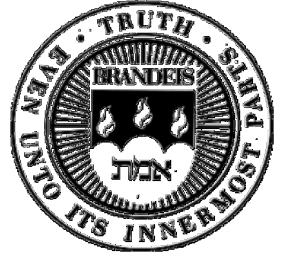




תורת אמת



A Weekly Brandeis Orthodox Organization Publication

29 Tishrei 5770 / 17 October 2009 Vol. XI Issue 8

PARSHAT BEREISHIT

Candle-lighting: 5:43 pm
Shacharit: 9 am
Sof Kriat Shema: 9:45 am
Sof Zman Tefilla: 10:40 am
Mincha 5:25 pm
Shkia: 5:59 pm
Motzei Shabbat: 6:42 pm

Parsha in a Box

- Hashem creates the world in six days...
- and rests on the seventh day... SHABBAT!
- Hashem commands Adam and Chava not to eat from the *Etz HaDa'at*, the tree of knowledge, and they don't listen
- Adam and Chava get kicked out of Gan Eden
- Kayin and Hevel bring sacrifices to Hashem and when Hashem accepts Hevel's sacrifice, Kayin kills Hevel
- Kayin is punished to be a wanderer

What is Torah?

By Rabbi Kaplowitz

It is hard to believe that *chagim* season – the intense period of Jewish holidays – is over. Over *Simchat Torah* many speakers touched on the fact that we immediately begin reading the Torah again after finishing the year-long cycle. This highlights our love for the Torah, and the passion we have for it.

I believe that there is another connection between *Simchat Torah* and the fact that we immediately begin reading from *parshat Bereishit*. On *Simchat Torah* we celebrate our relationship with the Torah. By dancing, singing and calling everybody up for an *aliyah* we show how precious the Torah is to us. However, our celebration would be incomplete if we left it with *Simchat Torah*. There is still a fundamental question which must be addressed: Once we establish our love for the Torah and our commitment to the Torah, we must answer for ourselves, and for others, what the Torah means to us. **Why** do we care so deeply about Torah, and what is it that the Torah adds to our lives that makes it so special?

This is a question that is highlighted in the very first Rashi on the Torah. Rashi famously asks: If the Torah is meant to be a book of *halachot* (laws), why does it not begin with the first *mitzvah* (commandment) that the Jewish people were given? What is the purpose of *Sefer Bereishit*, which we would classify as a history book? Rashi answers that the Torah had to begin with the story of creation to teach us that ultimately the entire world belongs G-d. Therefore, Hashem can decide who should live in *Eretz Yisrael*, and the other nations of the world cannot accuse the Jews of having stolen it from them. "Hashem willingly gave it to the other nations of the world and Hashem willingly took it away from them [and gave it to

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued on page 3)

Walking Before or With G-d?

By Sara Hammerschlag '10

There is a list at the end of *parshat Bereishit* of the ten generations between Adam and Noach. Like most Biblical genealogies, this one follows a strict (in this case, two-part) formula. To paraphrase: 1) *X lived Y years after begetting Z, and he begot sons and daughters*, 2) *And all the days of X were Y years, then he died*.

The only deviation from this formula appears with the chronicling of Chanoch's legacy. Chanoch's biography reads: 1) *Chanoch walked with G-d for 300 years after begetting Metushelach, and he begot sons and daughters*, 2) *And all the days of Chanoch were 365 years; Chanoch walked with G-d, then he was no more, for G-d took him*.

Aside from the obvious questions (to begin with, what does it mean to walk with, or to be taken by, G-d?), we may also wonder – in what way was Chanoch different from other people that would result in his being "taken" by G-d?

Chanoch was the seventh generation from Adam. A *midrash* notes that "everything that is seventh is beloved," citing both Chanoch and Moshe (the seventh generation from Avraham, Moshe "ascended to the L-rd") as examples. Additionally, as noted by Rav Amnon Bazak at Yeshivat Har Etzion, Chanoch lived 365 years, as many years in a lifetime as there are days in a year, implying a sense of wholeness and completion.

So something made Chanoch special, but what? Some *midrashim* (as well as the *Ralbag*) describe Chanoch as a supremely righteous man who merited removal from the mortal sphere without death, while others paint him as among the most wicked. The middle ground is presented by yet another *midrash*, which describes him as a complex man, sometimes righteous and sometimes wicked. Hashem therefore "took him" while he remained righteous, before he had a chance to revert to wickedness. Rashi builds

(Sara Hammerschlag continued on page 3)

Shabbat Shalom!

Creation of the World

By Adam Ross '10

The first few *pesukim* of the Torah, which depict the creation of the world, are some of the most beautiful and vivid imagery in the Torah. This *sidrah* also speaks to a powerful dichotomy found in the Jewish tradition. In one way, the story of Creation brings forth a universal message. In its simplest reading, the Torah tells us of the creation of the world as a system of measurements that all life adheres to. G-d created the heavens and earth, and the concept of day defined by light and night defined by darkness. Anyone can experience this by walking outside, feeling ground as matter, looking to the sky as space, seeing stars in the sky and knowing that's its night or feel and see the sun shining and know that it's daytime. Even more so, G-d created a **human being**. It was a human being that G-d created. The Jewish calendar acknowledges that idea through a *midrash* from *Pesikta DeRav Kahana* (23) which teaches that the first day of creation was the 25th of Elul and Rosh Hashanah is celebrated on the 6th day of creation. So on Rosh Hashanah, we are commemorating the creation of humanity. Of all peoples.

But there's always another side. Upon first gaze, one would understand the word *Bereishit* to mean *B'toch reishit*: In the beginning. However, Rashi takes the first word of the Torah not to be *B'toch reishit* but rather, *Bishvil Reishit*, **For Reishit** the world was created. *Reishit* in this context refers to the Jewish people as Jeremiah said, "Israel is holy to G-d, the first fruits (*reishit*) of his harvest." (Jeremiah 2:3)

This idea of the world being created for the sake of the Jewish people presents a serious obstacle to the understanding of *ma'aseh Bereshit* as a universal *sidrah*. How can a Jewish take on creation include both that G-d created the world for humanity, but also take into account the belief that the world was created for the sake of the Jewish people? There are many Jews who have trouble with this aspect of their religion and try to theologically flee from it. However, with a seasoned approach to this interpretation of *Bereishit* and idea of chosenness, one can find an empowering meaning and responsibility in being Jewish that does not include within it supremacism as a prerequisite.

Along the lines of Jewish responsibility, R' Nachman of Breslav teaches that G-d's main intention in creating the world was for the Jewish people and so that they would carry out G-d's will. (*Likutey Moharan* I 52) This too, can be taken the wrong way. But when someone does something for another person or gives a person a task to do, it doesn't necessarily mean that they think that person is better than everyone else. They're simply better equipped for the job. According to R' Nachman, the merit of the Jewish people was not that they were better than the rest of the world, rather that they would carry out His will of *Tzedek* and *Mishpat* and bring His name to the rest of the world.

We see this responsibility to carry out G-d's will as an intrinsic aspect of the Jewish faith. The Rabbis affirmed this task with the instruction to "do His will as if it's your own will, so that He will fulfill your will as if it's His will." (*Avot* 2:4) We remind ourselves multiple times day of this idea through our *davening* that it's not enough to praise G-d, we also need to act on our praises and spread His name to the rest of the world. We see this in *pesukei d'zimra*, when we *daven*, "*shiru lo, zamru lo, sichu b'chol nifl'otav*" (*divrei hayamim* 1:16). We can sing out to him, make music for his sake, but also tell about the wondrous things that he has done. This theme is also found in *perek* 145 of *Tehilim*, "*Dor l'dor*

yeshbach ma'asecha, u'gvuratecha yagidu/hadar kvod hodecha v'divrei niflotecha asicha/v'ezuz noratecha yomeiru, ug'dulatecha asaprena." Our service of G-d is not limited to praying and learning, but to also tell the peoples of the world about G-d as a means to inspire them to do good.

This responsibility as Jews does not mandate a superior status to the rest of world. It only gives us better sense of inspiration to influence the world by being a human manifestation of G-d's positive attributes. By embodying aspects of G-d that cause more goodness in the world, we fulfill our responsibility to tell of G-d's greatness. We're telling others about G-d's works and wonders by being a model for a set of behaviors that all humans should aspire to fulfill.

To return to the initial difficulties with the dichotomy of creation, a *sidrah* that is universally applicable but also an example of Jewish chosenness, it doesn't have to be such a difficulty. The world was created for all peoples. We see that today in the diverse qualities of the global community. But in terms of the Jewish people, our faith asks of us a special task, to bring goodness down to the world through G-d's name. But this is not a deed to entitlement, if anything; it's a call to action. The world is ours to fix and there's no better place to look for motivation than in the beginning.

Looks like we've successfully freed Adam Z. Ross. Guess that benefit concert last semester really helped!

Be Like a Shepherd

By Alyssa Moore '13

In this week's *parsha*, we have the famous story of Kain and Hevel. The two brothers both bring *korbanot* to Hashem; Kain, the farmer, brings the fruit of the ground, while Hevel, a shepherd, brings the best of his flock. However, Hashem only accepts Hevel's *korban*, as the *pesukim* say, "*vayisha Hashem el Hevel v'el minchato, v'el Kain v'el minchato lo sha'ah*" (4:4-5). In order to fully understand Hashem's acceptance of Hevel's *korban* and rejection of Kain's, we must first take a deeper look at the occupations of the two brothers and the traits that they embodied.

Kain was a farmer; he was a slave to his field. His labor resulted in a finished product in which he could take pride. He focused on the land because it provided him with crops that would be for his own benefit. He had no time to contemplate spiritual matters. On the other hand, as a shepherd, Hevel focused on living creatures, which instilled in him the quality of sensitivity to others. He had time to relate to the world, as he was not absorbed in selfish matters as was Kain.

Rav Hirsch and Seforno both explain that the reason for the double language ("*el Hevel v'el minchato, v'el Kain v'el minchato*") is because Hashem responded not just to the *mincha* of Hevel, but also to Hevel himself; someone who is caring and selfless and has the personality of a shepherd, someone who subscribes to the proper spiritual philosophy. Similarly, Hashem did not just reject Kain's *korban*; he also rejected Kain as a person who exemplified the characteristics of a farmer, someone who is selfish and consumed with himself and his own needs. The double *lashon* is necessary to teach us that it is not just about the action that one performs; it is also about how he performs it and the attitudes that he expresses. May we all be *zocheh* to emulate the qualities of Hevel and be successful in our *avodat Hashem*.

According to Google, there are a lot of Alyssa Moore's in the world. But none as unique as the one who goes to Brandeis. Except that she looks like Tamar Rock.

M O D A O T

- **Mazel Tov to Alex and Ruth Malkin on the birth of their granddaughter in Israel!**
- **Welcome to the Scholar-in-Residence Rabbi Ysoscher Katz!** Rabbi Katz will be giving two shiurim over Shabbat: Friday night at 8:30 pm in Feldberg Lounge on the topic of "Hasidut and Modernity: Friend Not Foe" and again on Shabbat day at 1:30 in the Bet Midrash on the topic of "Takanot Usha: A Precursor to Contemporary Controversies in Psak."
- **Sponsor Kiddush!** Speak to Mimi

Cooper or email her at mfc621@brandeis.edu if you, a group of your friends, or even better - your parents would like to sponsor kiddush in honor of someone's birthday or another special occasion. Special requests for food and decor will be considered.

- **Etrogim and Hadassim Wanted!** Have an etrog or pile of hadassim lying around and don't know what to do with it? Please email Danny Sternberg at dss28@brandeis.edu and he will happily take it off your hands. He

is trying to make hadas tea and etrog cake and jam from our sukkot leftovers. Thanks!

- **Want to write for Torat Emet?** Do you love your *Bar/Bat Mizvah parsha*? Do you love Torah? Do you love writing? If you're interested in writing for Torat Emet and sharing your words of Torah please contact Lauren or Ronit! Long and short articles are both appreciated. We are still looking for writers for the rest of the semester.

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued from page 1)

us]." Implied in Rashi's comment is the fact that the Torah is NOT simply a book of laws. There is significance to the history and stories found in it as well. Every detail of the Torah is important. We have much to learn.

This only intensifies the question: What is Torah? What does it mean to us? I do not believe that there is one answer to this question. Each person must find his or her connection to the Torah. For many people, Torah is first and foremost a book of Halachah. As Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz writes, "the content of Jewish faith – the stance of man before G-d as Judaism conceived it – can be externalized in one form only, the halakhic system... The essence of Jewish faith is consistent with no embodiment other than the system of halakhic praxis" (*Accepting the Yoke of Heaven: Commentary on the Weekly Torah Portion*, p. 8). Similarly, we find in the *Gemara Brachot* 8a a teaching in the name of Ulla: "Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, has nothing in this world but the four cubits of *halachah* alone."

While *halachah* is of the utmost important, I believe that it is wrong to limit Torah to a book of *halachah*. The *Midrash in Yalkut Shimoni (Parshat Shemini 536)* states rhetorically: "Were not the *mitzvot* given to "smelt/refine" people?!" In this understanding the Torah is a moral and ethical code. This idea is also alluded to in the Ramban's famous warning against being a *naval bi-reshut ha-Torah* – a disgusting person with the Torah's permission.

For other people, the history of the Torah and the connection with the Jewish people is of utmost importance.

Whichever element of Torah most strongly resonates with us, it is important to take the juxtaposition of *Sefer Bereishit* and *Simchat Torah* to ask ourselves the crucial question: "What does Torah mean to me?"

Rabbi Kaplowitz Fun Fact: Rabbi Kaplowitz will only eat slightly mushy bananas.

(Sara Hammerschlag continued from page 1)

upon this approach, explaining that the description of Chanoch's death is repetitive ("he was no more" and "G-d took him") to indicate the foreshortening of his life. Chanoch would have lived for a time span similar to that of the other nine generations (between 969 and 777 years) had God not taken him prematurely to preserve his untainted righteousness.

Despite his unique righteousness, Chanoch is not the only man described as "walking" in conjunction with G-d. There is a natural progression throughout *Sefer Bereishit*, from Adam hearing G-d walking in the Garden (Gen. 3:8) to Chanoch and Noach walking with G-d (Gen. 5:42 and 6:9, respectively) to Avraham walking before G-d (Gen. 17:1). The manner in which each walked in the company of God reflects not only the individual's relationship with G-d but also the correlated degree to which the man interacted positively with the rest of society.

Adam hid from G-d and was expelled from society (ie the Garden). According to Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch, Chanoch removed himself from society in order to achieve the elevated spiritual status that resulted in his being "taken". According to Rashi, Noach tried to convince the rest of his generation to repent while he built the ark; yet according to the *Zohar* he failed to beg G-d to have mercy on the world. While not entirely disconnected, Noach remained removed from his surroundings.

In contrast, Avraham spent his life among people, enacting justice and calling out in G-d's name. The account of how Avraham begged G-d to save *Sedom* is especially divergent from Noach's apathy toward the generation of the flood. Avraham walked before G-d for the sole purpose of engaging those around him. He walked not for his own gain (as did Chanoch), but for the benefit of the people he drew closer to G-d through his own proximity.

Avraham was able to ascend to a spiritual summit, drawing closer to Hashem than anyone before him, while retaining, and even strengthening, his connection with the people around him. While Chanoch claimed a unique level of intimacy with Hashem, he did so at an expense to both himself (he placed an inherent limit on how close he could come to G-d) and others (he made no effort to help them attain the same spiritual achievements). In our efforts to draw closer to Hashem, may we learn from Chanoch but aspire to the heights of Avraham.

Sara still has a paper due from last semester, but she doesn't like to talk about it.

SHORT VORTS

Why Isn't Man Good?

By Shira Moskowitz '13

"Berishis Bara Elokim - In the beginning God created." As Rambam teaches, creation is the root of faith for Judaism and without the belief in creation one cannot follow G-d's laws. The world was created *Yeish MeAyin* – there existed nothing before and G-d created two things "the heavens and the earth." From both the Heavens and Earth the rest of creation followed and was formed. This term of nothingness is not even comprehensible in human terms and upon this incomprehensible being of nothingness, we form our faith. In essence, the "created" G-d formed with the physical formation of the Heavens and Earth lent itself to the theological formation of faith.

Alongside this physical and theological creation, there lies another means of creation; the creation of quality. The first encounter with quality in the Torah is "And G-d saw that the light was **good**" (1:4). From this point on, after nearly every point in creation G-d says the word "good." Chapter one even ends with "And G-d saw all that He made, and behold it was very good" (1:31). In accordance with G-d creating the physical world from nothing, he created a "good" world. This term of "good" is undefined without previous usage to refer to, but is assumed to mean perfection based on context. This definition is solidified by the first time we see that G-d mentions that the world is "not good" when He leaves Adam alone, "It is not good that man be alone" (2:18). How is it possible for G-d to make a "mistake" especially after He just ended the previous chapter stating that everything He made was good/perfect? To understand this seeming mistake, Rav Chanoch Waxman analyzes the creation of the term "good" in conjunction with Adam. After G-d created Adam, He does not say it was good. Rav Waxman further discusses that after G-d created the firmament of Heaven, it does not say that it was "good." Only later on, after the third day of creation, when G-d separates the dry land from sea, does G-d say it was "good." When the dry land and sea were not separate, Heaven was not a complete existence for Heaven was dependent on the creation of Earth. Once Earth was formed, Heaven was complete and the term "good" could be used. "Good" must therefore be redefined to mean complete, not perfection. Therefore, G-d did not make a mistake when He said it was "not good." When G-d created Adam, He saw that within mankind there would be a constant evolving change; man would never be complete. Even after G-d states that it is "not good" that Adam is alone and then creates Eve, G-d does not say Adam is now "good." G-d created man perfectly, but mankind's existence can never be complete. G-d could not call His creation of Adam "good" because within the essence of man is change.

G-d knew that man would never be complete and that gave purpose to the world. Along with creating the physical, G-d created the theological, and along with creating the qualitative, God created purpose. Mankind will always have something to improve, something to reach, because within the creation of man there was no statement of "good," there is no completeness.

Shira is one of the two awesome BOO first year reps. Also, she's cooler than all of her siblings combined.

You Can Do It!

By Ayelet Nussbaum '11

After Hashem had accepted the *korban* of Hevel and rejected the one that Kayin had offered, the *pesukim* state that Kayin was exceedingly upset. Hashem approaches Kayin and asks, "Why are you upset, and why has your countenance fallen? Surely if you improve yourself *se'eith*." (*Bereishit* 4:6-7) How should we translate the word "*se'eith*"? Commentators such as Rashi, Onkelos and Radak translate it as "there will be lifting," meaning that his sin of offering an inferior *korban* would be forgiven. The Ibn Ezra also translates the word as lifting, but he explains that Hashem is responding to Kayin's fallen countenance and is comforting him by saying that Kayin should lift his face and should no longer feel ashamed.

Ramban rejects this interpretation and translates "*se'eith*" as dignity. Hashem is letting Kayin know that if he were to mend his ways, then he would gain superiority and surpass his brother since he is the firstborn. Kayin was upset and embarrassed by his younger brother, who had brought a *korban* from his finest flock and therefore Hashem was informing Kayin that now he has been given the opportunity to add exaltedness beyond that of Hevel by repenting and rectifying his ways. Hashem continues to tell Kayin, "If you do not improve yourself, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is toward you, yet you can conquer it." (*Bereishit* 4:7) Ramban explains that Hashem was also warning Kayin that if he doesn't repent, evil will come upon him and cause him to stumble in his ways, however, if he were to do *teshuvah* he would be able to triumph over his sin.

Teshuva works by removing the temptation of sin, and in Hashem's response to Kayin, Hashem was revealing to him that he has the power within himself to repent. If he did this, then his sins would be forgiven and he would gain dignity over his brother. Instead, we see in the next *passuk* that Kayin was unsuccessful in overcoming his sin, and he ends up killing Hevel. Now that the *chagim* have ended and we don't have the constant reminder to do *teshuvah* and atone for our sins, it is very easy for us to falter and slip a bit in our ways. This *Shabbos*, as we begin the Torah cycle again with *Parshat Bereishit*, we must take this lesson about repentance with us throughout the remainder of the year. We have to keep reminding ourselves that we do have the power to conquer our sins and that we are required to improve ourselves in order to prevent our desires and sins from prevailing over us.

Ayelet does great Britney Spears impressions. Also, you should ask her to tell you the story behind her Brandeis email address.

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