

The issues of Parsha Potpourri in 2026 are dedicated
לז"נ ברוך בן חיים זאב ז"ל
לז"נ אסתר בת ניסים יצחק ושמחה ז"ל
לז"נ יצחק מנחם בן ניסים דוד ויהודית יוכבד ז"ל
לרפ"ש יהודית יוכבד בת שרה
This week's issue is also dedicated
"לז"נ ר' אפרים ב"ר דוד אשר הכהן ז"

Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Bereishis – Vol. 22, Issue 1

Compiled by Ozer Alport

ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים ברא אתו זכר ונקבה ברא אתם (1:27)

Parshas Bereishis begins by detailing how the universe came into existence. On each day of Creation, after relating what Hashem made on that day, the Torah records that He saw what he had created and **טוב** – it was good. Paradoxically, although man is considered the ultimate purpose of the entire Creation, the Torah does not say Hashem saw that Adam was **טוב**. Although the Torah uses this expression regarding the creation of the animals earlier on the sixth day of Creation and describes the overall creation as very good after the formation of Adam, it never explicitly uses the phrase **טוב** regarding the creation of man.

Rav Meir Wahrsager cites the Sefer HaIkkarim (3:2) by Rav Yosef Albo, who explains that the expression **טוב** describes something that has fulfilled its potential and reached its shleimus (perfection). For this reason, Rashi writes (1:7) that the Torah does not use the expression **טוב** in conjunction with the second day of Creation, as the formation of the waters that began on that day was not completed until the third day of Creation.

The Sefer HaIkkarim explains that all creations other than man were formed having already maximized their potential, so it is appropriate to describe them as **טוב**. Man, on the other hand, is unique in being fashioned imperfect, so it would be improper to use the term **טוב** in reference to his creation. What was man lacking at the time of his creation? Rav Albo explains that although other animals grow larger and older, they fundamentally remain the same from birth until death. In contrast, man was created with latent potential and unrealized greatness that must be developed. Unlike animals, we are expected to make significant and fundamental changes throughout our lifetimes.

The Sefer HaIkkarim illustrates this distinction based on a pasuk (verse) in Koheles (3:19), in which Shlomo discusses the apparent futility of life. He writes **ומותר האדם מן בהמה אין כי הכל הבל**, which means that humans and animals appear to follow the same trajectory of being born, living, and eventually dying, in which case there seems to be **אין** – no advantage – to being a person instead of an animal. Rav Albo suggests that the pasuk can also be read as saying that there is in fact a difference between them: the word **אין**, which can be interpreted as referring to the dormant and undeveloped potential of man. In other words, the advantage of being a human is that, in contrast to animals, we possess **אין**, the ability to grow and improve.

Rav Wahrsager notes that many people convince themselves that because they were born with certain negative traits, such as a predilection for getting angry or speaking lashon hara, they are justified in deciding that they will always remain that way. According to the Sefer HaIkkarim, such people are in essence electing to live their lives as animals.

The Maharal (Tiferes Yisroel 3) explains that the Hebrew word for animal – **בהמה** – can be read as a combination of two words: **בה**, what is already in him is what he is. A person who considers himself a finished product, limited and constrained by the character traits and values he acquired during his formative years, is denying his advantage over the animal kingdom by rejecting his **אין**.

Instead, we must change our self-image and see ourselves as incomplete people who are constantly striving to actualize our potential in pursuit of true shleimus. To do so, we must internalize that the very definition of a human being is somebody who is a work in progress. In contrast to a stagnant **בהמה**, we not

only possess the ability to change, but that is what makes us uniquely human, and it is only through constant growth and improvement that we will merit טוב.

וייצר ד' אלקים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה (2:7)

A man who was stricken with cancer was presented by his doctor with a painful and heart-wrenching decision to make. To treat his illness, the doctor would need to perform surgery, and to access the affected region, he would need to cut through either the man's esophagus or his vocal cords. As a result, the man would permanently lose either the ability to eat, requiring the insertion of a feeding tube, or the ability to speak. From a medical perspective, the two options were equal, so the doctor let the man choose how the surgery would be performed.

Although most people would approach this tragic decision by weighing which of the two faculties is more important to them, this patient was an observant Jew who understood that his decision would have important ramifications for his ability to perform mitzvos. If he gave up his ability to eat naturally, he would no longer be able to perform the Biblical mitzvos of eating matzah, eating on the day before Yom Kippur, and eating in the sukkah. On the other hand, if he lost his faculty of speech, he would be unable to say Shema and Birkas HaTorah.

Unsure of the proper course of action, he approached his Rav for halachic guidance. However, rather than focus on weighing the mitzvos to be preserved and lost, the Rav surprised the man by citing the translation of Onkelos on our verse. The Torah records that Hashem formed man from the dust of the ground and blew into him the soul of life, at which point man became a living being. Onkelos renders the phrase "and man became a living being" as a reference to acquiring the ability to speak.

In other words, as advanced as man may be, virtually everything that he can do can also be duplicated by other living creatures. Onkelos is teaching us that what makes man uniquely human and elevated above all other species of animals is the ability to speak. In light of this insight into the special status of the power of speech, the Rav advised the man to preserve his vocal cords and forego the ability to eat naturally. Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein adds that even according to the man's initial approach of weighing the mitzvos involved, the mitzvos that require the power of speech are performed much more regularly than those associated with the ability to eat and would therefore take precedence.

ויאמר האדם האשה אשר נתתה עמדי הוא נתנה לי מן העץ ואכל (3:12)

After Adam and Chava ate from the forbidden fruit, they heard Hashem approaching and tried to hide from Him. Hashem called out to Adam, who responded that he was afraid because he was not wearing clothes. Hashem challenged how Adam knew this, questioning whether he had perhaps eaten from the forbidden fruit.

Adam responded, "The woman whom You gave to be with me gave me from the tree, and I ate." Commenting on this defense, Rashi writes that in giving this explanation, Adam was denying the good that Hashem had given him through Chava, which is difficult to understand. Although it may have been inappropriate for Adam to "pass the buck" and blame Chava instead of accepting responsibility for his own actions, in what way was this considered a lack of appreciation on his part? Wasn't Adam simply telling the truth?

Rav Aryeh Finkel explains that this question is rooted in a fundamental error. He compares it to a newlywed couple opening their wedding gifts. Upon opening an envelope from a distant uncle, they are flabbergasted to see that the card contains a check for one million dollars. After calming down, the wife points out that the uncle didn't even bother to write a note or sign the card. The husband responds in shock that his wife could even notice such a flaw. At a time like this, when they have just received such a valuable and totally unexpected gift, how could somebody notice such a relatively minor oversight? They should be so overcome with excitement at their good fortune that there is no place to focus on or even think about such trivialities.

Similarly, Hashem had just given Adam the most precious gift possible: Chava, a wife and helpmate. The Gemara in Yevamos (63a) teaches that Adam, desperate for a mate, sought a wife with every species that was created, but he was not satisfied until Hashem created Chava. A loving and supportive wife

should have been worth so much to him that, like the husband in the story, his intense joy over his discovery precluded him from finding any fault in her. The fact that he was able to blame her for the sin of the forbidden fruit was rooted in his lack of appreciation for her true value. For this reason, Rashi writes that in ascribing a deficiency to Chava, Adam was revealing his lack of gratitude to Hashem for the priceless gift that He had given him.

Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources that discuss them):

- 1) During the week of Creation, did Hashem form the new entities at night or during the day? (Bereishis Rabbah 12:14, Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer 7)
- 2) The נחש (snake) appears in the Torah in five places, one of which can be found in Parshas Bereishis. How many of them can you identify? (Torah Teasers)
- 3) Rashi writes (Bereishis 3:4) that the serpent succeeded in convincing Chava that eating from the fruit of the tree of knowledge would not cause her death by pushing her against the tree and demonstrating that touching it had not caused her to die as she had claimed (Ibid., 3:3). As Chava knew that the prohibition against touching the fruit had not come from Hashem but was added by her (Rashi Ibid.), why did she accept the demonstration as proof that eating it, which was forbidden by Hashem, wouldn't bring about her death? (Sifsei Chochomim)

Answers to Points to Ponder:

1) The **Midrash Rabbah** quotes Beis Shammai, who explains that Hashem thought about what to create at night and made it during the day, while Beis Hillel maintains that both the thoughts and the creation occurred during the day. Rav Shimon bar Yochai expresses amazement that such Torah giants could argue over such a subject and instead suggests that, according to everyone, Hashem thought about what to create both at night and during the day, then carried out the creation just as the sun was setting. The **Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer** teaches that the sun and the moon, as well as all the stars and constellations, were created at the beginning of the night on the fourth day of Creation.

2) In Parshas Bereishis, the serpent enticed Chava to eat from the forbidden fruit (Bereishis 3:1-6). In Parshas Vayechi (Ibid., 49:17), Yaakov blessed his children at the end of his life and compared the tribe of Dan to snakes. In Parshas Shemos (4:3), Moshe's staff turned into a snake at the burning bush. Although the staffs of Aharon and Pharaoh's sorcerers also became serpents (Ibid., 7:10-12), they are described as נחשי, not נחש. In Parshas Chukas (Bamidbar 21:4-9), Bnei Yisroel sinned by speaking against Hashem and Moshe and were punished by being bitten by snakes, at which point Moshe made a copper serpent that saved them. In Parshas Eikev (Devarim 8:15), Moshe reminded Bnei Yisroel of the many kindnesses that Hashem had done for them, which included protecting them from serpents in the wilderness.

3) The **Sifsei Chochomim** answers that Hashem's prohibition against eating from the fruit of the tree was only said to Adam. However, Adam was worried that women are more liable to make a mistake, so when he related the commandment to Chava, he told her that Hashem had forbidden them to touch the tree, which explains why she honestly believed and accepted the serpent's proof that violating the "prohibition" against touching and eating from the tree would not cause her to die. As for Rashi's comment that Chava added to Hashem's prohibition, he explains that the serpent only asked whether it was permissible for her to eat from the tree, so it was inappropriate for her to mention the additional prohibition against touching it.