

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Breishit/Machar Chodesh
October 14, 2023 *** 29 Tishrei, 5784

Breishit in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3137/jewish/Bereishit-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Bereishit," means "In the beginning" and it is found in Genesis 1:1.

G-d creates the world in six days. On the first day He makes darkness and light. On the second day He forms the heavens, dividing the "upper waters" from the "lower waters." On the third day He sets the boundaries of land and sea, and calls forth trees and greenery from the earth. On the fourth day He fixes the position of the sun, moon and stars as timekeepers and illuminators of the earth. Fish, birds and reptiles are created on the fifth day; land animals, and then the human being, on the sixth. G-d ceases work on the seventh day, and sanctifies it as a day of rest. G-d forms the human body from the dust of the earth, and blows into his nostrils a "living soul." Originally Man is a single person, but deciding that "it is not good that man be alone," G-d takes a "side" from the man, forms it into a woman, and marries them to each other.

Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden, and commanded not to eat from the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." The serpent persuades Eve to violate the command, and she shares the forbidden fruit with her husband. Because of their sin, it is decreed that man will experience death, returning to the soil from which he was formed, and that all gain will come only through struggle and hardship. Man is banished from the Garden.

Eve gives birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain quarrels with Abel and murders him, and becomes a rootless wanderer. A third son, Seth, is born to Adam; Seth's eighth-generation descendant, Noah, is the only righteous man in a corrupt world.

Machar Chodesh in a Nutshell: I Samuel 20: 18-42

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3572703/jewish/Machar-Chodesh-Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell-for-Shabbat-Preceding-Rosh-Chodesh.htm

Today's haftarah is read on a Shabbat that is immediately followed by Rosh Chodesh. Indeed, the reading opens with the words, "Jonathan said, 'Tomorrow is the [first of the] new month.'"

The story is one of loyalty and devotion. David and Jonathan are dear friends. Jonathan's father, King Saul, despises David, fearing that he will depose him from the throne. Sensing danger, Jonathan told David to hide in the field rather than attend Saul's Rosh Chodesh feast. Jonathan then attended the feast and gauged

the king's mood. Realizing that Saul was determined to kill David, Jonathan went out to the field, shot three arrows and called to his assistant, "The arrow is beyond you," a predetermined signal to his friend that it was not safe to return to the king's palace.

Before parting, the two friends kissed and wept, and swore to maintain their mutual affection for generations to come.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The God of Creation and the Land of Israel by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bereishit/creation-and-israel/>

There are times when an ancient text seems to speak more directly to where we are now than to the time when it was first written. Rarely has that been truer than in the case of the famous first comment of Rashi to the Torah, to the words: "In the beginning, God created..."^[1] Let us listen to it in its entirety:

Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah should have begun with the verse, "This month shall be to you the first of months" ([Exodus 12:2](#)) which was the first commandment given to all of Israel. Why then did it begin with, "In the beginning"? It began thus because it wished to convey the idea contained in the verse ([Psalm 111:6](#)), "The power of His acts He told to His people, in order to give them the estate of the nations." So that if the nations of the world will say to Israel, "You are robbers because you took by force the land of the seven nations," Israel might reply to them, "The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He created it and gave it to them, and by His will He took it from them and gave it to us." *Rashi on Genesis 1:1*

Rashi might have been speaking directly to us today, in our age of anti-Zionism, boycotts, sanctions, and divestments against Israel (BDS), and even a growing questioning of the State's right to exist.

Rashi (1040-1105) lived in Troyes, Northern France, at a time when the position of Jews under Christian rule was beginning to worsen severely. He lived through the most traumatic event of that period, the massacre of Jewish communities in the Lorraine at the beginning of the First Crusade in 1096. Jews in his day were persecuted and powerless. They had no realistic hope of imminent return to the land.

As to the logic of Rabbi Isaac's interpretation, it seems strained. Why did the Torah begin with Creation? Because that is a fundamental of Jewish faith. Rabbi Isaac seems to be arguing that since the Torah is primarily a book of commandments, it should begin with the first command – at least the first given to the Israelites as a collective entity. But clearly not everything in the Torah is command. Much of it is narrative. So Rabbi Isaac's question is odd.

So too is his answer. Why relate creation to a challenge to the Israelites' right to

the Land? Why, if Rabbi Isaac's interest is solely in commandments, not give the obvious halachic answer: the story of Creation is told to explain the command to keep Shabbat. Considered thus, it is all highly perplexing.

In fact, however, Rabbi Isaac is making a very cogent point indeed. Some years ago a secular scholar, David Clines, wrote a book entitled *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. His conclusion was that the single overarching theme of the Five Books of Moses is the promise of the land. That is surely the case. There are sub-themes, but this dominates all others.

Seven times in Bereishit God promises the land to Abraham, once to Isaac, and three times to Jacob. The rest of the Mosaic books, from the beginning of Exodus when Moses hears about "the land flowing with milk and honey," to the end of Deuteronomy, when he sees it from afar, is about Israel, the destination of the Jewish journey.

There is a fundamental rule of literary form. Chekhov said: if there is a gun on stage in the first act of a play, it must be part of the plot or it should not be there at all. If the central theme of the Mosaic books is the promise of the Land, the beginning must in some way be related to it. Hence Rabbi Isaac's point: the Creation narrative must have to do with the Land of Israel. What could this be if not to signal that the promise in virtue of which the Jewish people holds title to the land comes from the highest conceivable source, the sovereign of the universe, the Author of all.

No sooner have we said this than an obvious question arises. Why should a religion be tied to a land? It sounds absurd, especially in the context of monotheism. Surely the God of everywhere can be served anywhere.

Here too Rabbi Isaac steers us in the right direction. He reminds us of the first commandment given to the Israelites as a people, as they were about to leave Egypt.

"This month shall be to you the first of months. it shall be the first of the months of the year for you."

[Exodus 12:2](#)

Judaism is not primarily about personal salvation, the relationship between the individual and God in the inner recesses of the soul. It is about collective redemption, about what it is to create a society that is the opposite of Egypt, where the strong enslave the weak. The Torah is the architectonic of a society in which my freedom is not purchased at the cost of yours, in which justice rules, and each individual is recognised as bearing the image of God. It is about the truths Thomas Jefferson called self-evident, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." It is about what John F Kennedy meant when he spoke of "the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God."

We are social animals. Therefore we find God in society. That is what we discover when we reflect on the basic structure of the Torah's many commands. They

include laws about the administration of justice, the conduct of war, ownership of land, employer-employee relationships, the welfare of the poor, the periodic cancellation of debts, in short, an entire legislative structure for the creation of what Rav Aaron Lichtenstein called 'societal beatitude'.

Laws shape a society, and a society needs space. A sacred society needs sacred space, a holy land. Hence Jews and Judaism need their own land.

In four thousand years, for much of which Jews lived in exile, the people of the covenant were scattered over the face of the earth. There is no land in which Jews have never lived. Yet in all those centuries, there was only one land where they were able to do what almost every other nation takes for granted: create their own society in accordance with their own beliefs.

The premise of the Torah is that God must be found somewhere in particular if He is to be found everywhere in general. Just as, in the Creation narrative, Shabbat is holy time, so in the Torah as a whole, Israel is holy space. That is why, in Judaism, religion is tied to a land, and a land is linked to a religion.

But now we come to the most perplexing part of Rabbi Isaac's comment. Recall what he said:

Should anyone call into question the Jewish people's right to the land of Israel, the Jewish people can reply, "The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He created it and gave it to them, and by His will He took it from them and gave it to us."

How on earth could Rabbi Isaac think of this as a compelling answer? Almost inevitably, someone who challenges the Jewish people's right to the Land of Israel will not believe in the God of Israel. So how will a reference to Israel's God make Israel's case?

Ironically, we know the answer to that question. Today the overwhelming majority of those who challenge Israel's right to exist believe in Israel's God, that is to say, the God of Abraham. They belong to the large family of faith known as the Abrahamic monotheisms.

To them, we must humbly say: when it comes to political conflict, let us search for a political solution. Let us work together in pursuit of peace. But when it comes to religion, let us not forget that without Judaism, there would be no Christianity and no Islam. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism never sought to convert the world and never created an empire. All it sought was one tiny land, promised to the Children of Israel by the Creator of the universe, in whom Jews, Christians, and Muslims all believe.

Sadly, Rabbi Isaac was right, and Rashi was right to quote him at the beginning of his Torah commentary. The Jewish people would be challenged on their right to the land, by people who claimed to worship the same God. That same God summons us today to the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of human life, and the imperative of peace. And that same God tells us that in a world of 82 Christian

nations and 56 Muslim ones, there *is* room for one small Jewish State.

[1] This essay was originally written by Rabbi Sacks in September 2010. Years later when he began his translation of the entire Torah, he offered a radical new translation of the first phrase of the Torah: *Bereishit bara Elokim... – “When God began creating...”*. The full translation by Rabbi Sacks is available in the Koren Tanakh: Magerman edition.

Breishit: The Stewardship Paradigm by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l

<https://www.growtorah.org/breisheit/2021/8/9/breisheit-the-stewardship-paradigm>

Few texts have had a deeper influence on Western civilization than the first chapter of Bereshit, with its momentous vision of the universe coming into being as the work of G-d. Set against the grandeur of the narrative, what stands out is the smallness yet uniqueness of humans, vulnerable but also undeniably set apart from all other beings. The words of the Psalmist echo the wonder and humility that the primordial couple must have felt as they beheld the splendor of creation:

When I consider your heavens,

The work of your fingers,

The moon and the stars,

Which you have set in place.

What is humanity that you are mindful of it,

The children of mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them little lower than the angels

And crowned them with glory and honour. [1]

The honour and glory that crowns the human race is possession of the earth, which is granted as the culmination of Hashem’s creative work: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.” [2] This notion is fortified in Psalm 115: “The heavens are the L-rd’s heavens, but the earth Hashem has given to humanity.” While the creation narrative clearly establishes Hashem as Master of the Universe, it is the human being who is appointed master of the earth.

Grappling with the challenging notion of humans as Divinely-ordained owners and subduers of the earth, we come face to face with the fundamental questions of our place in the universe and our responsibility for it. A literal interpretation suggests a world in which people cut down forests, slaughter animals and dump waste into the seas at their leisure, much like we see in our world today. On the other hand, as Rav Kook, first Chief Rabbi of Israel, writes, any intelligent person should know that Bereisheit 1:28 “does not mean the domination of a harsh ruler, who afflicts his people and servants merely to fulfill his personal whim and desire, according to the crookedness of his heart.” [3] Could Hashem have really created such a complex and magnificent world solely for the caprice of humans?

Bereshit Chapter 1 is only one side of the complex biblical equation. It is balanced by the narrative of Bereshit Chapter 2, which features a second Creation narrative that focuses on humans and their place in the Garden of Eden. The first person is set in the Garden “to work it and take care of it.” [4] The two Hebrew verbs used

here are significant. The first—le'ovdah—literally means “to serve it.” The human being is thus both master and servant of nature. The second—leshomrah—means “to guard it.” This is the verb used in later biblical legislation to describe the responsibilities of a guardian of property that belongs to someone else. This guardian must exercise vigilance while protecting, and is personally liable for losses that occur through negligence. This is perhaps the best short definition of humanity’s responsibility for nature as the Torah conceives it.

We do not own nature—“The earth is the L-rd’s and the fullness thereof.”[5] We are its stewards on behalf of Hashem, Who created and owns everything. As guardians of the earth, we are duty-bound to respect its integrity. The mid-nineteenth century commentator Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch put this rather well in an original interpretation of Bereshit 1:26, “Let us make the human in our image after our own likeness.”[6] The passage has always been puzzling since the hallmark of the Torah is the singularity of Hashem. Who would Hashem consult in the process of creating humans? The “us,” says Hirsch, refers to the rest of creation. Before creating the human, a being destined to develop the capacity to alter and possibly endanger the natural world, Hashem sought the approval of nature itself. This interpretation implies that we would use nature only in such a way that is faithful to the purposes of its Creator and acknowledges nature’s consenting to humanity’s existence.

The mandate in Bereshit 1 to exercise dominion is, therefore, not technical, but moral: humanity would control, within our means, the use of nature towards the service of Hashem. Further, this mandate is limited by the requirement to serve and guard as seen in Bereshit 2. The famous story of Bereshit 2-3—the eating of the forbidden fruit and Adam and Chava’s subsequent exile from Eden—supports this point. Not everything is permitted. There are limits to how we interact with the earth. The Torah has commandments regarding how to sow crops, how to collect eggs and how to preserve trees in a time of war, just to name a few. [7]

When we do not treat creation according to Hashem’s Will, disaster can follow. We see this today as air pollution threatens our communities and as mercury advisories are issued over large sectors of our fishing waters. [8] Deforestation of the rainforests, largely a result of humanity’s growing demand for timber and beef, has brought on irrevocable destruction of plant and animal species. [9] We can no longer ignore the massive negative impact that our global industrial society is having on the ecosystems of the earth. Our unbounded use of fossil fuels to fuel our energy-intensive lifestyles is causing global climate change. Climate scientists document extreme and destructive storms, floods, fires, and droughts resulting from these anthropogenic changes in the atmosphere, and are predicted to rapidly intensify. [10] If we do not take action now, we risk the very survival of civilization as we know it.

The Midrash says that Hashem showed Adam around the Garden of Eden and

said, “Look at my works! See how beautiful they are — how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.”[11] Creation has its own dignity as Hashem’s masterpiece, and though we have the mandate to use it, we have none to destroy or despoil it. Rabbi Hirsch says that Shabbat was given to humanity “in order that he should not grow overweening in his dominion” of Hashem’s creation. On the Day of Rest, “he must, as it were, return the borrowed world to its Divine Owner in order to realize that it is but lent to him.”[12] Ingrained in the process of creation and central to the life of every Jew is a weekly reminder that our dominion of earth must be l’shem Shamayim- in the name of Heaven.

The choice is ours. If we continue to live as though Hashem had only commanded us to subdue the earth, we must be prepared for our children to inherit a seriously degraded planet, with the future of human civilization put into question. If we see our role as masters of the earth as a unique opportunity to truly serve and care for the planet, its creatures and its resources, then we can reclaim our status as stewards of the world, and raise our new generations in an environment much closer to that of Eden.

[1] Psalm 8:3-5 [2] Genesis 1:28. The verse continues, “And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” [3] “A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace,” by HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook. Edited by HaRav David Kohen, the Nazir of Jerusalem. Translated by Rabbi David Sears.

[4] Genesis 2:15 [5] Psalm 24:1 [6] The commentaries on this verse by Radak, Ramban, and Ralbag also shed light on this point. [7] Leviticus 19:19, Deuteronomy 22:6-7, Deuteronomy 20:19-20 [8] Read the [NRDC’s reports on air pollution](#) and [water pollution](#). [9] See the [Our World in Data research here](#) . [10] Read the [reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#). [11] Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7:13. [12] Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel, p. 30.

Parshat Bereshit: Standing Together by Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

<https://ots.org.il/standing-together/>

Dedicated to the wellbeing of our soldiers and security forces; a refuah sh’leimah to those who have been injured; and for the return of those being held hostage in Gaza.

At this moment of crisis for Am Yisrael, we begin Sefer Bereshit anew. It’s hard to imagine: how can we face a Shabbat together, how will we kickstart this year’s cycle of reading through the Torah, when we are overcome with devastation, grief, and fear? With the unfolding events in Israel tearing more and more deeply into our hearts with each passing day, with what frame of mind can we open up the Torah once again?

An Aggada recorded in Tractate Chagiga in the Jerusalem Talmud [2:1] makes an unusual remark. Why does the Torah begin with the letter ‘bet’?; Certainly it should have opened with ‘aleph,’ the first letter of the alphabet!

The answer, claims the Yerushalmi, relates to other words beginning with the same letters: 'aleph' is the first letter of 'arira' (curse), while 'bet' is the first letter of 'bracha' (blessing). Hence, it was preferable to begin the Torah with 'bet', rather than with 'aleph'.

As the Torah Temima [Bereshit 1:1(4)] notes, the Yerushalmi responds to an odd question with an even more unusual response. True, the Hebrew word for curse begins with aleph – but so do a wide array of words with more positive connotations, and the converse is true of the letter 'bet' as well!

The Torah Temima argues that the Aggada must have some further meaning beneath the surface regarding the symbolism of these letters. Along these lines, I heard from Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter that there is great significance to the Torah's beginning with the letter 'bet.' 'Bet', being the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, signifies togetherness. The world in which we live requires partnership – partnering with one another to improve the world, and partnering with the divine in that process. If the world were to be founded on 'aleph,' on individualism and solitude, it simply would not stand. Rather, it is through a commitment to solidarity and cooperation that we are charged to live in the world.

As I look around at the heroism and unity of the Jewish people demonstrated over these past few, painful days, I find myself overwhelmed with inspiration, even in the midst of all the grief and despair. Hundreds of thousands of reservists have mobilized, including many who rushed to the front lines from overseas, and thousands more have mobilized to support the families of the fighting and the fallen. Meals are being cooked, equipment collected and distributed, and donations made from Jewish communities worldwide. Dizengoff Square, which on Yom Kippur was the center of disunity, has become a collection depot for food and other needs for soldiers, jointly organized by both religious and secular. Divisions that just days ago ripped apart this nation have been put aside as we face these trying days together. Strangers are making their way to drop-off sites, military bases, Shiva houses, the homes of solo parents, and backyard weddings – everyone joined together by a shared sense of common purpose and identity.

Aleph, focusing only on oneself, is an assured path to 'arur', to curse and destruction. It is only through the Bet, through the solidarity that we have witnessed this week and which we will continue to witness in the hard days ahead, that we will succeed in breathing life into our pained and wounded nation. This unimaginably tragic moment is, despite the suffering, a testament to our shared solidarity and resolve, and a wake up call not to lose sight of what holds us together. *(Rabbi Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone in Israel)*

On Monday evening, the Upper West Side Jewish Community gathered together in prayer and solidarity for our brothers and sisters in Israel. Below is the kavannah

Rabbi Felicia Sol (B'nai Jeshurun) shared to close out the evening, before concluding with the singing of Hatikvah.

In the late 19th century, a Jew from Galicia, Naftali Hertz Imber, composed a nine-stanza poem entitled “Tikvateinu,” *our hope*. It carried with it the longing for the land, a recognition of the grief and pain of being exiled and of course the hope of return to the land of our ancestors. That poem, eventually whittled down to two verses, with some amendments, was then set to music. It was sung in 1945 when hundreds of survivors of Bergen-Belsen sang it on Kabbalat Shabbat, five days after their liberation. It was sung following the proclamation of the establishment of the state of Israel May 14, 1948. It wasn't officially adopted as Israel's national anthem until 2004.

Each time I sing those words, I feel so deeply connected to all the hope and will and commitment and vision that went into establishing the state and sustaining it over all these 75 years and I am also connected to the gap—to all the hopes that have *not* yet been realized: of peace and security for all those who dwell within Israel's borders.

Today, I returned to that original poem and was struck by two of the verses that echo the words of the book of Eikha, the book of Lamentations:

כָּל עוֹד דְּמְעוֹת מֵעֵינֵינוּ

תִּרְדְּנָה כְּגֶשֶׁם נְדָבוֹת

וְרַבּוֹת מִבְּנֵי עַמָּנוּ

עוֹד הוֹלְכִים לְקַבְּרֵי-אֲבוֹת.

As long as tears from our eyes

Flow like benevolent rain,

And throngs of our countrymen

Still pay homage at the graves of our ancestors.

כָּל עוֹד שָׁמָּה דְּמְעוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת

מֵעֵינַי-עַמִּי נוֹזְלוֹת

לְבָכוֹת לְצִיּוֹן בְּרֹאשׁ אֲשֶׁמּוֹרוֹת

יָקוּם בְּחֻצֵי הַלַּיְלוֹת.

As long as pure tears

Flow from the eye of a daughter of my nation

And to mourn for Zion at the watch of night

She still rises in the middle of the nights.

Oh how the tears have poured in these last days. Tears of shock and disbelief. Tears of pain and sorrow. Tears of helplessness. How many more graves will we have to pay homage to? And not just of our ancestors but of our children who went to a party in the woods only to be wounded, or kidnapped, or murdered. Or three generations of families that lived on a kibbutz, only to meet their death in a place

that had been their home since the early founding of the state. Or young soldiers sent into battle. How many more night watches will there have to be until the rockets and the terror will end and people will be able to sleep through the night? How many tears will be shed and how many innocent lives will be lost? Our grief is enormous, our disbelief profound and yet, the hope remains everlasting.

עוד לא אבדה תקוותנו

[Our hope is not yet lost.](#) It will never be lost. The hope that those that are being held hostage will be returned safely. Hope that humanity, sanity, and love will overcome hate, violence, and terror. Hope that we can still pray for hope. In fact, in Imber's original poem, he wrote that only with the very last Jew, is the end of our hope. And look around us. How many of us are here and on the livestream. We are here together to grieve, yes, but also to insist on sustaining our resilience and hope. We will need to shed our tears and we will have to cultivate our faith that hope is not only possible but necessary and even in the darkest moments, that we can be

להיות עם חפשי בארצנו

[To be a free people in our land and in peace and security.](#)

We will need to hold each other in our mourning. We will need to sustain each other in these challenging days ahead, we will need to do our part to reach out to our brothers and sisters in all their diversity in Israel and we will need to rise up in faith and in hope that the vision of our prophet will someday be possible.

וְיָשְׁבוּ אִישׁ תַּחַת גִּפְנוֹ וְתַחַת תְּאֵנָתוֹ וְאֵין מִחְרִיד

[And that each and every one of us may sit under our own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid.](#)

May that hope be everlasting.

Yahrtzeits

Motti Benisty remembers his mother Rachel Benisty on Sun. Oct. 15

Elaine Berkenwald remembers her father Israel Berkenwald on Mon. Oct.16

Treasure and Rich Cohen remember their grandson Andrew Morris Levy on Fri.

Oct. 20