Wave of Weight Loss Treatments

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/mtorc>

Please register at <https://torontotorah.com/cme>

CME credit pending

9:45-10:15 AM Sunday October 29

New weekly series! Giants of Halachah: A Blend of History and Halachah

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, at Eitz Chayim

7:30-8:30 PM Monday October 30

New weekly series! Halachah in Healthcare Settings, based on Nishmat Avraham

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, at Eitz Chayim and on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/medhal>

Please register at <https://ematai.org/medicalchabura>

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