

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to begin by thanking the sponsors of today's drasha.

- Gary and Emily Honick, “in memory of Gary's mother, Bernice Honick, Bracha bas Asher, whose yahrtzeit is on the second day of Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan.”
- Elly and Shayndee Lasson, “in recognition and Hakaras Hatov to the Rabbi and shul administration for planning and facilitating a beautiful, meaningful and safe davening in our shul over the Yomim Noraim and Sukkos season.”
- Ethan and Cheryl Spiegler, “in memory of Cheryl's father, Harry Mirvis, Aryeh ben Avraham Lev, whose yahrtzeit is 2 Cheshvan.”
- Sam and Ruthie Zygler, “to Rabbi Marwick, in gratitude to a good friend.”

Thank you all very much for your generous support of the Shul. May you all be rewarded with *bracha* and *hatzlacha*, good health and happiness.

As I reflect on this incredible Yom Tov season, I would like to again thank our President, Kenny Friedman, for all his hard work for the shul during this challenging time. Also, thank you to our Vice President, Itzi Barr, and Executive Director, Shira Glickman, along with all the *gabboim*, *baalei tefila*, *baalei kria*, *baalei tekia*, and other volunteers who really stepped up and did so much to make Yom Tov run so smoothly. It was not easy planning six minyanim and ensuring safety, comfort, and inspiration—but through dedication, hard work, and *siyata dishmaya*, we accomplished it!

I also want to thank everyone who participated, for helping make this entire Yom Tov season at Shomrei Emunah so inspiring and uplifting. The tefillos on the Yamim Noraim were both beautiful and meaningful. The lively singing on Simchas Torah was an expression of true simchas haTorah and a manifestation of all the passion and intensity of the past month. It was truly exhilarating! Despite the many challenges, I believe this was one of the most uplifting years! May we build on this energy in the year ahead, with continued *bracha* and *hatzlacha* and a year of *siyata dishmaya*, and spiritual growth.

In addition, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to purchase *Chassan Torah* for me on Simchas Torah. It was an honor to represent you as we finished reading the Torah together. May everyone who was part of *Chassan Torah*, a minhag that dates to the time of the Geonim, be *zoche* to all the *brachos* it carries; a year of good health and much nachas, *bracha* and *hatzalacha*.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who already signed up to be part of the Ner Lamaor Campaign. Many have signed up so far, and we encourage more to be a part of this special *zechus*. The source for *ner lamaor* goes back to the commandment regarding lighting the menorah in the Beis HaMikdash.

וְאִתָּהּ תִּצְנֶנָּהוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְהֹוּ אֵלֶיךָ יְשֻׁמוּ יְיָ יְיָ כְּתִית לְמִצֹּר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד. בְּאֶהֱל מוֹעֵד מְחֻזָּץ לְפָרֶכֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַעֲזָרָת יַעֲרֹךְ אֹתוֹ אֶהְרֹן וּבָנָיו מֵעֶרֶב עַד־בֹּקֶר לִפְנֵי ה' תִּקַּח עֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֶם מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Command the Children of Israel, to bring you pure oil of pressed olives to keep the lamps burning continually... Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning before Hashem from sunset until daybreak. [This shall be] a law for the ages, throughout your generations, on the part of the children of Israel.

The Torah commands us to “keep the lights on.” The people of Israel were asked to make many donations to support the Beis Hamikdash, but this is the only one that is required on an ongoing basis. Fittingly, this commandment became an actual חוק לדורות “law for the ages,” long after the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed. **Medrash Hagadol** makes the shift clear: “[This shall be] a law for the ages, throughout your generations, on the part of the children of Israel. Even though the Temple has been destroyed and its candles extinguished, there still stand houses of prayer and houses of study in which we must light candles, for those are called “mini-temples.” In Jewish communities throughout the centuries, the commandment of “keeping the lights on” became a powerful guiding principle. In many communities—

from 11th-century Spain, through 16th-century Italy, to 19th-century Lithuania – there were associations called “Shemen la’Maor” or “Ner la’Maor” whose key purpose was to raise funds for the oil to illuminate the sanctuary and for other overhead costs. It is a special zechus to help enable and facilitate all the limud and tefillos in the shul, and contributors are included in a weekly misheberach
It is a special merit for you and your families.
I invite everyone to be a part of this special opportunity!

The Torah begins, where you would expect, at the beginning. בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ. It begins with a detailed account of Hashem’s creation of the world.

Creation is very difficult to wrap our brains around, and indeed, in a very famous statement, **Rashi**, in his very first comment on the Torah, wonders why the Torah began here. He asks why didn’t the Torah begin with something more instructive, the first *mitzva*, hachodesh haze lachem.

רש"י בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק א
(א) בראשית - אמר רבי יצחק לא היה צריך להתחילא [את] התורה אלא (שמות יב ב) מהחודש הזה לכם, שהיא מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו בה] ישראל,

Rabbi Yitzchak said: [Hashem] should have begun the Torah from This month shall be for you [the beginning of the months]’ (Exodus 12:2), because it is the first commandment which Israel was commanded. What is the reason that it began with the Book of Breishis?

He answers:

ומה טעם פתח בבראשית, משום (תהלים קיא ו) כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים, שאם יאמרו אומות העולם לישראל לסטים אתם, שכבשתם ארצות שבעה גוים, הם אומרים להם כל הארץ של הקדוש ברוך הוא היא, הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו, ברצונו נתנה להם וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו:

It began thus because it wished to convey the message of the verse, The power of His acts He told to His people, in order to give them the estate of nations (Psalms 111:6). So that if the nations of the world will say to Israel, You are bandits, for you conquered the lands of the seven nations who inhabited the Land of Canaan, [Israel] will say to them, The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed is He. He created it (this we learn from the story of the Creation) and He gave it to the one who is proper in His eyes. By His wish He gave it [the Land of Israel] to them, and by His wish He took it from them and gave it to us

What a powerful statement! What Rashi is telling us, in essence, is that the entire Sefer Breishis was not included in the Torah only to teach us about creation and the matters of faith tied to it, or even to teach us about the history of the Jewish people. Rather, it was included to proclaim that the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people for one reason, and one reason only--it was promised to Avraham’s descendants by the One Who created it and Who can give it to whomever He wants. Thus, our claim to the Land of Israel is not because we were there first. Nor do we deserve the Land of Israel because we suffered from countless pogroms and persecutions over the centuries while living in the Diaspora. Our primary connection and entitlement to the land of Israel has its roots in Hashem’s promise to Avraham that his descendants would be given the Land of Israel as an everlasting possession, as stated in the Torah. The Torah itself is our deed to the Land of Israel.

Rashi’s statement has broad ramifications for our times. We are living in what many have called the post-Zionist era, when the early immigrants’ passion and the drive to build the State of Israel has largely faded. It has been replaced by a lack of interest, and even a questioning of our right to live in this land, by the descendants of those very immigrants presently living in Israel. Many young Israelis - even those in the army - are disillusioned with the State of Israel today and find it hard to justify their right to be in the land, especially with world opinion against them. They may even feel like “occupiers” of a land that rightfully belongs to the Palestinians. And this ambivalence is certainly true of the majority of American Jews in the Diaspora.

The character of the modern State of Israel greatly depends on the justification for our being there in the first place. After all, if the Torah, which contains Hashem's promise to Avraham, is our deed to the Land of Israel, then we would do well to make sure that the character of the state that we build on that land, and our lives in general, reflect the values of the Torah.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, former Chief Rabbi of Israel and the youngest survivor of Buchenwald, gave the following speech to the Oxford Chabad Society on May 7, 2006: "I was privileged once to meet David Ben Gurion, the architect of the State of Israel. On April 13, 1972, I received a telephone call from Ben Gurion. At the time, he was living in Sde Boker, the desert kibbutz. He was a great admirer of the Tanach, and he called to ask some questions regarding two passages in the Torah which he did not understand. He asked if we could meet ...to discuss these issues ... I considered this a great honor indeed. When we met..., we discussed his questions for several hours, but I had one question of my own. I asked, "For years I have been telling a story that I had heard about you during the Period of the British Mandate of Palestine. I would like to confirm if this story is true or not."

"What is the story in question?" asked Ben Gurion.

I proceeded to tell him what I had heard. It happened in 1937, at the time that the Peel Commission was presiding over the British mandate of Palestine, as Israel was then known, trying to decide what to do about the Arab-Jewish conflict. The Peel Commission suggested cancelling the British mandate, the same decision that the UN came to in 1947. Ben Gurion was then the head of the Jewish Agency, and was the last witness before the Peel Commission to appear in favor of a Jewish state. Ben Gurion spent over three hours explaining the linkage between the Jews and the Land of Israel, stating, "This is our home." Everybody was impressed by Ben Gurion's testimony. Everyone, that is, except for Lord Peel.

"Mr. Ben Gurion, may I ask you a question?" said Lord Peel.

"Of course you can, that is why I am here," replied Ben Gurion.

"Where were you born?"

"Plonsk" came the reply.

"Where is Plonsk?"

"Poland."

A long silence followed. Finally, Lord Peel said in the barest whisper, "Very strange indeed. All of the Arab leaders who have appeared before me were born in Palestine. Most of the Jewish leaders who have appeared before me were born in Eastern Europe."

Lord Peel continued, "Mr. Ben Gurion, the Arab people have a Kushan entitling them to this land." A Kushan was an Ottoman land deed. "Do you have a document saying that Palestine belongs to you?"

At that point, Ben Gurion became aware of the Tanach in his hand that he swore upon when taking the oath to be a witness to the commission, and he held it up triumphantly exclaiming "Here is your Kushan, here is your document. It is the world's most highly respected book, and I believe that you British regard it with much respect, too. We must have this land."

Back in 1973, I asked Ben Gurion in his desert home "Is this story really true? Did you hold up a Tanach and say 'Here is your document'?"

Ben Gurion smiled and said "Emet Veyatziv," it is true and it is certain.

I had another question to ask: "Imagine you have a document that entitles you to a land. Then you destroy it. You crumple it up, shred it and tear it. Try and present this document to a committee as proof of entitlement for a piece of land. The committee will not accept it in its torn and tattered condition. But look at the Jewish people. We pick and choose certain laws. We consider some laws archaic. In effect, we are destroying our own document. How can we therefore use it as entitlement to the Land of Israel?"

Rabbi Lau's question to Ben Gurion should challenge us, as well. And the question is not limited to our right to Eretz Yisrael. As the **Gemara in Brachos 35a-b** teaches us

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף לה עמוד א – עמוד ב

אלא, סברא הוא: אסור לו לאדם שיהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה. . אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: כל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה - כאילו נהנה מקדשי שמים, שנאמר: לה' הארץ ומלוואה. . אמר רבי חנינא בר פפא: כל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה כאילו גוזל להקדוש ברוך הוא וכנסת ישראל. .

We are entitled to use the world only if we make a bracha when we partake of the world—if we appreciate the source of our existence and relate our use of the world to the knowledge that it belongs to Hashem and our mandate to use everything to make the world more Godly.

But even more than that, all our actions create our reality and affect the world order. As the **Ramban** explains this idea further:

רמב"ן בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק א
ונתן רבי יצחק טעם לזה, כי התחילה התורה בבראשית ברא אלהים וספור כל ענין היצירה עד בריאת אדם, ושהמשילו במעשה ידיו וכל שת תחת רגליו, וגן עדן שהוא מבחר המקומות הנבראים בעולם הזה נעשה מכון לשבתו, עד שגירש אותו חטאו משם, ואנשי דור המבול בחטאם גורשו מן העולם כולו, והצדיק בהם לבדו נמלט הוא ובניו, וזרעם חטאם גרם להם להפיצם במקומות ולזרותם בארצות, ותפשו להם המקומות למשפחותם בגוייהם כפי שנזדמן להם:
אם כן ראוי הוא, כאשר יוסיף הגוי לחטוא, שיאבד ממקומו ויבוא גוי אחר לרשת את ארצו, כי כן הוא משפט האלהים בארץ מעולם, וכל שכן עם המסופר בכתוב כי כנען מקולל ונמכר לעבד עולם (להלן ט כז), ואינו ראוי שיירש מבחר מקומות היישוב, אבל יירשוהו עבדי ה' זרע אוהבו, כענין שכתוב (תהלים קה מד) ויתן להם ארצות גוים ועמל לאומים יירשו בעבור ישמרו חקיו ותורותיו ינצורו. כלומר, שגירש משם מורדיו, והשכיך בו עובדיו, שידעו כי בעבודתו ינחלוה, ואם יחטאו לו תקיא אותם הארץ, כאשר קאה את הגוי אשר לפניהם:

According to the **Ramban**, Rabbi Yitzchak is informing us that the world was created with a certain natural order, which depends on the actions of individuals and nations. Hashem created the world with guidelines and expectations and there are consequences to our actions; the world is changed by our actions. Sefer Breishis--beginning with Hashem creating the world, and the changes based on Adam and Chava and their eating from the *etz hada'as*, continuing with the *mabul*, and onward--serves as a reminder that those who acted properly were rewarded, and those who acted inappropriately were punished. The land of Israel given to the Jews, highlighted by Rabbi Yitzchak, serves as only one example of that reward and punishment structure.

This system is called שכר ועונש—reward and punishment. As the **Nefesh Hachaim** writes

נפש החיים שער א - הערות פרק ד
וקרוב לשמוע שגם זה בכלל כוונתם ז"ל באבות דע מה למעלה ממך. ר"ל עם כי אינך רואה בעיניך הענינים הנוראים הנעשים ממעשיך. אבל תדע נאמנה. כי כל מה שנעשה למעלה בעולמות העליונים גבוהי גבוהים. הכל ממך הוא על פי מעשיך לאן נוטים על פיהם יצאו ויבואו:

It is reasonable to suggest that there is an alternative meaning within the statement in Pirkei Avos, דע מה, usually translated "be aware of what is above you" also means, know that what is above you is affected by your actions... ממך דע מה למעלה, ממך. Your actions influence the higher order of the world.

And as the **Mesilas Yesharim** teaches in Perek 4 (and end of 8) when discussing what should motivate us to exercise caution in life and to watch our actions...

אך ההערה לכל ההמון, הנה הוא בענין השכר ועונש עצמם בראות עומק הדין עד היכן מגיע, אשר באמת ראוי להזדעזע ולהתחרד תמיד, כי מי יעמוד ביום הדין ומי יצדק לפני בוראו באשר השקפתו מדקדקת על כל דבר קטן או גדול.
But the general masses will be roused to "watchfulness" through the matter of reward and punishment upon recognizing the extent of the depth of judgment on this. In truth, it is proper to continuously shudder and fear, for who will stand on the Day of Judgment? Who will be found righteous before his Creator, whose sight scrutinizes all things, great and small.

, כי כך היא המדה ועל הכל הוא דן ועל כל חטא הוא מעניש ואין להמלט.
For this is the trait [of justice]. He judges on everything. He punishes every sin. And there is no escape.

But there is another crucial lesson in Sefer Breishis. If the essence of this sefer is reward and punishment, we should note that the Torah had not yet been given. So what is the basis for reward and punishment?

Sefer Breishis is also called Sefer HaYashar, because the lesson of *schar va'onesh* is taught through adherence to *yashrus*, not *mitzvos*--specifically through the lives of the *avos* and *imahos*. They lived life

with honesty and integrity—and were called *yesharim*. And they were very clearly judged for their actions—punished for their sins and rewarded for their good deeds.

As the **Netziv** explains in his famous introduction, this *yashrus* was evident in the way the *avos* and *imahos* treated others—treating everyone, without exception, with love and respect—even those who thought differently.

וזה היה שבח האבות שמלבד שהיו צדיקים וחסידיים ואוהבי ה' באופן היותר אפשר. עוד היו ישרים. היינו שהתנהגו עם אוה"ע אפי' עובדי אלילים מכוערים. מכל מקום היו עמם באהבה וחשו לטובתם באשר היא קיום הבריאה.

He says they were models for *derech eretz*.

וכן הרבה למדנו מהליכות האבות בדרך ארץ.

And, as **Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky** points out, this *yashrus* was evident in the way they thought and lived; their *midos* and values, always going above and beyond to help others. He calls this *mentschlichkeit*—and says it is what Chazal meant when they said *תורה* דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה

They acted with genuine *yashrus*, an idea of basic decency that can be inferred from Hashem's creation of the world something that precedes Torah.

אמת ליעקב בראשית פרשת לך לך פרק יד פסוק יד

(יד) וישמע אברם כי נשבה אחיו וירק את חניכיו 19. הנה אילו היה אברהם שואל שאלה אי חייב לילך להציל את לוט בודאי היה נענה שהוא פטור, דהא אין אדם מחויב להכניס את עצמו בספק סכנה בכדי להציל את חבריו [עמש"כ בענין זה להלן סוף פרשת מסעי], אלא מה שעשה כן אברהם הוא משום שהאבות נקראו "ישרים" [עבודה זרה דף כ"ה ע"א], והיינו שכל הנהגתם היתה לא על פי דיני התורה אלא על פי השכל הישר, כי האלקים עשה את האדם ישר, ועל פי היושר היה מוטל על אברהם להשתדל להציל את לוט וכדביארתי לעיל [י"ג פ"ט] כי אברהם הרגיש את עצמו כאחראי לשלומם של לוט מכיון שהרן אביו מת בכבשן אביו משום שאמר שהוא מאמין באלקי אברהם, ולכן ע"פ היושר, "מענטשליך קייט", הוכרח אברהם להריק את חניכיו ולרדוף אחר המלכים. ובאמת כל חיי האבות, שחיו קודם זמן תורה, היו מונהגים על פי היושר, וזהו ביאור מאמר חז"ל [ויק"ר פ"ט א"ג]: דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה, והיינו שהאבות התנהגו על פי דרך ארץ והיושר עוד קודם שניתנה תורה. . . .

והנה רש"י ריש בראשית הקשה מדוע התחילה התורה מבראשית ברא אלקים היה לו להתחיל מהחדש הזה לכם, ותירץ משום כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים כו' הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו וכו'. ולכאורה זה רק מיישב מדוע הביאה התורה את סיפורי מעשי בראשית וכו', אבל כל הפרשיות מלך לך עד פרשת בא, עדיין אינו מובן מדוע הוצרכה התורה להאריך בכל זה, ועל זה לכאורה לא תירץ רש"י כלום. אבל לפמש"כ נראה שבאמת על פרשיות אלו לא קשה כלל, דמהסיפורים האלו אנו למדים מה צריכה להיות הנהגת האדם על פי היושר והדרך ארץ, ודבר זה אפשר לתבוע אפילו מהגויים, כי אף על פי שמצוות לא ניתנו להם, אבל אעפ"כ להיות על פי יושר זה יכול כל אחד אם הוא רק רוצה בזה. . . .

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky continues that this is all part of Rabbi Yitzchak's answer. Beyond the specific 613 *mitzvos*, that cannot address every situation that arises, as the **Ra"n** points out in *Derashos*, is the need for *mentschlichkeit*; decency, honesty and integrity—*yashrus*—that is learned from the *avos* and *imahos* and the way they lived. That is why it would have been insufficient to begin with the first *Mitzva*.

And when **we** live with their values and *yashrus*, their *mentschlichkeit*, **we** are deserving of reward—the reward reserved for Bnei Yisrael.

As **Rashi** writes explaining the opening word בראשית, the world was created for Yisrael who are called *reishis*...

רש"י בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק א: בראשית ברא - אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשני, כמו שדרשוהו רבותינו ז"ל בשביל התורה שנקראת (משלי ח כב) ראשית דרכו, ובשביל ישראל שנקראו (ירמיה ב ג) ראשית תבואתו.

The **Chasam Sofer** and others teach that we are called B'nei Yisrael—Yisrael is an acronym for יצחק, יעקב, שרה, רבקה, רחל, אברהם, לאה

תורת משה בראשית פרק מו פסוק ה

(ה) וישאו בני ישראל את יעקב אביהם. בני ישראל ר"ת אברהם יצחק יעקב שרה רבקה רחל לאה, כן כ' הראשונים

We are called Yisrael—and when we act like the *avos* and *imahos* we earn our name and our destiny.

May we learn the lessons of *mentschlichkeit* and *yashrus*—and be *zoche* to earn the reward meant for Klal Yisrael, and see the return of the *Beis Hamikdash*, *bimhera viyamenu*...amen.