

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 29 Tishrei 5781, Erev Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan. Rosh Chodesh is tomorrow and Monday. The re-appearance of the moon was already 3:23 am earlier today, Yerushalayim time. We omit Av HaRachamim.

TORAH DIALOGUE
(p. 2 Hz) (p. 1 S) (p. 3 Hi) (p. 2 AS)

BREISHIT בראשית

Genesis 1:1

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED),
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1. Torah is the blueprint for our lives, and it all began with the Creation of the World. The first two chapters both deal with creation. The first is to tell us that Hashem is the sole creator of the universe. The second chapter introduces Hashem's relationship with man. The Rambam in his Code of Jewish Law (Mishnah Torah) tells us that if you want to know God, you need to look around you and inspect nature. See the world and all its masterful wonders. These are the laws of nature, where we cannot question why, but we can inspect and learn how. We do not know why there is a force of gravity, but we can learn how it works. And we figured out what the escape velocity of a rocket ship has to reach in order to break the gravitational force in order to reach orbit (a speed of 25,000 miles per hour, or about 7 miles per second). All this and a great deal more emanate from the Biblical text that sets us on the course of exploring our universe. When man walked on the moon in the summer of 1969, the world cheered. Some ultra-Orthodox Rabbis complained that man had overstepped his bounds. Doesn't Tehillim say the Heavens belong to Hashem, and the earth belongs to man? Rav Soloveitchik answered that there are two heavens. The physical heaven which man is allowed to explore, and there is a metaphysical heaven, which is completely spiritual. The latter is the world which we cannot penetrate. (The Rav was worried that our success would go to our heads, and that did happen.)

2. When Hashem said that it was good, the Ramban interprets that statement to say that Hashem made it permanent. This culminates with the verse that Vayechulu, the Heaven and Earth were finished. What it really means is that all the items in creation were a finished utensil working together as a unit, knowing which force was greater than the other. When a hurricane approaches, we see its power and uncontested force. We see it uproot a strong oak tree, and we see a palm tree bend over without breaking. Hashem's law is supreme. We cower in the presence of Mother Nature. This gives a different interpretation to the Shabbat. No work. Just take the time to marvel at the way the world works. Sit, learn, and think. Recognize our limited position in Hashem's world. We might consider ourselves to be on top of the food chain, and we are. But our domain is finite. We are severely limited in our ability to comprehend Hashem's way of governing the world. Accept our place and enjoy Hashem's blessings, for they are plentiful. (RED)

3. When Kayin killed his brother Hevel, it raised the thorniest of questions for man to ponder (and come up empty). Hevel was a righteous person who brought an elite gift to offer Hashem. And Kayin became so jealous of his brother that he killed him. Hashem allowed this to happen. Stopping it would destroy the gift of free will that Hashem gave us. This forced us to believe in an afterlife where Hashem can correct matters and right the wrongs that are committed regularly in our world. When Hashem created light, He also created darkness. He created good and created evil. And man from the time of Creation will sin and test Hashem and himself. When Adam and Chava sinned, Hashem engaged them in conversation and gave them the possibility to confess and repent. They played the blame game and blamed someone else. When Hashem engaged Kayin in conversation after the murder, Kayin blew the chance to confess and repent. Human nature became apparent for all to see, from the first days of the world up until today, man will find it so difficult to confess. (RED)

4. "And Kayin said to Hevel his brother, and it was when they were out in the field, Kayin rose up against Hevel his brother and killed him" (4:8). This is an elliptical sentence; something is obviously missing: what did Kayin say to Hevel. The Midrash fills in the gap, explaining the argument. Sticking to the literal interpretation, the Ramban wrote that Kayin said to Hevel, "let's go out to the field." The Vilna Gaon stated that Kayin called him "brother." Both interpretations lead us to believe that Kayin planned the murder and lured his brother out in the field in a spirit of friendship. Without going into the Midrash, the wisdom of our Sages to explain the fraternal argument is very telling. When someone has an evil plan in dealing with rival, he will come up with an excuse to rationalize his evil plan. Historically, we have seen this fact in every war. Some minor skirmish or a killing of a minor government official will trigger a war, a monumental war, as was the case in World War I. An excuse can be real or fabricated, but it will always be there. (RED)

5. After Kayin killed Hevel, he is punished by living a nomadic life. He would not be able to call any place home. If he committed a premeditated murder, he should have been executed. Hashem decided to punish him differently. I believe that Hashem was using Kayin as a traveling poster board to show the world that this is what happens to a killer. Let it be known throughout the world, in which at this stage of development there were no governments, no countries, no police, and no courts who made laws. The Talmud claims that the seven Noachide laws, which includes a prohibition against murder, was virtually stated in the Torah either at this time in the Torah (or in Parshat Noach after the Flood). So Kayin was not warned about his crime. When you think about it, Kayin lived an exceptionally long life, longer than most. But his lesson was ignored. No matter what Hashem had in mind, it was all for naught. Hashem ended up giving up on the current state of human life. He would end up killing them all and starting the world again with Noach. (RED)

6. In the seventh generation of human life, there was a surge of technological advancement (4:20-22). The Torah

relates that Lemech was blessed with children: Yaval, who was the first person who dwelled in tents and bred cattle. Yaval's brother, Yuval was the first to handle a harp and a flute. Another son was Tuval-Kayin, who sharpened all cutting implements of copper and iron. Tuval-Kayin's sister was Naamah, who, according to Targum Yonatan, composed music. According to Rashi, all these innovations were used for idolatry. Noach, who is Naamah's husband, was also involved in this generation of technological improvements by inventing the plow. These developments changed the world. Iron, and the development of metals, was morally neutral. It is what you did with it that mattered. You take metal and make a sword or make a plow. And that is how we should judge the situation. (RED's note: We live in the world of technology. Take the computer for example. There is a great deal of evil available on the computer, but there is a tremendous amount of Torah available on the computer. The computer is also morally neutral. We will be judged on how we use the computer.)

7. Pirkei Avot (ch. 5) states that there were ten generations between Adam and Noach. This is to teach us that Hashem exercised extreme patience in handling mankind. There were only a few rules, and man violated them all. Christianity states that man is basically evil; Judaism feels that man is basically good. The Rambam understands man's logic in developing issues of idolatry. Man felt that there had to be a God in the world, but could not see it. But he saw celestial spheres in the sky that dominated the world. A sun that gave off sunlight and heat. A moon that did the same to a lesser degree. Man started to see these spheres as awesome sights. It didn't take long for man to worship these figures, God's agents in this world, as being independent forces in the world. (Don't ask me about worshipping a man-made figurine or the like, for I cannot apply the Rambam's logic in those cases.) Anyway, idolatry per se was not beyond being logically understood. So man went beyond logic and went on an evil path. Yet Hashem gave man all the time imaginable to correct himself, to no avail. (RED)

8. MIDRASH. (The Midrash discusses the expression Hashem Elokim in the second story of creation, XII: 15) "...The Lord God ... This may be compared to a king who had some empty glasses. Said the king: 'If I pour hot water into them, they will burst; if cold, they will contract [and snap].' What did the king do? He mixed hot and cold water and poured it into them, and so they remained [unbroken]. Even so said the Holy One, blessed be He: 'If I create the world on the basis of mercy alone, its sins will be great; on the basis of judgement alone, the world cannot exist. Hence I will create it on the basis of judgement and of mercy, and may it then stand!' [RED's note: I see a clear lesson to parents. Balance the feelings of compassion and judgement in dealing with our children. We call Hashem Avinu (our father) Malkeinu (our king), expressing our belief that Hashem acts toward us in both ways. So too should our relationship with our children be crafted.]

HAFTORAH

(p. 948 Hz) (p. 1189 S) (p. 933 Hi) (p. 1207 AS)
MACHOR CHODESH
Samuel I 20:18-42

The choice of this haftorah for a Shabbat that comes out to be the day before Rosh Chodesh is obvious from the first line. The scenario set before us, between King Saul, his son Yonatan and his son-in-law David, occurs on the day before Rosh Chodesh. Yet, the choice lacks substance. Why not choose a haftorah which speaks of the renewal of the Jewish people or some other topic that is more conducive to teaching the meaning of Rosh Chodesh? Instead, we read a chapter that paints a sad picture in Jewish history. King Saul dislikes David and desires to kill him. David came on the scene quite suddenly with his slaying of Goliath, and subsequent victories made him quite popular. Maybe Saul saw David as a threat to take the kingship and lead the people into idolatry. Saul's son Yonatan and daughter Michal were aligned firmly with David, even though it meant Yonatan's departure from royalty. This haftorah touches upon the overall question of who is worthy to lead the people of Israel. Both physical and spiritual qualities were necessary. All three participants, Saul, Yonatan, and David, are all eminently qualified. Maybe this choice of who will be the king is really a question of the spiritual renewal of the people of Israel and the lesson that Rosh Chodesh implies.

SHABBAT HALACHAH

The Acharonim discuss whether it is permissible to use an electric light bulb in place of a Havdalah candle. There are a number of halachic issues involved: Is an electric light considered actual fire? Is it considered a torch? Does the glass interfere with the view? Would one recite *Ma'or* (in the singular) or *Me'orei* (the plural)? The consensus of opinion among the Poskim is that one cannot use a fluorescent or a frosted incandescent light bulb for Havdalah. The only question is about using a clear incandescent bulb. Some Poskim permit it, while others forbid it. Even those who permit it would agree that *L'Chatchila* it is preferable to use a wax Havdalah candle. It is said that when electric lights came to Europe, Hagaon Rav Chaim Ozer, zt"l, and the Rogetchover Gaon, zt"l, recited Havdalah over a clear incandescent light bulb to emphasize that an electric bulb is considered actual fire. In this manner people would not turn lights on or off on Shabbat. Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, was opposed to using an electric bulb for Havdalah.