

א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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בראשית

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How תורה Shapes the World

By Ozzie Vidan

פסוק 1: "בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ." - *"In the beginning, HaShem created the heavens and the earth"*. The first פסוק of this week's פרשה and the entire חומש, and there are already numerous intriguing questions. The most famous is what exactly does "In the beginning" mean? "In the beginning" of what?

According to רבה, בראשית רבה, the answer to this question is the תורה. ה' looked into the תורה and created the world. He used it as a building block for all of creation. The מדרש later asks why ה' chose to start the תורה with the creation rather than שמות ספר. רבי יהושע provides an answer to this question. He says that ה' began the תורה with the story of creation to establish a clear and unarguable connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. This decision was made so that when other nations raise objections or claim that the Jewish people are robbers for conquering כנען at the time of יהושע, we can respond with the fact that the entire world belongs to ה', and that he gifted to us the land of Israel and His Holy תורה. We could also say that He tried to give it to the other nations but they foolishly rejected him, but when He came to us, we welcomed Him (וזאת הברכה על רש"י). ה' blessed us with the amazing gift of תורה which is the sole reason all the other nations have sought to destroy us for many generations.

בני ישראל writes in his אגרת תימן that the reason why the non-Jews constantly arise to annihilate is because they are jealous. They are jealous of the love and protection of ה' that He so graciously gave to us. They are envious of all the blessings and miracles we have. He says that their battle is not with us, but with ה'. They are angry at Him for not choosing them to be His nation and His children. They wish they had the תורה to guide them through their lives and to show them the right path. רמב"ם goes on to explain that we can see a common pattern in the creation of other religions. Many of these faiths attempt to establish themselves by claiming that ה' has forsaken the Jewish people and chosen them instead. This just proves how resentful they are of the תורה, מצוות, and most of all, ה'.

In this week's פרשה, we can also clearly witness ה's kindness, eternal love and compassion for עם ישראל. רש"י highlights this in the פסוקים in ב' פרקים and ג', where ה's two names, י-ק-ו-ק, signifying mercy and closeness, and א-ל-ק-ים which symbolizes justice and distance, appear side by side. This sends the message that ה' created the world with both His merciful and protective attributes, while also incorporating elements of justice and judgment. This is also evident when אדם and חוה are being punished for eating from the forbidden עץ הדעת. Even in moments of anger or disappointment, ה's unwavering care and mercy always shines through. His punishments, though just, always have compassion.

Now, more than ever, it's important to understand that we will always have ה' on our side. No matter what happens He will always be guiding us and protecting us. We need to know that ה' is like our father who *only* wants the best for us and if anything bad happens it is for the better and it is all part of ה's bigger plan. We also have the one thing nobody else has, תורה and תפילה. תורה and תפילה never run out, we can do them forever, and we know for a *fact* that it is helping.

שבת The Special Spice of

By Binyamin Orkaby

“וַיָּכַל אֱלֹקִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי” and ‘ה’ rested on the seventh day (בראשית ב:ב). After creating the world in six days ‘ה’ rested on seventh day setting a precedence for the שבת. Each week after working the entire week, on the seventh day, שבת, we take a break from work, just as ‘ה’ stopped doing work on the seventh day. As the פסוק says “וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:” and ‘ה’ ceased doing any work on the seventh day (בראשית ב:ב). The following פסוק begins “וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹקִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי” and ‘ה’ blessed the seventh day (בראשית ב:ב). The פסוק continues “וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ” and ‘ה’ declared the day holy (בראשית ב:ב), which doesn’t give any insight as to what the ברכה that ‘ה’ gave was.

The טעם מאכלי השבת טוב יותר ממאכלי כל ימות is brought down a מדרש to explain that the ברכה is that food will taste better on שבת than on all the other days of the week. The טעם לועז tells a story about רבינו הקדוש and the king אנטונינוס. One week רבינו הקדוש invited אנטונינוס to come to his house for a meal on שבת. At the meal רבינו הקדוש served cold foods, as it was שבת, and אנטונינוס ate all the foods served, and enjoyed them all immensely. Some time later רבינו הקדוש invited אנטונינוס to have a meal with him during the week. At the meal אנטונינוס asks רבינו הקדוש, “What is the reason that the same foods that you gave me the first time, which had been cooked the day before and were served cold, tasted better than the hot, fresh food that you are serving me now?” רבינו הקדוש answered, “the food that you are eating now is missing a special spice which had been in the other food.” To this אנטונינוס the king was bewildered, and he responded, “what is this spice that you weren’t able to buy? And why didn’t you send to my palace to get this spice if you couldn’t find it?” Replied רבינו הקדוש “the spice that was missing was שבת itself, for the flavor that is found in the foods cooked for שבת is not comparable to any spice in the world.”

This story teaches us one element of the ברכה of שבת. Each week when we sit down at the table to eat the שבת סעודה we should remember the ברכה that ‘ה’ gave the שבת. By having foods which taste better it is easier for us to relax and enjoy the שבת as a happy stomach is a happy person. However, we must remember that there is more to שבת than just eating and relaxing. שבת is a day in which we can connect more closely to ‘ה’, as well as strengthen bonds with our friends and family. May we all have a meaningful שבת full of ברכה and not forget to enjoy the food with its special spice, the spice of שבת.

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