

Peninim On The Torah

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Parashat Bereishit

And G-d said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (1:3)

In Sefer Tehillim (119:130) David Hamelech says, "The introduction of Your words illuminates." The Midrash in Sefer Shemos explains that this pasuk refers to the opening words of the Torah, "In the beginning G-d created." Light preceded all of the rest of Creation. Similarly, the Aron Hakodesh, which housed the Torah, also called ohr, light, preceded the other vessels of the Mishkan. Light must precede every other creation; in fact, it must precede everything. The ability to see clearly, to understand the basic foundation of knowledge, is a prerequisite for an undistorted view of life. Clarity of vision is the framework upon which all understanding is based.

How many people grope through life due to their inability to see clearly - either because they cannot see, or because they refuse to open their eyes? There are also others who do see, but with colored glasses. Thus, their perspective is distorted. When Hashem created the world, He first looked at the Torah, which preceded Creation. This is a lesson for us; in order to understand the story of Creation, to maintain an accurate perspective on life and the workings of this world; one must look through the lens of the Torah. It illuminates the path toward understanding.

Even in the construction of the Mishkan, the Torah came first. Without the Torah's guidance, many aspects of this most hallowed edifice, its function and service, might interfere with our ability to understand cogently. The Torah illuminates its intricacies, giving meaning to its challenges. Suddenly, everything makes sense. It is all a matter of perspective - a perspective which we should develop through the lens of the Torah.

Seeing is believing. One looks at the Tzitzis and is inspired to mitzvah observance. How? He does not only look with his eyes. He looks with his mind and with his heart. Above all, he looks through the eyes of the Torah which grants him a unique insight into what otherwise might appear to be mere strings. Throughout the Torah, the individual finds an illuminated version of this vision: the Tzitzis with the techeilis, light blue thread, reminding him of the sea, which-- in turn-- reminds him of Heaven, catalyzing a vision of Hashem and His mitzvos. All of this is the result of seeing properly through the illuminated vision which the Torah provides. If the lens is not perfected by the Torah, the vision remains defective.

At the end of Sefer Devarim (30:15), the people are told, "See - I have placed before you today

the life and the good, and the death and the evil. And you should choose life." (30:19) What fool would not choose life? Why would anyone eschew blessing? Why choose evil over a life of goodness? It is because he is missing the key element in this exhortation: see! If one does not see the good and the life, how well can he possibly choose? Even worse are those who refuse to look. They are afraid of what they might "see."

Yet, a problem has surfaced. Amidst the light that Hashem created there were patches of darkness, to the point that light and darkness functioned "in a mixture." Hashem felt it necessary to distinguish between the light and the darkness, and He separated one from another. The Midrash goes a bit further in an explanation of these creations and their separation. "And the earth was astonishingly empty, with darkness upon the surface of the waters" (Bereishis 1:2). This darkness is a reference to the actions of the righteous. "Hashem separated between the light and the darkness (ibid.1:4). The Almighty distinguished between the actions of the righteous and the actions of the wicked. Apparently, this separation could only come about through acts of Hashem. Only He in His infinite wisdom could delineate between the light of the righteous and the darkness of the wicked. Why? Anybody who can see should be able to perceive this separation.

Horav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv, Shlita, explains that Vayehi erev, "And there was evening," (1:5) refers to the maasei reshaim, actions of the wicked. The word erev, evening, has a different connotation than we might imagine. In order for it to be considered erev, it does not have to be pitch-black outside. In fact, the Torah instructs us to slaughter the Korban Pesach ba'erev, "Slaughter the Pesach-offering in the afternoon." (Devarim 16:6) As soon as the sun begins to turn towards the west, even though it is in the middle of the sky shining brightly, it already has the halachic status of erev.

Likewise, the term boker, morning, occurs one moment after alos ha'shachar, the morning star has risen in the sky. It is still dark outside. It is a time when it is almost impossible to distinguish between the colors of blue and white-- and certainly impossible to delineate between various hues of blue. Yet, it is boker; it is light!

We now understand why Hashem had to distinguish between ohr and choshech. Light and darkness are not necessarily perceptible to the untrained eye. It takes a special "lens," the lens of Torah, to see the true colors and even the true shades of each color before a decision can be made regarding the integrity of one's spiritual leanings. We think, we see, but-- without the corrective lenses-- our vision remains impaired.

And G-d saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. (1:31)

After Hashem created the world in its entirety, the Torah declares that it was not only good, but it was very good. On an individual basis, each creation in isolation may be viewed as inherently good. When everything is combined into the larger context, it becomes very good. Even those creations that appear to be evil-- such as misery, pain and even death-- have their place in the larger scheme of things. Thus, in the total context of existence, we can view them as being very good. Indeed, the Midrash says: Tov, good: this is the angel of life. Me'od, very (good): this is the angel of death. Incredible! The angel of death and what he represents is not only good, it is very good. With an inimitable analogy, the Maggid, zl, m'Dubno gives us a homiletical insight into Chazal. A craftsman who was famous for his intricate works of art, his beautifully fashioned furniture, and his supreme workmanship once left his home without putting away his expensive tools. His son, Yankel, was an astute, resourceful bundle of

energy, always looking for something to do. Noticing his father's tools, he had an idea. Why not demonstrate his talent to his father? Certainly, he could create works of art just like his father. He proceeded to the tool box and began to create. Wood was putty in his hands, as his father's saw cut various pieces of furniture down to size. The hammer and nails were also helpful, as were the drill and screw driver. Yankel was having a blast, until his father came running home after remembering that he had neglected to put his tools away.

"Yankel, what have you done?" his father screamed.

"I was only helping you. I decided to fix up some of our furniture," Yankel replied innocently.

Yankel's father could hardly constrain his smile as he told his precocious son, "Even responsible adults who have mastered carpentry should not attempt to use these tools. Certainly, a young child who has no experience will do much more harm than improvement. These are powerful tools which, when used by someone who is untrained, can be very destructive."

Likewise, Hashem tells us in Sefer Devarim (30:15), "See! I have placed before you today the life and the good." The "good" as determined by Hashem is before us. Take it! So what does the "brilliant" man do? He decides that there is a better way. There is better than good. There is "very" good. He will arise early in the morning to daven k'vasikin, at sunrise. Meanwhile, he will wake up his entire family and everybody else in his apartment building. Someone trying to be more "creative" will add some mitzvos. If they do not approve of another person, they decide it is a mitzvah to "bury" him. In other words, there are those individuals who will not leave well enough alone; Hashem's 613 mitzvos are not sufficient. They must focus on new programs, new charities, new ideas, new forms of service to the Almighty - everything - except for focusing on the original that has been tried and proven.

Tov, good: this is the angel of life. Hashem has told us how to live. Tov me'od, very good: this is when people seek to improve on Hashem's good. The Midrash is not addressing the positive aspect of death. Rather, it is focusing on the negative aspect of "very good."

Accursed is the ground because of you...For you are dust, and to dust shall you return. (3:17,19)

It is difficult to understand the way in which Adam HaRishon, the crown of Creation, Hashem's handiwork, transgressed His explicit command, a command that was punishable by death. If this is so, as the Rambam states in his Moreh Nevuchim (1,2), why was he punished so severely? Anybody can err. Furthermore, why did Chavah believe the serpent's assurances over Hashem's explicit warning? Indeed, something was wrong with her reply to the snake, "Lest we die" (Bereishis 3:3). Did Hashem not say that death would clearly be the punishment?

In his Madreigos Ha'Adam, the Alter, zl, m'Novaradok, Horav Yosef Yozel Horowitz, zl, explains that there are two ways of relating to evil. The first is a recognition that does not arouse a craving for that which is evil. The second does. An example of the former is the way we think about drugs. While we are aware that certain drugs are mind-altering and pleasure inducing, this knowledge does not increase our desire to join the ranks of its users. The pleasure does not override the awareness of the inherent danger in using drugs. This acknowledgement is tangible. Drugs do not appeal to us because of the explicit danger involved in using them. This is an example of an evil for which there is no craving.

Not so, in regard to kavod, honor, or the desire to increase one's wealth. It is an all-consuming desire that envelops us and controls our lives, despite the fact that we are aware that these desires can drive us out of the world. Nonetheless, the potency of this knowledge does not impact upon our inner selves to protect us from succumbing to these desires. The information about the danger of these deficient character traits remains theoretical and does not prevent us from acting in a negative manner.

Adam's intellect prior to his sin was comprised of pure logic, unaffected by previous experiences. He understood evil by perceiving it. He was only able to do good - because that was the logical thing to do. What he desired neither influenced his reasoning, nor mediated his comprehension of good and evil. If he understood something to be wrong - his own desire did not play a role in his actions, which were predicated upon reason. He was like an angel, although he was dressed in the physical garb of his eternal body. He was naked and unashamed, because rationally he had nothing about which to be ashamed.

He differed from an angel in one area: free will. An angel cannot choose. It must do good. It cannot choose to do evil. Adam, however, was given the ability to choose, to cease being like an angel. Although his mind was pure and unbiased, he had the opportunity to think outside the box in order to do what he wanted. If he desired to live a life without spiritual danger, then he would have to be careful not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. If he stayed away from the tree, he would live a life of awareness of the clear distinction between good and evil, never descending into evil. If, however, he sought a life of conflict, a life in which he could wage war against his lusts and desires, then he could eat from the tree. Thus, his passions would be aroused, and the war between reason and emotion would begin within him.

As in every question, there are two sides. If Adam were to remain in the realm of status quo and not eat of the tree, he would remain forever in this spiritual state. His spiritual status would not rise. If he were to eat of the tree, he would be compelled to struggle between his longings and prejudices, against his intellect and its forces. Thus, the warning not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge was good advice rather than prohibition. Eating of the tree could result in death. This is why Chavah said, "Lest you die." It was not a "done deal." It was entirely possible that they would not die, but that they would emerge victorious. The snake encouraged her to eat, arguing that in this way she might ascend spiritually as never before. He assured her of success; he guaranteed victory. She listened. That was her mistake.

Moreover, the snake convinced her that even after eating from the tree, the newly integrated lusts and desires would not take immediate effect. They would remain an abstract awareness which would not impose on her thought process. Considering this, the risk remained small. She realized she was wrong when, as soon as they ate from the fruit, she and Adam realized that they were naked. Before the sin, the body was the garment over man's pure soul. Now, he and his body became one entity, and he was naked. Immediately, this reality awakened uncontrollable lusts. Man sought to cover his body in order to quell his desires.

Adam had gone too far. He was now in a situation in which constant testing was a way of life. The battle against the senses became a bequest handed down to future generations. For us, instincts and desires are in control, and it has become a struggle to be victorious over them. The intellect that had been so powerful has become a tool of the emotion. This is the curse that has befallen mankind.

Sin rests at the door. (4:7)

The yetzer hora, evil inclination, does not give up. It waits vigilantly for the opportunity to entice the individual to sin. The Midrash draws a comparison between the evil inclination and the dogs in Rome. Apparently, the dogs in Rome were extremely astute in providing sustenance for themselves. They would park themselves at the back of the baker's door, where he stacked his freshly baked breads. As the baker stacked the breads, the dog feigned sleep in order to arouse the baker's vigilance. As soon as many breads were arranged on the trays, the dog jumped at the trays as if he were about to steal many breads. The baker, although he had been caught off guard, succeeded in driving away the dog. His loss was only one loaf of bread, a paltry sum, considering what the dog could have taken. The baker felt that he saved the day, and he "showed" the dog who really was in charge. His mistake was that the dog had only wanted to steal one loaf of bread. He made a ruse of wanting to steal the whole lot, but that was only to distract the baker from focusing on each individual bread.

The yetzer hora works the same way. At times, a person sins and is remorseful, filled with regret. Under other circumstances, he sins at the behest of the yetzer hora and, instead of repenting, he arrogantly declares that he has managed to triumph over the yetzer hora, when, in fact, the yetzer hora has bested him. Horav Nissan Bobruisker, zl, cites the following examples to support this idea. Case number one: A person may be running late for work. The yetzer hora "suggests" that he not bother with Tefillin for that day since he is running late. The man "vanquishes" his inclination and hurriedly wraps his Tefillin, mumbling a few words of prayer - the absolute minimum - and goes to work feeling good about himself. After all, he has emerged victorious over the yetzer hora. What he does not realize is that this is all the yetzer hora had wanted. It wanted to steal one bread, to get him to put on his Tefillin hurriedly and daven without kavanah, intention and devotion. The yetzer hora has succeeded.

Case number two: A wealthy man is tempted to keep his business open on Shabbos. He resists, because he would never give in to his evil inclination. Instead, he remains open on Friday as late as possible, running home at the last second, jumping into the shower, and most often, not even making it to shul on time. Shabbos night, he opens his store at the earliest z'man, time, that Shabbos is over. He even "walks" to his store on Shabbos, to be there at the very moment Shabbos is over, to open up. He thinks he has won; he claims victory. The fool does not realize that all the yetzer hora had wanted was to disrupt and disturb the sanctity of his Shabbos. The yetzer hora has succeeded - again.

In the third case scenario, a man argues with his friend. Rather than getting carried away with fists flying and expletives being flung at each other, they "control" themselves and do not go beyond sharp words and a few insults. It could have been worse, so they both feel that they have emerged victorious from a situation that had been rapidly deteriorating. What they do not realize is that this is what the yetzer hora sought to accomplish: create discord, fling a few insults and make sure that these two do not speak to each other for awhile. So, they did not punch each other out. Discord still prevails, and hurt exists. The yetzer hora has won again.

Last are those who refuse to stand up to the wicked for fear of creating "controversy" in the community. Instead, they bend over backward to compromise at every conceivable juncture. They pat themselves on the back for preventing the scoffers from making inroads into the observant community. They do not realize that compromise is an inroad and that their tolerance is a sign of weakness. The yetzer hora has won.

The evil inclination is a brilliant tactician and master warrior. It allows itself room to withdraw, so that it can pursue its grand design at a later date. Meanwhile, it has weakened its adversary. As a seasoned negotiator, it demands much more than it really wants, just like the dog who pretends to want

all of the breads when it only wants one. Above all, it wants its victims not to feel remorseful, to always feel smug and secure, proud that they did not capitulate. If they feel regret, they will be on guard the next time when the yetzer hora comes in for the kill.

The yetzer hora only seeks an opening. This opening is called compromise. To compromise is to open the door. To compromise is to begin the process which leads to total failure.

In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth. (1:1)

Sefer Bereishis is aptly given its name as a result of being the "first" of the Chumashim. The Talmud in Avodah Zarah 25A has another name for Sefer Bereishis: Sefer HaYashar or Sefer Yesharim, the Book of Righteousness. Yashar means more than righteousness. It means straightforwardness, integrity, mentchlichkeit, human decency. Sefer Bereishis chronicles the lives of the Avos, Patriarchs, men who exemplified righteousness to G-d and mentchlichkeit to all human beings. In the preface to his commentary to Sefer Bereishis, the Netziv, zl, expands on this idea. The Patriarchs distinguished themselves not only in their relationship with Hashem on the highest spiritual plane, but also in their dealings with the non-Jewish people with whom they came in daily contact. They acted with integrity and esteem for every human being. Propriety, honesty, and decency were character traits which earned them the deep admiration and respect of all people. The non-Jewish world knew not of their spiritual relationship with Hashem. They knew only of their yashrus with people.

In his commentary to the first pasuk in the Torah, Rashi questions why the Torah, which is primarily a book of commandments and instructions for life, begins with an account of Creation, rather than the first mitzvah which Hashem gave to the Jewish people. He explains that the Torah anticipated a time when, after we would have conquered Eretz Yisrael, the nations of the world would arise and condemn us as robbers and thieves. Thus, from the onset, the Torah informs us that Hashem created the world, and, as Creator and Proprietor of the entire universe, He gave Eretz Yisrael to us. He may do as He pleases. It pleased Him to give Eretz Yisrael to His Chosen People. We are not thieves. We are simply taking what is rightfully ours.

Everyone has heard of or studied this Rashi. Does anybody ever wonder about Rashi's answer? How will our response to the citizens of the gentile world allay their critique of us? They do not care about what is stated in the Chumash. Rashi's exposition certainly has no place in their minds. A quotation from Sefer Bereishis is not an argument that would compel the non-Jewish world to rescind their complaints against us. I do not believe that this approach will sway them.

Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, explains that Rashi is not suggesting a reply to be offered to the nations of the world. Nothing will impress them. They will never abandon their hatred towards us. The response, however, is for our own edification. As a kind, softhearted, mentchlech nation, we have a difficult time listening to complaints which impugn our integrity. If we hear the nations of the world calling us thieves long enough, we might even begin to believe them. We might begin to doubt our inherent right to the land. Perhaps the Torah was wrong in granting us the land that had until now belonged to the Canaanite nations. These are some of the thoughts that might slowly infiltrate our minds. Before long, we will lose the courage and will to fight for the land.

It is for this reason that the Torah begins by assuring us that everything it does is with yashrus. The only way to act is with propriety and fairness. The nations that had inhabited Eretz Yisrael did not

have eternal rights to the land. Their lease had expired, and it was time for them to move on. It was now time for the Jews to enter and inhabit the land which Hashem had given them. If it is in the Torah, it is yashar and, therefore, the land is ours.

Let me take the liberty of citing a few vignettes to support the idea and demonstrate the significance of acting with yashrus. In the Talmud Sotah 40A, Chazal relate that Rabbi Avahu was a great Torah scholar who had the opportunity to become a Rosh Hayeshivah. This was an enviable position, not only because of the inherent esteem, but also because of the financial rewards that were involved. When Rabbi Avahu heard, however, that Rabbi Abba, another Torah scholar, who was in deep financial straits also needed this position, he deferred, asserting that Rabbi Abba was more suitable to be Rosh Hayeshivah. This is yashrus at its zenith! Imagine, how much time and effort Rabbi Avahu had exerted preparing for such a position. He had expended endless hours of study and research to achieve a position of erudition and respect that would render him worthy of being selected as Rosh Hayeshivah. He had another character trait that outshone his learning - yashrus. This trait did not permit him to assume a position that another scholar needed. His humility was consistent with his erudition. He was rewarded with five sons that illuminated the Torah world with their knowledge.

Horav Meir Simcha HaKohen, zl, Rav of Dvinsk and author of the Ohr Sameach and Meshech Chochmah, was certainly well-known for his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah. He was also recognized for another unique quality - his relationship with -- and the respect he received from -- the non-Jews of Dvinsk. When World War I broke out, Grand Duke Nikolai ordered the expulsion of all Jews from the Russo-German front. Dvinsk became dangerous for the Jews, and many fled, leaving their homes and belongings. Even the Rogatchover Gaon, zl, the other rav in Dvinsk, was prevailed upon by his congregants to leave. Rav Meir Simcha refused to budge. He said, "As long as there are nine Jews and I am the tenth, I will be there for the Minyan." When he was reminded of the constant danger, his response was simply, "Every bullet has a designated address, and none will reach where there is no Heavenly decree that it do so." Yet, despite the obvious dangers of doing so, thousands of Jews and gentiles signed petitions attesting to the nobility of the Rav's character and his vital importance to the well-being of all of the members of the community. He was allowed to remain unharmed. His reputation was so widespread that even non-Jews sought his counsel. Indeed, some say his universal acceptability began with a decision he had rendered in a dispute between a Jew and a gypsy. These two had been business partners until a major conflict of interest developed between them. The gypsy suggested that they both go to the Rav for a decision. Rav Meir Simcha listened to both sides and, after his own careful independent investigation, decided in favor of the gypsy. From that day on, word of Rav Meir Simcha's integrity and sense of justice spread throughout all of Dvinsk and even Latvia.

Horav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, zl, was an outstanding tzaddik and undisputed halachic authority. Indeed, he was a man of singular greatness. His ability to "conceal" his greatness was a true measure of his gadlus, distinction. As the head of the famous Ezras Torah charitable organization, he carried on his shoulders the plight of literally tens of thousands of families throughout the world. Their daily well-being was his daily concern. Yet, he never revealed the identity of these families. His weekly salary was a paltry fifty dollars. Indeed, at one meeting, the resolution was passed that his "salary" should be increased. Rav Henkin immediately arose from his chair and exclaimed, "Must I leave Ezras Torah?" Rav Henkin carried a small notebook with him, in which he kept a log of those minutes during the day that he did not fully dedicate to Ezras Torah. He was not involved with personal business during this time. He had no personal business. He lived for the klal, general community. When someone would visit to discuss a halachah, however, or if he would receive a call from anywhere in the world

requesting his opinion concerning a halachic issue, he would immediately look at the time and note in his record how many minutes he had borrowed from Ezras Torah. He would then know how many minutes he would have to "make up" for Ezras Torah. Yashrus!

The earth brought forth vegetation, grass producing seed of its kind, and trees producing fruit. (1:12)

There is a fascinating Midrash concerning this pasuk that should give us all something to ponder. Chazal teach us that when Hashem created iron, the trees became distressed, because the sharp blade of the axe could destroy them. Hashem replied to the trees, "Do not worry. As long as you do not provide wood for the axe handle, the blade will remain harmless." The simple lesson from this Midrash is: We are our own worst enemies. We shoot ourselves in the foot. No one can impose worse harm on us than the harm we cause ourselves. Ask anyone, however, who carries the fault for a certain incident or situation, the response will, in all likelihood, be-the other person. The fault lies either with parents, or teachers, or the community, but never oneself. Parents provide their children with all forms of gifts, both monetary and tangible gifts. We give them every electronic invention known to man, then we wonder why they have no time to study. The first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet - aleph and bais - spell the word av, which means "father". Veritably, it is from our fathers, our parents, that we learn the alphabet of life. The Jewish home is the primary institution in life. It is the place in which the character and proclivities of a child are molded and shaped for the future. Thus, parents must assume responsibility for their own actions. We would do well to examine ourselves vigorously before attributing our faults to others.

There is another lesson to be derived from Chazal. The trees complained about the possible destruction that could be wrought by iron. If we think about it, it is not the iron or the wood, nor is it the axe that destroys; it is man who swings the axe that destroys. Yet, the trees immediately complained. That is nature. As soon as progress is about to commence, someone has to voice a complaint. They are afraid it might hurt them. It is always about "me." Considerable progress has abruptly come to a halt as a result of people's petty vested interests. As soon as the trees heard of another creation that might affect them, they complained. History has proven that this attitude still plagues us.

These are the products of the heaven and the earth when they were created in the day when Hashem made earth and heaven. (2:4)

The Torah now focuses on the events preceding the creation of man. In the second interpretation he offers in his commentary to this pasuk, Rashi explains the word b'hi'baram, "when they were created," to mean that Hashem created them with the letter "hay." This is supported by the pasuk in Yishayah 26:4, "With 'kah' (G-d's Name is spelled with "yud" and "hay"), G-d created worlds." In other words, b'hay'baram means that the two worlds - this temporary world and the Eternal world - were created with the letters that connote Hashem's Name, "yud" and "hay." The letter "hay" was used to create this world and the letter "yud" was used to create the Eternal world. What is Rashi teaching us?

Horav Aharon Soloveitchik, zl, explains that each of these letters has a separate function in the Hebrew alphabet. The letter "hay" represents the hay ha'yediah in Hebrew grammar. When the letter

hay prefixes a word, it indicates something outstanding. For example, while shulchan means table, ha'shulchan is a reference to the table, a distinct, specific table. The letter hay, in this case, is used to denote a certain entity.

The function of the letter "yud" is primarily at the end of a word. In Hebrew grammar, when a "yud" is added to the end of a word, it indicates possession. Hence, shulchani means my table.

The Torah teaches us that man is created b'tzalmo, in his image (ibid.1:27). It also states that man is created b'tzelem Elokim, in G-d's image. How do we reconcile these two expressions? The Torah is teaching us that while man is created in the G-dly image, he is also created in his own image, with his own unique potential. Every single person has his own "yud." This may be the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, but it is his exclusively, and no one can take it from him. Man must, therefore, strive to achieve his own potential, to realize the unique Tzelem Elokim within him. When we say that the next world was created with the letter "yud," it means that one can attain a share in the World to Come only if he exercises and asserts his individual tzelem, his 'yud.'

We cannot, however, ignore man's "hay," the letter which denotes his desire to stand out in the crowd, to be recognized for his uniqueness, to be distinguished among men. This drive for individuality is what motivates men to excel, to be original, to be innovative. This drive also motivates selfishness among men, compelling them to live on a more materialistic level than their neighbor. After all, I cannot be like everybody else. Without the "hay," there would probably be little progress in this world. People would not be driven. Thus, the concept of this world being created with a "hay" means that advancement in worldly matters is, for the most part, achieved via the vehicle of man's selfish ambition expressing itself, whereas advancement to the World to Come is the product of asserting one's "yud," his uniqueness.

Let us go one step further. While constructive ambition, represented by the letter "hay," is commendable and, in fact, indispensable to world progress, destructive ambition is dangerous and can bring down the world. Constructive ambition takes on the forms of achievement in Torah study, amassing greater knowledge, endeavoring for chesed, acts of loving-kindness, and pursuing righteousness. Destructive ambition is the product of jealousy, and it is manifest when a person attempts to realize his goals to the detriment of others. The "hay" of progress can, in the wrong person, be transformed into the "hay" of destruction. It can corrupt and degenerate in the pursuit of the wrong goals.

How does one make sure that he does not fall prey to the "hay" of ruin? He can do so only by having the "hay" work in consort with the "yud." Thus, he channels his ambitions to act in consonance with his unique, inherent potential, his tzelem Elokim. We should try to achieve distinctiveness by becoming the individuals that Hashem has designed us to be.

Cain spoke with Hevel, his brother. (4:8)

Targum Yonasan gives us a clue concerning the conversation that took place between the world's first two brothers. Kayin said, "There is no Judge, and there is no Justice; there is only one world; there is no reward for the righteous and no punishment for the wicked." Hevel, of course, disputed each point. These words led to physical violence, during which Hevel was killed. We wonder at Kayin's hypocrisy. Here is a man who had just offered a sacrifice to Hashem, and he was distraught that Hashem was more pleased with Hevel's sacrifice than his. If Kayin felt there was no Judge, i.e., no

G-d, why did he offer a sacrifice? Apparently, he did not really believe it.

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, suggests that Kayin was actually aware of Hashem's existence. He had to take one look at his father, Adam HaRishon, to see Hashem's handiwork. His problem was that he hurt; he was distressed that Hashem did not accept his sacrifice with favor. This is why he made his sacrilegious statements. He knew he was wrong but he was angry that his sacrifice was not accepted. Instead of introspecting to discover a reason that he was not heard, he denied Hashem's existence. To erase the envy in his heart over his brother's acceptance, he renounced the validity of his acceptance.

Is it any different today? All of those who deny Hashem are doing so to placate themselves. They know the truth; they just cannot handle it. It is easier to repudiate Hashem's Torah than to admit one's

And there was evening and there was morning. (1:5)

The Midrash interprets the reference in the pasuk to night and day from a different perspective. "It was night" denotes the activities of the wicked, while "it was morning" is a reference to the actions of the righteous. Hashem asserts that the light is good. It seems strange that the Torah would have to tell us that Hashem favors the actions of the righteous, symbolized by the light. Such a statement is not novel. Certainly, Hashem prefers the activities of the righteous. We do not need a Midrash to teach us this lesson.

The Dubno Maggid, zl, gives a practical exposition of Chazal. People learn Torah and perform mitzvos in different ways, with varying attitudes. One can go to a school in order to witness the failure of the greater society around him. The scene epitomizes the breakdown of society. It is so destructive that no good can be derived from the situation. He, therefore, chooses the positive approach of learning Torah and mitzvah observance.

His counterpart may look at the lifestyle of the tzaddikim, the righteous, who devote themselves and their lives to acting positively, to a life of harmony within themselves and in their families. He sees the contentment and happiness, the serenity and satisfaction within their lives and in terms of their achievements.

Yes, there are two approaches: looking at the positive, the approach of light; and the converse, the negative approach, viewing evil in its entirety, including its consequences. They both bring results, but which is preferable? Hashem says in regard to the light: "It is good."

Let us make Man in Our image, after Our likeness. (1:26)

What is the meaning of man being formed in G-d's image? Certainly man has a corporeal form, quite unlike Hashem, Who has no corporeality. Furthermore, what is meant by the phrase, "Let us make Man" ? Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, gives a compelling explanation. The concept of man, as he was created, is not limited to what we see with our human eyes. Man was designed to be much more than a two-legged creature. Man is "man" only when he lives up to his spiritual potential and integrates his spiritual dimension with his physical entity. This is consistent with Chazal's dictum, Atem kruijn

Adam, "You, (Klal Yisrael) are called Adam, Man, and not the gentile world." The potential in spirituality allows Hashem to refer to each of us as an adam, a man.

How does this transpire? What must one do in order to achieve the appellation of a "man." When a man performs mitzvos and maasim tovim, good deeds, he enhances the spiritual dimension within himself; he creates the true "man." This is the meaning of Naase Adam, "Let Us make Man;" "Us" is a reference to Hashem and man himself. The sum total of man and his actions comprise the "man" component of the "Us" in the phrase, "Let Us make man."

The tzelem Elokim is man's spiritual image, the way in which he appears in the Olam Ha'Ruchani, spiritual world. When we perform what is demanded of us and enhance our performance with hiddur mitzvah, with exacting and meticulous observance, we refine our spiritual image. The focus of man on this world is to develop and embellish his spiritual persona, to live as a "man" and not as an animal, thereby completing the process of creation that Hashem has initiated.

With this in mind, we now have a new understanding of the meaning of man. There has to be something different, something special and unique, something striking, about the person. This can only be actualized by focusing on the spiritual facet of an individual. This, in turn, will manifest itself in a countenance and demeanor that reflects the true man, as willed by Hashem.

The gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, were individuals who truly transcended the realm of the physical. Each manifested total control over his physical dimension; his complete devotion to everything spiritual was reflected in his total demeanor. To gaze upon his countenance was to observe the earthly state of a tzelem Elokim at its zenith. Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl, was an individual whose gadlus, greatness, in Torah was matched by his empathy for the feelings of each and every Jew. He was a rosh yeshivah par-excellence whose concern for the plight of his fellow Jew was personal. Their pain was his pain; their joy was his joy. In "Touched By A Story," Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates a poignant incident that occurred concerning Rav Isser Zalman in which this virtue was manifest.

Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, was the Rosh Hayeshivah in Kletzk, Poland, and also a son-in-law of Rav Isser Zalman. As the war clouds became more and more imminent over Europe, Rav Aharon decided that the yeshivah in Kletzk would be forced to move to America. Yet, he felt that with a future filled with uncertainty, it would be best that he send his son Shneur, the future gadol and his spiritual heir, to his grandfather in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Shneur spent the war years under the watchful eye of his revered grandfather, who doted on him. Rav Isser Zalman imbued his grandson with an ahavas Torah and ahavas Yisrael, love of Torah and love for every Jew, which became his hallmarks.

When the war ended and life was beginning to return somewhat to normalcy, Rav Aharon decided it was time to send for his son. The news obviously brought a bittersweet reaction from the grandparents, as (Rav) Shneur had been their pride and joy for the past five years. Life must go on, however, and the young bachur had to go home to his parents. Arrangements were made, and the day on which - (Rav) Shneur was to go home arrived. The taxi that would take him to the ship that was sailing to America pulled up to the curb, as Rav Isser Zalman and his rebbetzin waited with their grandson outside their apartment.

It was now time to say goodbye. The rebbetzin hugged her beloved grandchild and blessed him one last time. Rav Isser Zalman, normally an individual who did not conceal his emotion, stuck out his hand and bid his grandson a safe journey and hatzlocha, good luck, in the future. Rav Shneur entered the taxi and left.

A man of Rav Isser Zalman's stature was always surrounded by his students. This time was no

different. They watched incredulously as their beloved rebbe gave a "cold" goodbye to his grandson. They knew him to be a warm and sensitive person, traits which were inconsistent with the way he had just acted. Surely, a grandson deserves more than a handshake!

Students must learn, and the only way to grow is to ask - which they did. "Rebbe, not even a hug?" Rav Isser Zalman looked at his students and smiled, as he wiped away a tear from his eyes, responding, "My dear students, yes, I wanted to hug and kiss Shneur with all my heart. Trust me, it was quite difficult to contain my emotions, but I felt it would be wrong to publicly express my true emotions.

"You see, there are many grandfathers who can no longer feel the loving embrace of a grandson. Likewise, there are many grandchildren who can no longer experience the warmth and caring that a grandfather has to offer. Many of our people have perished during the war. I felt that in some way I had to share in their pain and suffering. If I refrain from hugging my beloved grandson, perhaps I can sensitize myself, ever so slightly, to what these unfortunate Jews are going through."

We now have a glimpse of what it means to transcend the physical and develop one's tzelem Elokim.

Hashem blessed the seventh day. (2:3)

The Midrash relates that the Roman Caesar once went out for a stroll. In the course of walking, he entered the Jewish neighborhood. It was Shabbos, and the aroma of delicious Shabbos foods permeated the air. The Caesar was enchanted by the essence. He sent for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, a leading sage, and asked, "Why do the Jewish foods have such a savory fragrance to them? I have never smelled anything so delectable." Rabbi Yehoshua replied, "We have a unique spice called Shabbos that creates a sweet aroma in our food."

"Please obtain this spice for me, so that I can also partake and enjoy my food," the Caesar requested.

"I am sorry, my Caesar, but this spice is available only to he who observes the Shabbos. One who does not observe Shabbos does not benefit from its aroma."

I feel this Midrash is conveying a critical lesson regarding mitzvah observance in general. One cannot grasp the profound delight captured through mitzvah observance unless he experiences the observance firsthand. In attempting to reach out to the unaffiliated, one does not succeed by arguing his point, since each individual feels that his is the correct approach. The correct approach is to learn with the individual, to get him actively involved, so that he directly experiences the ideas that we want to transmit. Once he learns, his ability to see what we see is enhanced. He no longer needs explanation; he has his own experiences.

What if this approach does not work? What if he learns, and it does not change him? What if his character remains the same as it had been before? What if the experience has not transformed him? The Dubno Maggid, zl, addresses this question and responds, in his imitable manner, with a parable:

A salesman arrived in a city with his case of samples, which he mistakenly left in the train station. When he checked into the hotel, he asked the bellboy to please arrange to have his suitcase retrieved from the station. The bellboy asked, "How much does it weigh, since if it is heavy, it will cost

more to pick it up?"

"It is very light, only about five pounds," the salesman replied.

A few hours later, the bellboy appeared at the salesman's room, exhausted, sweaty and reasonably upset. "You told me the suitcase was light. It must weigh at least sixty pounds! Can you imagine how difficult it has been for me to carry it all the way here?"

The salesman looked at the boy incredulously and asked, "Are you sure that bag weighs sixty pounds and not five pounds?" "I am absolutely certain," the bellboy replied.

"Then, young man, you have brought me the wrong suitcase. My bag weighs no more than five pounds. If you are exhausted, it is because you have the wrong bag!"

A parallel idea applies to Torah study. If after studying Torah, one has not changed, his character remains as deficient as it was before, then there is something very wrong with the manner in which he is learning. It is not the right package. This applies equally to mitzvah observance. If one does not sense a change after he has experienced the mitzvah, then he did not experience it correctly - or his response to experiencing the mitzvah was flawed.

There are some things that simply cannot be conveyed verbally; they must be experienced personally in order to be effective. There are certain emotions that the human psyche must experience before the mind can accept them intellectually. Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl, the legendary menahel of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, was an individual who did not simply perform or observe mitzvos; he lived them. Carrying out a mitzvah was an experience that penetrated his entire essence. Once, as a group of his students returned from Tashlich on Rosh Hashanah, Rav Shraga Feivel summoned them to come over. He was already sick at the time, nearing the end of his life. He said to them, "After an entire day of davening, I still do not feel that I have reached the level of Malchiyos, of declaring the total sovereignty of Hashem. Please help me. Perhaps together we might arouse ourselves to sense a taste of Malchiyos."

He then began to sing slowly from the Rosh Hashanah davening: V'yeida kol pa'ul ki Atah Po'alto, "Let everything that has been made know that You are his Creator," drawing the students into the niggun, melody, with him. They sang one niggun after another, and then Rav Shraga Feivel drew them into a dance to the words, V'al kein nekaveh Lecha, "Therefore we put our trust in You." They sang and danced with pure ecstasy. When they concluded, Rav Shraga Feivel thanked his students for helping him to achieve his goal. The students also achieved a goal as tears of hisorerus, spiritual arousal, streamed down their faces. They had gone beyond reciting the words; they had experienced the declaration of Hashem's sovereignty.

Accursed are you beyond all the cattle and all the beasts of the field...and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. (3:14)

One wonders if this is much of a punishment. On the contrary, the snake will never have to search for food. Why does Hashem say to the snake, "Accursed are you beyond all the cattle and beyond all the beasts of the field"? We derive from here that an easy life, a life without challenge and

trial, is not necessarily a blessing. We grow and develop from our challenges. Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, remembers when a bachur about to be married asked Horav Moshe Schneider, zl, Rosh Hayeshivah in London, for a brachah, blessing, prior to his wedding. Rav Moshe asked him, "What kind of blessing would you like?" The young man replied, "I would like to be blessed with an easy life, no challenges, no obstacles, no vicissitudes." The Rosh Hayeshivah looked at the young man and said, "That is not a blessing! My blessing to you is that you should have obstacles and challenges, but that you should triumph over them!"

Thus, the snake is worse off than all of the animals and beasts. For it goes through life without having to confront challenge or to overcome hardship. The opportunity for growth and development is denied to the snake. Apparently, this applies also to those who feel life is all about sleeping, eating and satisfying one's physical whims and desires. Torah study is something they do in their spare time, when they have thoroughly satisfied all of their wants. A Jew lives through yegia, toil. He grows through labor until he achieves sheleimus, perfection and completion. Sitting back and enjoying life does not give a person much to live for, because life becomes meaningless in that state.

The Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, explain the curse in a different manner. The snake would now have everything readily available to sustain himself. He would not have to turn to Hashem to supplicate Him for sustenance. This is a great curse. Hashem wants us to turn to Him, to entreat Him every step of our lives. The Kli Yakar explains the prohibition against taking usury exists because usury is a process by which a person sits back and allows his money to grow on its own. The Torah wants a person to turn to Hashem every day, every moment, so that he never forgets from Where and from Whom he is sustained. Hashem did not want the snake's entreaty. This is the greatest curse. We derive from here a valuable lesson. At times, we wonder why Hashem causes us to face serious challenges: monetary, physical, personal and family. We must remember that He wants to hear from us, and this is the means by which He catalyzes our entreaty. What we think is a curse, might very well be a blessing in disguise. As long as Hashem interacts with us, it indicates that He still wants to hear from us. When everything seems to be going well is the time to begin to wonder if He is conveying a subtle message to us.

In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and earth. (1:1)

The Baal Haturim notes that the last letters of the words Bereishis bara Elokim - taf, aleph, mem - spell out the word emes, truth. This teaches us that the world was created via the attribute of emes. Interestingly, the Torah alludes to the word emes in an indirect manner, since the sequence of the letters is out of order. Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, infers a profound lesson from here. The Torah teaches us that one must strive for the truth, regardless of the situation. One is not obligated to be truthful only during times of smooth sailing in which he has no extenuating circumstances or financial troubles. One must be truthful, even under circumstances that overwhelm and distress him, when life has no seder, order, and the demands on him are overpowering. Even when he is under stress, one must act with integrity. Indeed, the only thing that can guide him to maintain a straight course through the ambiguities and vicissitudes that confront him is the truth. The Brisker Rav, zl, was known to be the paragon of integrity. The attribute of emes was his benchmark in every endeavor in his life. He demonstrated this trait when an individual whom he held in esteem would visit. The Brisker Rav showed him the greatest reverence, regardless of the person's station in life. Conversely, if he was visited by a person for whom he had very little respect, it did not matter whether the individual had a

large following or not, the Rav's greeting was only cordial and diplomatic.

Indeed, the Brisker Rav was once asked if a person's stature can be measured by his following. He responded that one's following is not an indication of his true character. He substantiated this with Rashi's comment concerning the multitude of stars that accompany the moon. These stars are present to appease the moon after its size had been diminished by Hashem. This teaches us that one's following is not a sign of his essence. On the contrary, it might indicate the converse. A weak person needs a strong backing. A strong person does not need the accolades and the "pat on the back" that are quite often false anyway.

The Rav cited the following analogy to explain this further. A man walks down the street and notices a large tree. Regardless of how many people come along to support his "view," he is clearly aware that there is a tree in this place, because he sees it with his own two eyes. Let us look at another scenario. The same person stands in the street and does not see a tree. Then, even if another person comes along and says he sees a tree, he will not believe his peer. If ten people come and declare that they see a tree, the first person might begin to question his own ability to see clearly. After all, ten people say that they see a tree! If one hundred people come along and verify that they see a tree, then the first person who had not seen a tree might even begin to believe that he is losing his eyesight. If one hundred people see something and he does not, then something must be wrong. His "inability to see" will increase as more and more people exclaim that they see a tree.

The same idea applies to Torah leadership. The true Torah giant does not need a large community to pay him homage. The Chafetz Chaim was rav in Radin, a small community in Poland. He made the town great. He gave it distinction. He gave it greatness. The Chafetz Chaim and so many like him were distinguished in their own right. They did not need others to substantiate the reality of their gadlus. There are others, however, who are like the elusive tree that one believes exists only because so many say they see it. If the tree is not there, the fact that people say it is there will not bring it into existence. Gadlus baTorah is inherent within the person. It is not subject to public acclaim.

And G-d saw all that He had made and behold it was very good. (1:31)

Life is comprised of successes and failures. Some of us have a greater number of success. Others look at failure more often than at success. This is not a perfect world, but our perspective on life and the world can make a "world" of difference. Hashem created the world that we know in Six Days of Creation. He made some subtle changes during Creation in order to offset some of the problems that arose.

Hashem first created light. This was a powerful, intense and very spiritual light. In fact, it was so spiritually illuminating that the wicked would never be worthy of experiencing it. Hashem, therefore, separated it from this world and set it aside for the righteous to enjoy in the World to Come.

On the third day, there was once again a disappointment, when Hashem created fruit trees whose bark would taste the same as the fruit. The trees produced a bark, but it did not taste like the fruit. The earth was later punished for not conforming to Hashem's command.

On the fourth day, the two illuminations, the sun and the moon, had a "situation." At first, they were both the same size - until the moon complained about having to share its dominion over the world with the sun. In response, Hashem decreased the size of the moon. Once again, the creation produced

disappointment.

Yet, as we see from the Torah, despite the shortcomings and disappointments, Hashem said that His creation was tov me'od, very good. It would have been better. It could have been perfect. There could have been an absence of strife, no disagreement, no complaints. There could have been - but there was not. Yet, Hashem says it was very good. Why? Horav Avraham Pam, zl, cited in *The Pleasant Way*, explains that Hashem accentuated the positive. He focused upon the success - not the disappointments.

Emphasize success; accentuate the positive; focus on winning: these are phrases that we hear all the time. How often do we listen to them? We listen to a shiur, lecture, or speech. The speaker/lecturer has presented a powerful and brilliant discourse. The presentation contained a few short moments when he seemed to drag out his thoughts. During the sixty-minute lecture, eight minutes were boring. Does that diminish the value of the rest of the speech? Just because a small part of an endeavor does not rise to the apex of our expectations does not - and should not - decrease its total accomplishment. Having said this, we are enjoined to make every effort to praise the positive efforts of those with whom we come in contact on a regular basis. This is a reference to those whom we take for granted, the chazzan or baal tefillah in shul, the cook who prepared our food, the one who gives a daily shiur, our wives and mothers, etc. We tend to ignore the basic expression of gratitude for services rendered, either because we take them for granted or because we do not focus on their positive aspects. We have constant opportunities to perform chesed with a simple good word, a smile, a gesture of recognition. Some of us, regrettably, find it difficult to pay a compliment. We conjure up all forms of excuses for not rendering this common courtesy, but, after all is said and done, it is the result of an insecurity on our part. What we do not realize is that a subtle compliment can make a distinct difference in someone's life, as evidenced by the following story:

The story is told about a famous author who was walking along the East River promenade in New York City, very depressed. He felt at the end of his rope. His life's work, his writing, was of no value. His life felt empty and meaningless. Had his writing really accomplished anything? There was only one thing to do. Suicidal, he thought about climbing over the railing that divided the promenade from the river and throwing himself in.

He stood there, staring at the dark waters, about to make his final move, when he suddenly heard an excited voice, "Excuse me, I am sorry to impose on your privacy, but are you Christopher D'Antonio, the author?" He could only nod in return. "I hope you do not mind my approaching you, but I had to tell you what a difference your books have made in my life! They have helped me incredibly, and I just wanted to thank you!"

"No, it is I who should be offering gratitude to you," he said, as he turned around, walking away from the East River and heading home.

Space does not permit me to add many more vignettes of chesed through words. As someone who has spent many years in the field of chinuch, however, I can say unequivocally that nothing does more for a student than positive recognition from his rebbe. This equally applies with regard to the rebbe. Parental recognition of a rebbe's efforts on behalf of their child is crucial for the rebbe, the child, and the parents.

And the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden and the Tree of Knowledge good and bad. (2:9)

Sforno explains that daas, knowledge, means to focus one's heart on (what is) good and evil. From this source of the word daas, we also find the phrase v'haAdam yoda, "and Adam knew," i.e., he became aware and now concentrated his heart on her (Chavah). This is also why a relative is called a moda, as it says in Rus 2:1, moda l'ishah, "a relative of her husband," for it is natural that one concerns himself for the needs of his relative. Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, infers from here that a relative is a moda, because the foundation of closeness and love is the knowledge and concern for the needs of his relative. This is also why a friend is referred to as meyuda, as it is written in Tehillim 31:12, ufachad limyudoai, "and a fright to those who know me (my friends)." A friend is someone who understands my needs and focuses upon them.

Any love, any relationship in which the two parties are not sensitive to the needs of one another, is not a relationship. Love cannot exist unless there is an awareness of each other's needs and sensitivities. Horav Moshe Leib Sossover, zl, was want to say that he learned ahavas Yisrael, love for all Jews, from an itinerant farmer. A farmer who was totally inebriated asked his friend, "Do you love me?" The friend responded, "Of course I do," and he immediately proceeded to demonstrate his affection by embracing and kissing him. The drunken farmer continued, "Do you know what I am missing? Do you know what I need?" "How should I know what you need?" the other farmer/friend retorted. "Well, if you are not aware of my needs, how can you say that you are my friend?"

This story sums it up. A friend is aware; a friend cares. One who is not aware of his friend's needs is not much of a friend.

By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread... For you are dust and to dust you shall return. The man called his wife's name Chavah, because she had become the mother of all living. And Hashem made for Adam and his wife garments of skin. (3:19,20,21)

The commentators question the sequence of the pesukim. The fact that Adam named Chavah should have been written earlier, at the end of Perek bais, where the Torah relates how Adam gave names to all the creatures. Why is the naming of Chavah juxtaposed on Hashem making garments for Adam and Chavah? The Kehillas Yitzchak explains that when Adam realized what Chavah's act had catalyzed, when he understood that his death and the deaths of all future generations was the result of Chavah's eating and sharing of the Eitz Hadaas, he immediately became severely depressed and angry. After awhile, it dawned on him that anger would be to no avail. It would not rescind the decree. Death was now an inevitable part of the human condition. At the same time, Adam was acutely aware of Chavah's role in propagating life. He decided to be maavir al midosav. He overlooked his anger and decided to forgive Chavah. He transcended, passed over, his natural character traits that would predispose him to anger. This character trait was Adam's distinction.

Imagine what we have just said. A man discovers that his wife has put poison into everyone's food. She is about to feed this preparation to him and all of their descendants. Is there any question as to his reaction? He would undoubtedly call her a murderess at best and immediately go out to publicize his wife's invidious act.

Is that not what Chavah did? She caused death to become a part of our lives. Everyone returns to dust as a result of Chavah's actions. Should she be lauded for this act? Yet, Adam controlled himself and overlooked her error. He did not call her an evil serial killer or murderess. He accentuated her

positive attributes. While it was true that she brought death to the world, she also brought life. Without Chavah there would be no life, no future - nothing! We must remember her positive contributions and name her accordingly.

When Hashem saw how Adam transcended his anger and harbored no enmity towards his wife, He made holy garments for them - an indication of His favor. This teaches us that when one transcends his natural inclination for anger, revenge and hatred, Hashem overlooks his transgressions and gazes favorably upon him.

Great people are able to act in this manner. The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh writes that Moshe Rabbeinu had every reason to be upset with Klal Yisrael. They caused his death. Because of them, he would never enter Eretz Yisrael. Yet, he still blessed them prior to his death. Great people overlook their contemporaries' shortcomings. They transcend slander and disparagement. They look beyond the pettiness that has become a major component in the daily endeavor for so many of us. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates that this middah, character trait, the ability to transcend anger and hurt in order to pursue peaceful reconciliation, was the hallmark of the previous Bobover Rebbe, Horav Shlomo Halberstam, zl. The Bobover Rebbe was a wellspring of sensitivity for all Jews. His activities during and after World War II saved the remnants of Galician Jewry, both physically and spiritually. Men of distinction, however, will inevitably have detractors who are filled with envy, glory-seekers who resent sharing the limelight with anyone other than their own shadow. Shortly after the Rebbe emerged on the American scene, a rabbi who felt threatened by the Bobover Rebbe's activities on behalf of world Jewry lashed out strongly against the Rebbe. He did not mince words in his character assassination of the Rebbe. The Bobover Rebbe did not respond. It was only after the slanderous remarks were becoming downright humiliating that the Rebbe called together all of his chassidim in his bais hamedrash.

The large shul was filled to capacity. There was not an empty seat, as everyone crammed to hear the Rebbe's response to the insults hurled at him. Everyone expected a fiery rejoinder that would put the rabbi in his place. The Rebbe entered the bais hamedrash, ascended to the lectern in front of the Aron Kodesh, and, after kissing the Paroches, cover, turned to the gathering and spoke for fifteen seconds! He said, "I am declaring to everyone assembled, as I stand in front of the Aron Kodesh, that I absolutely forbid anyone from battling on my behalf. My honor is my honor - and it will remain my honor, if everyone acts appropriately and does not take sides. Whoever does not obey me has no place in my bais hamedrash." The Rebbe descended the podium and left the bais hamedrash.

A few hours later, the Rebbe asked his gabbai, attendant, to take him to the rabbi's home. Word of the Rebbe's response had already gotten out throughout the community. The Rebbe arrived at the rabbi's home and ascended the steps to his apartment. He knocked on the door lightly until the rabbi himself answered. Ashen-faced, the rabbi realized who was standing before him. Words were not necessary, nor would they suffice. It was action that was needed. The Bobover Rebbe took the rabbi in both his arms, embraced and kissed him. He said, "You may go to any one of my chassidim and they will attest to the fact that I harbor no ill feelings towards you. As once we were friends, we will continue to remain friends."

Rav Zilberstein notes that the Bobover Rebbe left this world on Rosh Chodesh Av, the same yahrtzeit as Aharon HaKohen. They had one thing in common: ohaiv shalom v'rodef shalom; they were both individuals who loved peace and pursued peace. The common thread that coursed between them was their love of all Jews and unswerving desire to promote harmony within Klal Yisrael.

Out of a sense of hakoras hatov to Hashem Yisborach, I have taken it upon myself to present

insights into our daily davening, with the hope that it will catalyze greater understanding of the Tefillos and, thereby, increase their inspiration and effect.

In his Iyun Tefillah Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, cites the Chovos Halevavos, who says, "When one prays, he should not permit his mouth to precede his heart." This means, explains Rav Schwab, that one is to comprehend fully the words of the Tefillah before he utters them. The Chovos Halevavos is critiquing those who know the meaning of the words, but concentrate on their meaning only after they have vocalized the words. Merely mouthing the words, however, without having any understanding of their meaning, is nothing more than lip service and can hardly be called Tefillah. The Tefillos and their meaning should be integrated in our mind in such a manner that the conveyance of these words should be a form of speaking naturally to the Almighty. We begin with the first prayer of the day - iust okug-Adon Olam.

The phrase Adon Olam means Master of the world. To refer to Hashem as Master is to ascribe a personal relationship with Him, since a master has a personal relationship with his servant. Hence, we begin every brachah with Baruch Atah Ado-noi, which confirms our recognition of Hashem as our Master. It was Avraham Avinu who first referred to Hashem as Master. We affirm Hashem as Melech, which is a broader, more general term, and as Adon, which emphasizes His personal relationship with each individual.

Rav Schwab comments that there is no greater introduction to the prayer of the day than the notion that, regardless of how feeble and small man may be, he is in direct contact with the Almighty. One's concentration on Tefillah, his devotion and emotion, should reflect this feeling.

G-d said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let us separate between water and water...and it was so...and there was evening and there was morning, a second day." (1:6,7,8)

Although Hashem created the heavens on the first day they remained in a state of transition. He solidified them on the second day, creating a separation between the waters above and the waters below. For a deeper explanation of the meaning of this division between waters, one should delve into the various commentaries on the Torah. For our purposes, we look to the end of the pesukim where the Torah writes that "it was so," followed by the statement that this was the second day. This is the only day of Creation about which the Torah does not say "ki tov," "it was good." Rashi explains that the phrase "ki tov" applies only to the finished product, the culmination of an endeavor. The waters, which Hashem began to create on the second day, were not completed until the third day. The Midrash gives us an alternative reason. Since the waters were divided on that day, the concepts of separation, division and, ultimately, strife were introduced to the world. Dispute, disunity, strife and discord are not onstructive. Hence, the day did not warrant the appellation of "ki tov."

On the first day of Creation, Hashem separated between light and darkness. Yet, the Torah writes "ki tov" in regard to the first day. The commentators explain that on the first day, it was a division between two unlike entities, light and darkness. At times, such a separation is healthy and even encouraged. When two waters of the same essence are split it is not a good omen.

We may certainly apply this idea to our own daily path of life. Unity among people is essential, as long as they hold the same perspective and moral belief. When an individual's doctrines and actions are antithetical to another's moral principles, the people must separate from one another. Peaceful coexistence among people is the only way society can thrive. Discord and controversy undermine and, ultimately, destroy communities. Peaceful coexistence cannot reign at the expense of subverting and crippling one's ethical and moral tenets. When two waters of the same essence are split, it is more than

a negative sign, it is a tragedy. When Jews quarrel, when brothers feud to the point that their feelings of brotherhood are subjugated, it is heartbreaking. When religious beliefs cloud one's vision of kinship, it is devastating. Our people have suffered long and hard, but have remained one People. It is lamentable that there are people who would overlook their heritage in order to promote their own misguided agenda.

I recently read a poignant story which, unfortunately, provides a sad commentary on the human condition and the nadir to which some people descend. In the slave labor camp of Plashuv, a Jewish prisoner was aroused one night by a conversation between two kapos. These kapos were concentration camp police who were "selected" from among the Jewish prisoners themselves to carry out the orders of the Nazis in expediting the final solution. Their survival was dependent on proving their fidelity to the Nazi beasts in carrying out heartless acts of cruelty against their own brethren.

That there was always a steady supply of recruits, for this malevolent work is truly an unfortunate page in our history. The Jewish prisoner who was suddenly awakened listened to the following conversation between two kapos on duty.

One of them was crying, to his comrade's astonishment. Cruelty was part of their lifestyle, and whatever sentiment they might have had was long gone. Tears were an expression not commonly found by a kapo.

"Why the tears? What happened?"

"Do not ask.. Something occurred today that shook me up terribly," he responded.

"I do not understand you. What could possibly move you? I escorted my own father to his death, and you watched as your mother was shot to death . What could possibly bring you to tears?"

The weeping kapo, amid brokenhearted sobs, answered, "Today was different than anything I have ever experienced. I was taking an old chassid to be killed, when suddenly he stopped and looked me straight in the eyes and said, yes, we deserve this horrible punishment. We truly are guilty and warrant this fate. If one Jew is capable of leading another Jew to the slaughter, then something is very wrong with our nation, and we, have to answer for it - even with this punishment! Whenever I think of that old man's words, I tremble with disgust and loathing."

This story and the old chassid's piercing words should evoke within all of us a sense of introspection. Are we guilty of the same through indifference? Does one have to lead a fellow Jew to his death, or does a lack of empathy -- or even a tinge of hatred for someone who does not believe as we do -- warrant Hashem's anger? I hope we never find out.

And Hashem G-d formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of Life. (2:7)

Man is comprised of two aspects: spiritual and physical. The guf, body, is his physical dimension; the neshamah, soul, the "chelek Elokai miMaal," portion which comes directly from Hashem Above, is his spiritual dimension. Life is a constant struggle between the spirit and the physical: Who will prevail? Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, cites his rebbe Horav Leib Chasman, zl, who explained this with the following compelling analogy.

It happened that those who sought to undermine the Jewish religion were finally successful in

slandering the saintly Chafetz Chaim. The government, looking for any opportunity to put away anyone who was seditious, quickly arrested the Chafetz Chaim and placed him in jail. A few days later, they were finally able to capture the archenemy of the state, a man known for his vicious cruelty and evil, a man whose tentacles of power reached into every area of the government. It took years of meticulous and patient policework to gather the evidence and capture this mafioso. Shockingly, he was placed in the same cell as the Chafetz Chaim! Let us imagine the scene that unfolds before us. The aged Chofetz Chaim, a slight, bent over, elderly saint sharing a cell with a bear of a man whose cruelty was matched only by his vulgarity and size. One look from the mafioso could stun the Chafetz Chaim. Suddenly, wonder of wonders, the Chafetz Chaim turns to the mafioso and asks him a penetrating question on the Rambam! What is even more shocking, the mafioso responds, citing a Rashbah! We might think this is some sort of bad dream, but, it continues with the two proceeding with their dialogue throughout a vast array of halachos ranging from Talmud to Aggadah.

After the discussion, the Chafetz Chaim washes to eat, and the mafioso responds, "Amen." During the meal, the Chafetz Chaim relates a Torah thought to the avid attention of the mafioso. What is occurring? Are we losing our minds?

"No!" says Rav Chasman, this is not an analogy - it is reality! This happens daily in the fusion of the body and soul. The body is the mafioso filled with base lusts and passion if left to nothing but his physical essence. Everyone -- regardless of his moral breeding can and will descend to the nadir of depravity as evidenced by some of history's most infamous degenerates. Conversely, anyone who is able to subjugate his physical dimension to his spiritual development can attain the most sublime levels of holiness and virtue. Indeed, he can become a Chafetz Chaim. It all depends upon which is stronger: the spirit or the body.

As an individual grows, the potential Chafetz Chaim within him and the potential mafioso within him also grow. They interact - they dialogue - they respond to each other. Who will reign supreme? It all depends upon who is stronger.

Let us take a Shabbos table where the "two" are sitting together, and we will observe how they interact. The Chafetz Chaim sings the Shalom Aleichem with great devotion, his eyes glistening as he greets the Shabbos Kallah with great anticipation and longing. His Kiddush is filled with sanctity as he embraces the Shabbos and welcomes its holiness into his simple home. The mafioso is there - watching, waiting for that cup of Kiddush, so that the alcohol can soothe his timorous nature. The Chafetz Chaim washes his hands in preparation to bless Hashem for giving him bread. The mafioso cannot wait to sink his teeth into the delicious challah to satisfy his hungry belly. While the Chafetz Chaim is chanting the beautiful melodies of the zemiros of Shabbos, the mafioso is dreaming about the chicken and kugel whose delectable aroma permeates the air. They both eat, but, prior to taking a bite, the Chafetz Chaim says, "I'kovod Shabbos kodesh." I am eating this for a purpose, to enhance and enjoy the holiness of the holy Shabbos.

They both eat: one as a glutton to satisfy his physical desires; the other one to celebrate the sacred day. Our goal and purpose on this earth is to transform the mafioso within us into a veritable Chafetz Chaim, to dominate the spiritual over the physical. There is nothing wrong with enjoyment. It all depends how and what we enjoy. Some derive great fulfillment from a good meal; others, from a sporting event; and then there is the Chafetz Chaim, the ideal, who piques his delight from the study of Torah.

Hashem G-d said, "It is not good that man be alone; I will make him a helper corresponding to him."

(2:18)

Sforno focuses on the concept of "eizer k'negdo," "a helper corresponding to him" and interprets it as being the defining point in the relationship between husband and wife. He explains that "it is not good that man be alone." The intended purpose in creating man in the image and likeness of Hashem will not be realized if man has to occupy himself alone in order to supply the needs of life. He must have a helper that is equal to him in image and likeness, so that the helper is able to appreciate his needs and meet them at the proper time. Sforno adds that "negdo," opposite him, implies that when an object is placed on one side of a scale, the object on the other side of the scale will be of equal weight, so that they are truly opposite each other on a straight line. Otherwise, one will go up as the other goes down. Additionally, since it is written as k'negdo, with the "kuf" prefix, the Torah is teaching us that she should be like him, but not fully equal to him. Otherwise, she could not be a helper. Yet, since both equally fulfill the roles destined for them, they are equal in weight, striking a harmonious balance. Sforno teaches us that a woman's goal and purpose is to help, a service which in no way minimizes her significance or equality. Indeed, without her, the goals of a marriage and the future of Klal Yisrael could never be realized. Man, therefore, should seek a wife that will enhance his own qualities - regardless of her financial and ancestral roots. Nachlas Tzvi cites the Olelos Ephraim who explains the pasuk, "Therefore man should leave his father and mother and cling to his wife" (Bereishis 2:24), that one should reject the notion of investigating after the father and mother's yichus, pedigree, and rather cling to his wife - investigate her personality, character and spiritual/moral qualities. Likewise, a woman should seek the same in her husband. Only then will the pasuk's promise, "and they shall become one flesh," be fulfilled. There is more to marriage than money. One who seeks only financial status benefits from neither.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, in his *Choreb*, exhorts the young man to seek a wife who will truly be his "chavrusah b'chaim," learning partner in life. She should be his "lebensbagleiter," life's companion, sharing with him in every aspect of life. Anyone who has ever studied in a yeshivah understands the crucial importance of a good chavrusah. They must match and enhance each other so that both grow in Torah. It is a unique relationship in which each challenges, yet enriches, the other. So, too, is a wife a chavrusah in the subject of life.

In regard to the need for a man to have a helper, the Torah says, "It is not good that man be alone." Rashi comments, "So that they should not say that there are two authorities; Hashem is unique in the higher realms, and He has no mate; and this one, man, is unique in the lower realms and has no mate." This seems like an altogether new reason for the creation of woman. Interestingly, Rashi omits Chazal's statement in the Talmud Yevamos 62, "One who lives without a wife, lives without Torah, without joy, without blessing, without peace, without food, etc." Why does Rashi seemingly ignore Chazal's stated reason?

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, suggests that the above reason needs some clarification. Why do Chazal say that one who is not married lacks good or joy? Perhaps he is half a person who does not have complete good and complete joy, but, he certainly does have something. Why do Chazal insist that he has nothing?

Furthermore, if the sole purpose of the creation of woman was to fulfill a deficiency within man, to enable him to achieve completion, why did Hashem not simply create him complete, without deficiency and without shortcoming? Why was man fashioned in such a manner that he would need an eizer k'negdo?

This leads Rav Schwadron to submit that the underlying reason stated by Chazal that "people" might think that there are two authorities in the world is a reference to man himself. If he would have been created self-sufficient, without any need for a partner as helpmate, he might conjure in his "self-sufficient" mind that he is the "man" - there is no other authority but he.

Regrettably, this is human nature. If one lives alone and has no one else about whom to care or to think, he will invariably begin to think that he is it. Slowly this attitude will regress to the point that one positions himself as an "authority," a god. Indeed, after awhile, he even believes it!

However, if man is created with a deficiency - one that can be ameliorated only through the assistance of another human being, he will consequently learn to care and empathize also for the needs of his fellow man. He will then not become haughty and think that there are two authorities, because now he will realize that he is merely nothing more than flesh and blood. Chazal allude to this when they say that without a wife one is missing good, joy, blessing and Torah. When one is led by his heart's desire, other true concepts of joy and blessing elude him. In other words, man's need for a helpmate is what catalyzes the true benefits of blessing, good, joy and Torah. Rashi's stated reason is the source of the benefits stated by Chazal.

In the beginning Hashem created. (1:1)

Horav Tzvi Hirsh Meisels, zl, the Veitzener Rav, cites the Midrash Hane'elam that suggests that the letters of Bereishis, "Bais, Reish, Aleph, Shin, Yud, Saf," are an acronym for two words; bris eish, a covenant of fire. He explains the concept of a covenant forged in fire based upon the following story. Horav Meisels was the rav in the dreaded concentration camp Aushwitz. On Simchas Torah night a group of fifty young Gerer chassidim were brought to the gas chambers. Their sin was rebelling against the German government. Their act of mutiny - observing the laws of the Torah. These young men, who were defiant in life, were not going to go to their deaths without exhibiting the Jewish spirit that had maintained them to this point. They sang - and sang. They sang with a voice that was not theirs. They sang with a supreme power, imbued in them by the Almighty. They walked through the camp on the way to the crematorium with song and ecstasy. They were about to die Al Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem's Name.

As they entered the gas chamber, one of the young men said, " Tonight is Simchas Torah. While we have no Sefer Torah with which to dance, we have the Almighty with us. Let us dance with Him in our last moments." They formed a circle and started dancing, crying to one another in spiritual ecstasy. "Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu, u'mah naim goraleinu," "We are fortunate - how good is our portion, how pleasant our lot."

The chief executioner, the devil's emissary on this world, could not tolerate their joy. He could not bear to see these young Jews cheating him and his cohorts out of their sadistical fun. Above all, he could not tolerate the faith and conviction that was manifest by these young Jews. He wanted to see broken, wretched, depressed people, not proud ecstatic Jews. What did he do? - He would not kill them! He would not grant them their wish. They lived - because they sang. This is bris eish. The ability to maintain our faith, and to sustain our conviction-in the presence of the fires of the crusades, the flames of the pogroms, and the inferno of the Holocaust-is the legacy that has been bequeathed to us by our ancestors. This is our covenant of fire.

This covenant is not exclusively the domain of the observant. Indeed, every Jew has within him that Pintele Yid, Jewish spark, just waiting to connect, to be ignited into a fiery flame, a brilliant light. Horav Meisels recounts how he met a secular Jew being led to his death, who turned to him and said, "Rebbe, I know that perhaps I did not live as a Jew should live, but, I am going to my death happy to die as a Jew!" The apex of Jewish living is to die as a Jew! To be able to sanctify Hashem's Name in death, is to have attained the zenith of Jewish sanctity. The last words of the Torah are " kol Yisrael." This is a reference to Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership and the actions he took to preserve the spiritual integrity before " kol Yisrael," all of the Jewish people. Many commentators seek to connect the last words of the Torah with its beginning. Horav Meisels extends this idea with its accompanying narrative to interpret the words: " kol Yisrael - Bereishis" - " all of the Jewish People- regardless of their religious commitment and level of observance-are "Bereishis" - willing to share in the bris eish, covenant of fire, to stand ready to go into the fire for the Name of Hashem. "Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu!"

And Hashem Elokim formed the man...and he blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being. (2:7)

The "soul," the nishmas chaim, which Hashem blew into man's nostrils is defined by Targum Onkelos as "ruach memalela," a speaking spirit. This means, that the essence of life which only Hashem could have imparted to man, is the soul that includes the power of speech. The ability to use intelligent speech to communicate is what elevates man above the animal world. We must endeavor to understand with whom man was designed to communicate. At this time, no one else had yet been created. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, derives from here that the primary purpose in creating man with the "koach ha'dibur," power of speech, was so that he would "speak" to Hashem in order to supplicate Him through prayer. Speech is inherently holy, for it was created for us to be able to communicate with the Almighty. One who does not sanctify his speech-using it instead to disparage and slander-has defiled G-d's gift.

Hashem Elokim cast a deep sleep upon the man, and he slept. (2:21)

Hashem determined that Adam Harishon should not witness the creation of his wife to be. To circumvent this problem, He made Adam fall asleep. The Torah does not seem to record him waking up from his spiritual slumber. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, derives from here that indeed, in comparison to the clarity of vision and spiritual perception ?? Adam manifest prior to his slumber, he and his descendants are considered to be in a deep spiritual sleep. Only Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, being spiritually awakened as they experienced the Revelation and received the Torah.

With this idea in mind, Horav Schwab proceeds on to explain the daily Bircas ha'Shachar, morning blessing, " Who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids." This blessing is immediately followed with the supplication regarding our success in Torah and avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty, "that You accustom us to (study) Your Torah and attach is to Your mitzvos: Let not the evil inclination dominate us." The blessing concludes, "Who bestows beneficent kindness upon His People, Yisrael."

If we think about it, there are a number of anomalies exist regarding this brachah. First, this blessing is our praise to the Almighty for awakening us from our nocturnal slumber. This is the first blessing one should recite upon arising. Why then does it follow after the blessing, "Who restores souls to dead bodies," "Who gives sight to the blind," and "Who straightens the bent?" Second, how is the supplication regarding proficiency in Torah and mitzvos related to the beginning of the brachah, "Who removes slumber from my eyes"? Third, the blessing's conclusion "Who bestows beneficent kindness upon His People, Yisrael," implies that the chesed, kindness, of awakening in the morning is bestowed only on Klal Yisrael. Does not every body wake up - not only Jews?

Horav Schwab presents a novel interpretation. This blessing does not praise Hashem only for our physical awakening, since this is included in the blessing of "Who restores souls to dead bodies." We are also offering our gratitude for warranting our spiritual awakening, while everyone else wallows in a deep slumber. Since this awakening occurred during Kabbolas ha'Torah, the receiving of the Torah, the appropriate place for noting it would be with the supplication for proficiency in Torah, concluding the blessing by emphasizing that this chesed was bestowed only on Klal Yisrael. They received the Torah, while everyone else continues to sleep.

During the course of time and the travail of the exile we have certainly descended from the spiritual plateau we achieved at Har Sinai. Yet, the terms "awake" and "slumber," as well as "seeing" and "sightless" are relative. Our ability to observe and perceive on a spiritual level is considered limited in comparison to Moshe Rabbeinu's ability. Each person - each generation - each situation, however is to be viewed in its own context, exclusive of others. It is for this reason that we praise the Almighty daily for granting us spiritual perception.

Horav Schwab writes that he once heard an analogy that "sheds light" on the matter. He compares this to a home for the visually impaired where everybody has been sightless from birth. One day, a surgeon appeared at the home with the claim that he had perfected a procedure which would restore anyone's vision, regardless of his impairment. There was, however, one drawback: The results would last for only one day. The individual would see, but only for twenty-four hours. Understandably, no one was interested in this temporary cure.

One person stated that it was worth undergoing the pain of surgery if he could see, even for a single day. The surgery was successful. Lo and behold, the world opened up before this person. Suddenly, he could see face, images, and colors. He could perceive an entire world. Even after he lost his sight, he would have memories to treasure. He could relate to what he heard from others. The members of the home proclaimed him as their leader because, indeed, he could "see" better than they.

This same idea applies to Klal Yisrael. Unfortunately many have fallen back asleep, resorting to a state of spiritual slumber once again. The material/ physical blandishments of this world have blinded so many. Yet, this may all be true - now; nonetheless, these people all stood at Har Sinai and were healed; their spirits and sights were aroused. The impression lasts forever in the hearts, minds and psyche of every Jew. Deep down they know what a "mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh," "kingdom of Priests and a holy nation" should look like. They have a goal to which to aspire, and thus, they are still a "light unto the nations."

And he brought her to the man. (2:22)

This is the underlying concept of shidduchim, marriage matchmaking - Hashem brings the

couple together. It is only the unperceptive who think otherwise. Anyone whose vision is not blurred by secular induced myopia is acutely aware of the Yad Hashem, Hand of G-d, in this misunderstood area of Jewish life. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, tells the story of a young man, a talmud chacham and yarei shomayim, Torah scholar and G-d-fearing, who was having a difficult time finding his "bashert," intended mate. He decided to go to Eretz Yisrael to implore the neshamos, souls, of the tzaddikim, righteous, virtuous Jews, who are buried there, to entreat Hashem on his behalf.

He decided one day to go to the kever, gravesite, of Horav Aharon zl m'Belz, situated on Har Ha'menuchos. The wind, which was gusting with unusual force, blew off his hat. As he ran to retrieve it, he noticed many of the "kvitlach," notes left by other Jews to entreat the neshamah's intercession, had also blown away. It "happened" that one kvitel landed right next to his hat. When he picked up his hat, he also took the kvitel, figuring that he would return it to the kever. While he knew it was improper to look at its contents, he was overcome with curiosity when he just happened to see some of the emotion filled words. He read the prayer of a young woman asking the holy neshamah to intercede on her behalf to find her right mate. The young man was so moved by her entreaty that he asked his parents to negotiate a shidduch between himself and this young woman. With *siyata di'Shmaya*, Divine assistance, the shidduch was arranged to everyone's joy, and the young man and his bashert were married.

While this is a beautiful and poignant story which demonstrates the Divine Hand directly guiding events, it is equally important to always remember that this is true of all shidduchim. We just have to open up our eyes and see.

Hashem said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation" ...Now all the trees of the field were not yet on the earth...For Hashem had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil. (1:11, 2:5)

Rashi tells us the sequence of events preceding the "growth" of vegetation. On the third day of Creation the Torah says, "Tadshe ha'aretz desheh", "Let the earth sprout vegetation." The vegetation had already been created, but it remained beneath the surface until the sixth day, when it rained. It did not rain on the third day, because it was prior to Adam's creation. Hashem had to create man first, so that he would realize the need for rain and he would pray for it. This acknowledgement of the inherent benefit of rain catalyzed the prayer, for which Hashem was waiting. Now the vegetation could spring forth from the ground.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, derives two lessons from Rashi. First, to reflect and acknowledge every bit of good that we receive from Hashem is a form of *avodah*, service of Hashem. Indeed, we should delve into our life's experiences and see how Hashem is constantly helping us along the way. Second, this appreciation can only be manifest through the medium of prayer. Only after one prays for something, and is successful in his supplication, does he truly understand the good that he has received. Adam Ha'rishon knew that rain was essential for vegetation. Yet, this abstract awareness had no value until he integrated it into prayer. Knowledge of a situation without an organized response to it is meaningless.

Horav Solomon cites Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, who posits that only through the combined efforts of Torah and *avodah*, study and devotion/prayer, will one actualize the good that he seeks. One does not deserve Hashem's beneficence unless he understands the source of that good. This realization

is catalyzed by the individual's prayer. Hence, he understands that it is Hashem Who is his provider – not himself. He understands that without Hashem's favor, he is powerless and his actions are futile. This is the underlying motif of prayer. We sense that without Hashem we have no hope. Torah study is the wellspring through which flows Hashem's bounty. Prayer unlocks that fountain of good. The danger that we might forget the true source of our favor is so great that unless we pray for it, we will not receive it.

Hashem Elokim planted a garden in Eden...And Hashem caused to sprout from the ground every tree that was pleasing...Also the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden. (2:8,9)

Rashi interprets the words, “b’soch hagan,” in the literal sense: the Eitz Ha’daas was in the center of Gan Eden, equidistant from everything in the garden. We must endeavor to understand why Rashi defines b’soch in the “geographical” sense. He could just as well have interpreted b’soch as meaning “among” the other types of vegetation. How does Rashi understand that the tree was situated in the center of the garden? Horav Yosef Siegel, zl, of Chicago writes in his sefer Chazon Yosef that he heard the answer to this question from the sainted Chofetz Chaim at the end of World War I. The pshat, exposition, comes to us by way of the following story:

Prior to accepting his “shtele,” position, in Radin, the Chofetz Chaim was rav in Simiatitz, Russia. Horav Siegel happened to be in this city on the last Shabbos of the Chofetz Chaim's stay, as he was taking leave of the community. It coincided with the Bolshevik revolution as the communists were taking over the government. They immediately seized everyone's land and began hoarding food. People -- who simply wanted to survive -- would have to go to the commissar in every community to receive their rations. While this put a great strain upon the wealthy, we can only begin to imagine the overwhelming pressure this placed on the poor. Indeed, many people perished from hunger and deprivation, not able to obtain decent rations for their families. The Chofetz Chaim took upon himself the obligation to provide the basic necessities for the poor. He gathered flour from those who could spare a bit, while his daughter “Sarah’le” baked bread to distribute to the poor.

The time came for the Chofetz Chaim to leave this small town; the poor were hysterically afraid of what would happen now that their “source” of sustenance was departing. They pleaded with him brokenheartedly to provide for their needs. Obviously, the Chofetz Chaim did not savor this tragic situation. The Chofetz Chaim ascended the podium to deliver his last sermon. With tears streaming down his face, he begged for forgiveness from the community. He conceded that while he certainly did not hurt anybody financially, he might have offended someone's dignity. We can imagine the tzaddik hador, the saint of a generation of tzaddikim, asking mechilah, begging forgiveness, from his community. Certainly, such a person never hurt anyone – even inadvertently. He closed by saying that they all, himself included, should cleanse themselves of any possible offenses to their fellow man, either by humiliating, or lashon hora, slanderous speech, – knowingly and unknowingly.

After the sermon, the kehilla, synagogue membership, davened Minchah, and a number of the shul's dignitaries accompanied the Chofetz Chaim to his house for Seudah Shlishis. As they walked along the street, they met a Jewish young man, a powerful communist, the distinguished commissar of the town, who tragically had become an apostate. When the Chofetz Chaim saw him, he greeted him pleasantly, “Gut Shabbos.” The young man responded with the reverence reserved for a noted scholar,

“Gut Shabbos, Rebbe.” The Chofetz Chaim then invited him to join him for Seudah Shlishis. The young man refused, stating that he had already “eaten” the third Shabbos meal. The Chofetz Chaim said that he would like him to join him at home for a little talk.

Indeed, all of the assembled were shocked at what was transpiring before their eyes. Their beloved rebbe, the gadol hador, was consorting with a known miscreant, a sonei Yisrael, Jew-hater of the highest order. Horav Siegel relates how the Chofetz Chaim’s gabbai, secretary, divulged to him this young man’s pedigree. His family was far from reputable; he, however, distinguished himself as a scoundrel and thief, a truly rotten apple from an equally contemptible tree.

He had been caught stealing one time too many and was sent to Siberia to be incarcerated for “life.” During the Bolshevik Revolution, however, all prisoners had been freed. His evil was now sanctioned by the government. He rose quickly in the ranks, achieving high marks for his “prolific” past. As evil as he was to the Jewish community before he had been jailed, his new position afforded him even greater opportunity to continue his nefarious activities – legally. This made the Chofetz Chaim’s invitation to him all the more intriguing.

Impossible to refrain from “listening” to the sounds of the conversation, those assembled in the house heard the following dialogue between the tzaddik and the alienated Jew: The Chofetz Chaim said, “I summoned you because I would like to make a request of you. First, I would like to tell you a dvar Torah.” “Rebbe,” responded the commissar, “I really do not think that I am ‘ready’ to hear a Torah thought.” “Do not worry,” said the Chofetz Chaim, “It will be simple but meaningful.” The Chofetz Chaim began by citing the pasuk which we have questioned. “Why”, asked the Chofetz Chaim, “was it important to have the Eitz Ha’daas in the center of Gan Eden?” The Eitz Ha’daas, the Tree of Life, was the source from which spiritual life, Divine sustenance, flowed. Everyone is in need of this source of life; everyone seeks to fulfill the required course for achieving life. Because people are different from one another, there are also various ways available to be nurtured by the Tree of Life. Some reach it through Torah study; others through mitzvos; yet others through avodah, devotional service to the Almighty. There are people for whom acts of loving-kindness, charity, and promoting good-will are their tickets for achieving spiritual life.

Hashem sought to provide everyone with an equal opportunity for attaining life. He, therefore, planted the Tree of Life in the center of Gan Eden to convey to everyone that life is obtainable, life is achievable for everyone – equally. We are all equidistant from the Eitz Ha’daas. Whichever approach we take, we will realize our goal: some through Torah; some through avodah; some through gemillas chasadim, but everyone in accordance with his ability, talent and personality. “My son,” the Chofetz Chaim raised his voice, “you have been estranged from our people and religion for too long. You have now been granted a once in a lifetime opportunity to perform an incredible act of gemillas chesed by providing food to the poor Jews of this town. You can achieve the life that heretofore has been so distant from you. Who knows if it was not for this specific purpose that Hashem granted you such a powerful position in the government. I implore you to undertake the responsibility of sustaining the poor. In this way you, too, will achieve spiritual life.”

Needless to say, the hardened criminal possessed a soft Jewish heart and soul beneath the veneer of evil. He acquiesced to the Chofetz Chaim’s plea, and the Jews of that community no longer suffered from hunger. We now understand the significance of placing the Eitz Ha’daas in the center of Gan Eden.

Hashem turned to Hevel and to his offering. But to Kayin and to his offering He did not turn. This annoyed Kayin exceedingly. And Kayin rose up against his brother Hevel and killed him. (4:5,8)

Kayin could not cope with the fact that Hashem did not accept his offering, but had accepted Hevel's offering. Kayin had a problem with competition. Chazal teach us that "kinaas sofrim tarbeh chochmah," "jealousy among scholars increases wisdom." Kayin, obviously, did not ascribe to that dictum. His envy provoked him to destroy the competition. He did not realize that the only way to overcome the healthy challenge of competition is to compete and become better. Destroying the competition creates anarchy. Inability to deal with the challenge of a rival indicates insecurity. Focusing on destroying the opposition, rather than bettering oneself, demonstrates one's true weakness.

The nachash, serpent, had a similar difficulty. He wanted Chavah to be his. To accomplish his objective, he had to get rid of Adam, to destroy the competition. What else would we expect from a snake? What should we say? Perhaps, this is the underlying meaning of Hashem's admonishment to Adam, "Ayeca? Where are you?" Did Hashem really not know where Adam was hiding? No! Hashem was conveying to Adam an important idea. Ayeca? Where are you? Do not worry about anybody else but yourself. If people compete with you, if others are getting ahead of you in school, work, and life – do not pray for their downfall. Just work on yourself. Make yourself better. Ayeca – know where you are.

And Kayin knew his wife, and she conceived and Chanoch. He became a city-builder, and he named the city after his son, Chanoch. (4:17,18) Kayin was alone. He had sinned terribly. He needed to respond by doing something to make sure the tragedy that he had caused would never be repeated. He had a child whom he named Chanoch, an intriguing name considering its connotation. In addition, he built a city, which the Torah, incidentally, describes in the present tense, "boneh," building, as opposed to "va'yiven," he built. Third, he named the city Chanoch, after his son. These three acts are connected and ostensibly convey an important message. What is it? I recently heard a homiletic rendering of the connection between Kayin's actions. Kayin had erred and committed a grave sin; he had killed his own brother. In order to perform teshuvah, to properly repent his tragic sin, he was obligated to reflect upon the origin of his sin. How could he have acted in such a nefarious manner? Where was his understanding and appreciation of the value of human life? He decided that he did not know any better. No one had taught him. "Es hut gefelt in chinuch," he was missing an education! He had not been educated in terms of right and wrong. He was determined to see to it that such a tragedy would never happen again as a result of a lack of chinuch. He, therefore, named his son, Chanoch, implying the need for parents to educate their children, to see to it that their children have the finest Torah education, that chinuch be a vital part of their home life. The entire relationship between parent and child should be an endeavor in chinuch. Parents should understand the role that they play in their child's education, actively and by example.

This, however, was not enough. It was not sufficient to simply take care of his own child; he felt obligated to make sure that others were also availed a Torah chinuch. He could not raise a child in a vacuum. He must have friends, he must go outside, and he must have an environment that would be conducive to what he was taught at home. He created that environment. He built a city and named it Chanoch, to teach others the importance of chinuch.

There was still another lesson to be communicated: Chinuch is not a one-time endeavor, it is not a process that ends with elementary school, or high school, or yeshivah gedolah. Rather, it is a constant focus throughout life. Hence, we find the word "boneh" in the present tense, indicating the ever present need for chinuch. Kayin had the right idea. Unfortunately, not everybody ascribes to it.

In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth. (1:1)

We can translate the first pasuk of the Torah in a number of ways. Homiletically, the word "bereishis" can be translated as "bishvil reishis," "because of the beginning." This implies that the world was created as a result of things that are called "reishis," things that are of such prime significance that the Torah refers to them as reishis. Chazal accord two entities this distinction: the Torah and Klal Yisrael. Using this hypothesis, Hashem created the world so that Klal Yisrael would accept and observe the Torah. The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh adds by inference that one who studies Torah, making it an integral part of his life, merits the entire world. Everything in the world exists to serve this individual. Conversely, one who does not have such an association with the Torah is not permitted to have any benefit whatsoever from the world - unless he serves or sustains those who do study Torah.

Indeed, everything in this world exists for the purpose of serving the Torah and the ben Torah. After the completion of the railroad from St. Petersburg to Berlin, Horav Chaim Brisker, zl, remarked, "This was made for one purpose - to afford the yeshivah students easy access to get to the famous yeshivah in Volozhin. Everything in this world is for the Torah and those that study it."

Likewise, when the Trans-Siberian railroad was built after many years of torturous labor, costing significant sums of money and involving thousands of workers, everyone wondered why it had been constructed. What reason could there have been for creating a railroad through Siberia that would go as far east as Vlodivostak which bordered Japan? No logical reason justified this "waste" of human and natural resources.

The answer became apparent when the students and Roshei Yeshivah of the Mirrer Yeshivah in Poland fled from the European Holocaust to Shanghai, Japan, using this same railroad as their route of escape. A project was once again justified, as a result of its service to Torah and its devotees. If we keep this idea in mind, we might accord greater respect to those for whom Torah study is their life's ideal.

Hashem saw that the light was good, and Hashem separated between the light and the darkness. (1:4)

If the light was so "good" and the darkness less positive, why did Hashem merely separate them? Why did Hashem not banish darkness to some abyss, permitting "light" to shine all day? Why do they have equal time? Horav Yosef Chaim M'Bagdad, zl, explains that darkness increases our appreciation of light. He recounts an incident involving the Baal Haflaah, who was in need of a minyan at his home. After he was able to gather ten men, he realized that one of them was not desirable for a minyan. Thus, he sought another person. The individual in question was no fool and became quite insolent. He asked the rav, "Why did you not count me in the minyan? After all, even for the ketores, spices for the incense, they included the chelboneh, which had a foul odor." The rav immediately responded, "You are correct. That is why they need eleven spices!"

While the response may have put the man in his place, what really is the reason that they needed eleven spices? If the chelboneh is included, why do we need eleven spices? If it is not included, why bring it altogether? The answer, claims Rav Yosef Chaim, is that the ten good Jews and the ten sweet smelling spices stand out much more when they are relative to the foul-smelling spice and the Jew whose level of commitment leaves much to be desired.

The same idea may be applied to the creation of darkness and its relationship with light.

Hashem saw that light was inherently good. If He were to eliminate the creation of darkness, however, people would have become complacent with light. They would not appreciate its benefit as much. Consequently, darkness reigns in conjunction with light - to serve as a vehicle for appreciating the true brilliance of light.

And Hashem made the two great luminaries, the greater luminary to dominate the day and the lesser luminary to dominate the night. (1:16)

Chazal tell us that originally the sun and moon had been the same size. The moon complained, asking, "How can two kings rule simultaneously?" In other words, the moon felt that one of the luminaries should be diminished in size. Hashem, thereupon, told the moon to diminish itself so that the sun would be the dominant luminary. Chazal characterize the moon's remark as inappropriate. The moon receives its light from the sun. Thus, the sun is the *mashpiah*, source of light, and the moon is the *mekabel*, reflecting the light it receives from the sun. This was unacceptable to the moon. It could not "tolerate" being the same size as the sun, but not of equal brilliance. Hashem diminished its size, so that it could never expect to be totally equal with the sun.

The moon's "sin" is the root of all sin in the world. Man also refuses to be *mekabel*, to accept Hashem's dominance, to sublimate himself to Hashem. No one desires to be subservient. The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, attempts to underscore man's subordination to the Almighty in order to harm that relationship. Rosh Chodesh is the "*zman kapparah l'chol toldosom*," time of atonement for all their offspring. It represents an opportunity for salvation, "*u'seshuas nafshom miyad soneh*," and "a salvation for their soul from the hand of the enemy." On Rosh Chodesh, we offer a *Korban Chatos*, sin-offering, to atone for the sin of insubordination, for an attitude of misplaced assertiveness. The enemy from whom we seek salvation is the *yetzer hora* that manipulates our emotions, that "subtly" encourages us to defy the Almighty.

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, notes that if we review the various *korbonos ha'Chag*, offerings brought on the festivals, we will find that for every festival a *Korban Chatas* is offered. We will note two *korbonos*, however, that do not have a *Chatas* associated: the *Korban Tamid*, which was offered daily in the morning and evening; and the *Korban Mussaf* of Shabbos. What distinguishes these two "*zemanim*," moments in time, during which *korbonos* are brought, but, unlike for the others, a sin-offering is not included?

Horav Nebentzhal explains that all festivals are determined by the moon: the *Bais Din* sanctifies the New Moon, thereby designating the dates of the *Yamim Tovim*. Since the moon is the catalyst for the *Yamim Tovim*, it is understandable that as atonement for the moon's "sin," we offer a *Korban Chatas*. The moon complained, which is an error that must be rectified, especially since the moon is the determining factor in this festival. Shabbos and the daily *Tamid* are brought on a regular basis, daily and weekly. The sun governs the daily cycle that determines the *Korban Tamid*, both in the morning and in the evening, when the sun is setting. Shabbos begins with the sun's seventh daily setting. There is no reason to have a *Korban Chatas* be offered in response to the sun.

Horav Nebentzhal suggests that this might be the reason that the Torah juxtaposes the laws of *korbonos* upon the appointment of Yehoshua as Moshe Rabbeinu's successor. Chazal teach us that Moshe's face was like the sun, and Yehoshua's face was like the moon. This is an analogy to the lesser spiritual plateau achieved by Yehoshua in comparison to Moshe. Moshe was like the sun, inspiring,

sharing his brilliance with Yehoshua, encouraging him to attain his leadership role. Yehoshua also manifested a problem with "two leaders sharing the same crown," when he came to Moshe complaining about Eldad and Meidad who were prophesizing. Moshe, like the sun, was above this. He responded to Yehoshua saying, "Are you being zealous for my sake? Would that the entire people of Hashem be prophets" (Bamidbar 11:29). Moshe, the quintessential leader, did not succumb to envy. He begrudged no man. That is the sign of a true leader.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife. (2:24)

Is this really the way it is supposed to be? For what purpose do parents spend their lives raising children, enduring hardship, frustration, and at times, pain? When their son grows up, should he reject them in order to cling to his wife? This cannot be the Torah's intention. Radak says that the pasuk only implies a physical separation. His attachment to his wife requires him to move out of his home of origin in order to establish a new home with her. This writer once heard an explanation for this pasuk that sets the tone for marriage. While one is in his parents' home, he is a mekabel, a taker. His parents support and sustain him. He has no specific responsibility towards others. When he takes a mate, he "leaves" his parents' home. He now assumes the role of "nosein," giver. He must now take the initiative to play a more aggressive role in his new relationship. The submissiveness of the past, the "taking" to which he had become accustomed, is no longer appropriate. He is responsible for the care of his wife, playing a pivotal role in their relationship. Indeed, he leaves his parents' home, but only in the sense of the lifestyle to which he had become accustomed.

Alternatively, we may suggest another interpretation. The Torah says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother." The Torah does not say that a son shall leave his parents. This would lead us to infer that the "son" never leaves his parents' home. "Ish", man, is a term which denotes submissiveness and compliance. That characteristic of the individual is now transferred to his wife. In order for a relationship to retain its harmony and unity, it is critical that each partner devoid himself of his self-importance. Nothing can be more anathema to a marriage than a mate who is obsessed with his or her own ego. The young man is to take the deferential nature he had assumed in association with his parents and integrate it into his relationship with his wife.

Hashem turned to Hevel and to his offering...But to Kayin and to his offering He did not turn...This annoyed Kayin exceedingly...And Hashem said to Kayin, "Why are you annoyed?" (4:4,5,6)

Hashem is questioning Kayin about the source of his depression. Does not the Torah, however, in the preceding pasuk clearly state the reason for Kayin's annoyance: Hashem's rejection of his offerings. Is that not enough reason for one to be despondent? Horav Chaim Brisker, zl, gives a practical explanation to the query. Hashem asked Kayin, "Why are you really upset? Is it because your korban, offering, was not accepted, or is there a deeper reason, the fact that your brother's korban was accepted?" Quite possibly Kayin's dejection was not due to his own rejection by the Almighty. Perhaps the real problem was the fact that his brother's korban was accepted.

Regretably, this has become second-nature for many. They could tolerate their own lot, as long as their neighbor does not succeed. The thought that someone else would succeed is a bitter pill for many to swallow. We tend to become so obsessed with our friend's success that we neglect doing something about our own failure. How are we to correct our own mistakes when our prime concern is our neighbor's achievement?

This is the book (account) of the descendants of Adam. (5:1)

The Torah enumerates the generations that descended from Adam Ha'Rishon. In his inimitable manner, Horav Moshe Swift, zl, suggests a homiletic interpretation of this pasuk. "The book of life is the generations of man." There are all kinds of books. Some are worth reading, while others are nothing more than trash. Some books teach valuable lessons with profound meaning, while other books leave no lasting impression. We are pages in the book of life written by our parents. They are the cover, the binding that holds the pages together. We write the pages based upon the way that we act and our adherence to the path which they have forged for us. The length of the book is determined by the amount of work the children contribute to it. Parents hope and pray that their children will write creditable pages in their book of life.

Sometimes, however, the pages are well-written but the binding is worthless, causing the pages to scatter and the book to fall to pieces. The parents are weak; they are irresolute, giving in to every foolish notion that arises. Their own legitimacy as committed Jews is at best placid. Thus, the book's binding falls apart. Before the children grow up and add their own pages to the book, it falls to pieces and the pages scatter.

How tragic a scene: a book that had so much potential, but has fallen apart because the covers were weak. How often parents bemoan the decisions they have made for their children! Every author needs a good editor, one that will be objective, advising to supplement or -- at times -- to delete. Parents have the opportunity to avail themselves of help as they prepare their book of life. Some accept the advice of their editor, while others make their own subjective decisions. Unfortunately, when we are dealing with a book of life, there is no room for error.