

RAV MOSHE
STERNBUCH
ON CHUMASH

===== Bereishis =====

Michtav Berachah

I was very gratified to hear of the forthcoming publication of an English collection of *divrei Torah* and *aggadah* that I have said on the parshah, including those I merited to hear from my *rabbeim*, the *gedolei hador* of the previous generation.

This work is especially fitting for our generation, which is beset by confusion and spiritual weakness. Studying the parshah strengthens one's faith and teaches him to perceive the Hand of Hashem in all events. I trust that this sefer will bring encouragement to many, inspiring them to greater *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim*.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to my grandson Rav Pinchas Yehuda Sternbuch *shlita*. Aside from investing his heart and soul for the success of the yeshiva and the bachurim, he also has expended much effort to ensure the success of this sefer. I also thank Rav Shimon Szimonowitz *shlita* and his staff at Machon Aleh Zayis for their efforts in preparing and publishing this work, and for their worthy undertaking to disseminate Torah in Klal Yisrael. I also wish to express my appreciation to my dear friend Rav Reuven Schron *shlita* and to the other donors who generously undertook to cover the publishing expenses for this work. May the merit of the Torah stand by them and their families, and may Hashem grant them all good, materially and spiritually. *Etz chaim hi lamachazikim bah, v'somcheha me'ushar*.

I thank Hashem, Who in His great kindness has granted me the privilege throughout my life to study and teach Torah, and to witness the growth of the yeshivah that I was *zocheh* to establish, where *bnei Torah* toil in Torah and refine their *middos*. I also wish to express my appreciation to my son, Rav Ephraim Zalman *shlit"a*, who devotes himself wholeheartedly to the talmidim, guiding them to attain higher levels in Torah, *yiras Shamayim*, and *middos tovos*.

May Hashem, in His mercy, continue to grant me strength to teach His Torah and to publish additional sefarim for the benefit of Klal Yisrael. May the Torah never depart from my mouth, nor from the mouths of my children and descendants, and may we merit soon the complete redemption, when we shall see the glory of Hashem revealed in the world.

בְּיָמֵינוּ

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Introduction

With heartfelt gratitude to Hashem, we express our thanks for the great kindness He has shown us in allowing us to publish this sefer, Rav Moshe Sternbuch on Chumash, a work that brings the Torah wisdom of *Maran Posek Hador*, Rav Moshe Sternbuch *shlita* to the *tzibbur* at large.

The teachings collected here are drawn primarily from the Rav's many years of delivering *shmuessen* on the weekly *parshah* in his *Beis Medrash*, Merkaz HaTorah, in Johannesburg, South Africa, and later in his *Beis Medrash HaGra* in the Har Nof neighborhood of Yerushalayim, and in the *Yeshivah Gedolah* under his leadership in Beit Shemesh. Additionally, halachic discussions were selected from Rav Moshe's many halachic works and inserted in the relevant *parshiyos*. These *divrei Torah* were published and widely distributed each week in tens of thousands of copies throughout Eretz Yisrael and abroad, and were eventually collected and published in Hebrew in the *Biurim V'Hanhagos al HaTorah* and *Vayaged Moshe* series.

In these talks, Rav Moshe Sternbuch presents incisive halachic analysis and profound insights into the *pesukim* and words of *Chazal*, along with guidance in *avodas Hashem* and practical lessons for navigating the challenges of our generation. His words often draw upon the wisdom of the great Torah giants of earlier generations with whom he merited a close connection.

In recent years, many have requested that these teachings be made

available in English as well. Rav Shimon Szimonowitz and the team at Machon Aleh Zayis have undertaken this project, with the hope that it will bring the Rav's timeless guidance to an even wider audience.

Included alongside the collected teachings are relevant stories told by Rav Moshe of the *gedolim* he merited a connection with, including Rav Elchonon Wasserman, Chazon Ish, the Brisker Rav, the Tchebiner Rav, his *rebbe* Rav Moshe Schneider *zt"l* and many others. Additionally, relevant stories told by Rav Moshe's *talmidim* about Rav Moshe himself were selected from the Hebrew books *Gadol B'kirbech* and *Me'onos Arayos* to add context and give readers a glimpse of the greatness of the author, thereby enhancing their ability to properly appreciate and absorb, Rav Moshe's elevated words.

We conclude with a heartfelt *tefillah* that Hashem grant Rav Moshe *shlita* many more years of strength and tranquility, so that we may continue to learn from the wellsprings of his Torah and wisdom. Just as we have merited to bring this volume to completion, may we be privileged to continue publishing more of his teachings for the benefit of Klal Yisrael.

Bereishis

The Purpose of the Torah's Stories

בראשית ברא אלהים.

In the beginning, Hashem created (Bereishis 1:1).

Rashi cites Rav Yitzchak's explanation why the Torah begins with the account of creation rather than the *mitzvos*. He says that it is because the nations of the world accuse us of being bandits who conquered Eretz Yisrael from its rightful owners. *Klal Yisrael* responds that *Hashem* created the world, and it is his. He granted the land to the seven nations when He so desired, and He took it from them and gave it to us when He desired.

How does Rav Yitzchak answer the essence of his question that the Torah should begin with the *mitzvos*? Although there was a specific need to tell the story of creation, why does the Torah continue with the story of the *Avos*?

Rav Yitzchak's teaching reveals the proper perspective on all the stories in the Torah. They are not mere historical tales; they are relevant to our lives to this very day. These stories carry practical lessons, *halachos*, and instructions for how we should conduct our lives. His teaching is not unique to the story of creation; it is an example of how we should understand the entire *Sefer Bereishis* and all of the stories included.

Rav Moshe Schneider, often incorporated stories of *gedolim* into his *shmuessen*. Rav Yechezkel Abramsky expressed his disapproval, believing that *bachurim* should not waste their precious time hearing stories. When Rav Moshe Schneider pointed to *Sefer Bereishis* as proof of the importance of stories, Rav Abramsky countered that *Sefer Bereishis* is not merely a collection of stories; it contains instructions for conducting our lives properly.



The Root of Kefirah

בראשית ברא אלהים.

In the beginning, Hashem created (Bereishis 1:1).

The Midrash relates that a heretic once approached Rabi Akiva and asked, “Who created the world?”

Rabi Akiva replied, “HaKadosh Baruch Hu.”

The heretic demanded, “Show me clear proof of this.”

Rabi Akiva replied, “Come back tomorrow.”

The next day, when the heretic returned, Rabi Akiva pointed to the garment the heretic was wearing and asked, “Who made this garment?”

“The weaver,” the heretic answered.

“I don’t believe you,” Rabi Akiva said. “Show me clear proof!”

The heretic responded, “What proof can I give you? Don’t you know that the weaver made this garment?”

Rabi Akiva replied, “And don’t you know that HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the world?”

Defeated, the heretic departed.

Rabi Akiva’s students, who had been listening to the exchange, asked him, “Rebbi, what was the clear proof you gave?”

Rabi Akiva explained, “My children, just as a house testifies to its

builder, a garment testifies to its weaver, and a door to its carpenter, so too the world testifies to HaKadosh Baruch Hu as its Creator.”

Rabi Akiva demonstrated that believing in Hashem is self-evident. How then can educated and intelligent people deny the obvious and declare themselves atheists?

Rabi Elchanan Wasserman explains that the root of *kefirah*, heresy, lies in man’s desire for freedom. If he were to acknowledge a Creator, he would be forced to conduct himself in accordance with His will. Denying the obvious is the only way he can fulfill his heart’s desires. The Torah warns, *Ki hashochad ye’aver eini chachamim* — “bribery blinds the eyes of the wise” (*Devarim* 16:19). When a person is determined to reach a certain conclusion, even the clearest evidence will be ignored.

When creating man, Hashem said to the Heavenly Court, *naaseh adam* — “let us make man” (*Bereishis* 1:26). Rashi notes that using the plural *naaseh* falsely implies that others assisted Him in creation. Nevertheless, the Torah records this terminology to teach us a lesson in *middos*: to ask permission from those of lesser stature when undertaking an action. The Midrash teaches that when Moshe Rabbeinu wrote this *pasuk* he asked, “Master of the World! Why do you give the heretics justification for their erroneous beliefs?” Hashem answered, “Write. He who wishes to err shall err.”

Why would the Torah risk leading people astray just to teach a lesson in *middos*? Rav Elchonon explains that there is no real risk; those who seek the truth will find it, while those who wish to arrive at other conclusions will do so regardless. Only one who “wishes to err” will become a heretic; an objective person will not be led astray.

He added that the prohibition of *kefirah* is *V’lo sasuru acharei levavchem* — “you shall not stray after your hearts” (*Bamidbar* 15:39). The Torah recognizes that the root of heretical thinking is in the desires of the heart rather than the intellect of the mind.

When Rav Chaim Brisker served as Rosh Yeshivah in Volozhin, he was asked to engage with a *bachur* who had veered from the path of Torah, claiming to struggle with questions in *emunah*. Rav Chaim replied

that if the *bachur* truly had questions, he would answer them. But if he had “answers” to justify his actions, there was nothing to discuss. For a true believer, no question can shake his *emunah* — but for one who has “answers,” no refutation will suffice.

Even Open Miracles Have No Effect

Someone remarked to Rav Moshe that the unfortunate state of American Jewry is due to the rampant materialism in America. Being so busy with material pursuits, people go through life without stopping to think about religious matters. If only Hashem would show them open miracles, they would be shocked out of their complacency and do *teshuvah*.

Rav Moshe answered ruefully: To someone steeped in material pursuits, even open miracles will not help. If one does not seek to be inspired, he will simply brush off even an open miracle and continue his life as usual.



Studying the Ways of the Wicked

והארץ היתה תוהו.

And the earth was empty (Bereishis 1:2).

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2:5) teaches that *aretz* in the *pasuk* refers to the deeds of the wicked, while *ohr* refers to the deeds of the righteous. At first, it is unclear which deeds Hashem desires. When the Torah writes, *Vayar Elokim es ha'hor ki tov*, “And Hashem saw that the light was good,” we learn that Hashem desires the deeds of the righteous.

How can we even entertain the possibility that Hashem would desire the deeds of the wicked over those of the righteous?

There are two ways a person can be inspired to dedicate his life to Torah: by observing the corrupt ways of the wicked and realizing that only a life of Torah can bring true meaning; or by observing the elevated conduct of the righteous and being inspired to follow their path. *Chazal* teach that both approaches can be effective, and we could not know which approach Hashem desires until the Torah revealed that He prefers we be inspired by the ways of the righteous. Although studying the conduct of the wicked can also motivate effectively, it inevitably leaves a negative spiritual impact on one's soul.



The Hidden Light

וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך.

And Hashem saw that the light was good, and Hashem made a separation between the light and the darkness (Bereishis 1:4).

Rashi explains that Hashem saw that this light was not suited for the wicked and therefore separated it for the righteous in the World to Come.

The benefit which could be derived from the original light was dependent on one's level, allowing the righteous to benefit fully but not allowing the wicked to benefit. Hashem saw that it would be impossible for the wicked to survive in darkness, so he put this light away for the next world in which there will no longer be any wicked people. However, even then the righteous will only benefit according to their level. We must do everything we can to avoid the great shame in the next world when our shortcomings will be exposed to all.

We say in the Haggadah, *Bring close the day which is not day or night*. In the World to Come, light and darkness will not be separated by times but by the individual.



A Tzaddik's Mitzvos

ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך.

*And Hashem made a separation between the light and the darkness
(Bereishis 1:4).*

The Midrash teaches that the “light” refers to the actions of the righteous, and the “darkness” refers to the actions of the wicked.

Why must we separate between two opposites? Perhaps the Midrash is not referring to the sins of the wicked but their mitzvos. Even when the wicked perform a mitzvah which is outwardly similar to a *tzaddik's*, Hashem, who can discern the thoughts of each, differentiates between them. The difference between a mitzvah performed with heart and one performed by rote is as different as night and day.



The Halachic Definition of Night

ויקרא אלהים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה.

*And Hashem called the light “day,” and the darkness He called
“night” (Bereishis 1:5).*

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 2a) teaches that Hashem assigned light to serve during the day and darkness during the night, indicating that darkness is a distinct creation, not merely the absence of light. This idea is further reflected in the *brachah* of *yotzer ohr u'vorei choshech* – “who fashions light and creates darkness,” emphasizing that both light and darkness are independent phenomena.

Rabbeinu Tam rules that night begins seventy-two minutes after sunset. The Vilna Gaon asks: If such an intense level of darkness is required to be defined as night, then in places like Vilna there would be months in

which night never falls. Additionally, how were the *Rishonim* permitted to live in such regions if they were unable to perform nighttime *mitzvos* throughout the year?

The answer lies in this teaching of *Chazal*: Darkness is not the absence of light, but its own phenomenon. Halachic nightfall is defined by the onset of darkness, always seventy-two minutes after sunset, and not the absence of light which varies by region.

By following Rabbeinu Tam's opinion we express our *emunah* in the Torah's definition of reality, accepting that darkness is present even when our senses perceive otherwise.



Rav Chaim Druk related that he once discussed the topic of halachic nightfall with the Chazon Ish, who was adamant that nighttime cannot be at such a late time as Rabbeinu Tam suggests. He then commented cryptically "In the World to Come we will understand Rabbeinu Tam's ruling. In this world *halachah* follows the *poskim*." Perhaps the Chazon Ish was hinting at the explanation above; Rabbeinu Tam's opinion follows the true reality, one that we can only grasp in the World to Come. Until then we must follow *our* perception of reality and treat the absence of light as nighttime.

Our *gedolim* held varying opinions regarding Rabbeinu Tam's *zman*.

Rav Moshe once visited the Klausenberger Rebbe to speak in learning with him. Although he was already very weak at the time, when the topic of Rabbeinu Tam's *zman* arose, the Rebbe vigorously debated the matter. He said that 150 years ago everyone followed Rabbeinu Tam's *zman*, and did not even consider the other opinions. His father, Rav Zvi Hersh of Rudnik, remembered seeing the Ksav Sofer davening Minchah at the very end of Rabbeinu Tam's *zman*.

The Belzer Rebbe kept Rabbeinu Tam's *zman* when in *chutz la'aretz*. However, when he arrived in Eretz Yisrael, he began keeping an earlier *zman* of 50 minutes after sunset. His brother-in-law, the Mekor Baruch

of Seret-Vizhnitz, told Rav Moshe that when he asked the Belzer Rebbe about this change, he explained that a Yid from Eretz Yisrael had visited his father Rav Yissochor Dov and told him that in Eretz Yisrael the stars appear earlier than in *chutz la'aretz*. At the time, his father had ruled that one may keep an earlier *zman* in Eretz Yisrael, and he follows his father's ruling.



The Satmar Rav's Protest

On one of the Satmar Rav's visits to Eretz Yisrael, Rav Amram Blau requested his assistance in organizing a public protest regarding the rampant *chillul Shabbos* taking place in Yerushalayim at the time.

The Satmar Rav responded: "Why do you look for *chillul Shabbos* amongst the secular Jews? Why not protest the *chillul Shabbos* in our own *kehillah* first? On Motza'ei Shabbos, I witnessed many people performing *melachah* less than seventy-two minutes past sunset. Does this practice not call for a protest?"

Rav Amram excused himself, arguing that this was the accepted custom amongst the Jews of Yerushalayim for many generations and it would be difficult to convince the people to change their ways.

The Satmar Rav retorted, "*Minhag* has the same letters as Gehinnom; a custom which contradicts *halachah* carries no weight."

With those words, he dismissed Rav Amram and declined to participate in his protest.

Turning to Rav Moshe, who had witnessed the exchange, he lamented the laxity amongst American Jews regarding Rabbeinu Tam's *zman*.

"When we arrived in America there was a meeting of many leading *rabbanim* to establish a community-wide custom regarding the proper *zmanim* for Shabbos. It was decided that all the *kehillos* would be stringent in this matter, beginning Shabbos at sunset and keeping Shabbos until seventy-two minutes after sunset. We

kept our end of the deal [to begin Shabbos at sunset], they did not keep theirs.”



The Stars' Role

ויעש אלהים את שני המאורות הגדולים את המאור הגדול לממשלת היום
ואת המאור הקטן לממשלת הלילה ואת הכוכבים.

Hashem made the two great luminaries, the large luminary to rule by day, and the small luminary to rule at night, and the stars (Bereishis 1:16).

Rashi cites the Gemara (*Chullin* 60b) which teaches that the sun and the moon were created of equal size. After the moon complained that it is impossible for two kings to share one crown, Hashem made the moon smaller. He then gave the moon accompanying stars to appease it.

The Brisker Rav remarked that true *gedolim* shine like the sun and do not need to be surrounded by others who will publicize their greatness. Only those of lesser stature require followers to spread their light.

The *baalei mussar* taught another lesson: Even when rebuke and punishment are unavoidable, care must be taken to appease the one being punished and keep his honor intact.



Prioritizing Our Own Spiritual Needs

ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו.

Hashem said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Bereishis 1:26).

Rashi notes that using the plural “*Naaseh*” falsely implies that others

assisted Him in creation. Nevertheless, the Torah records this terminology to teach us a lesson in *middos*: to ask permission from those of lesser stature when undertaking an action.

When the Chasam Sofer instituted his famous Policy of Separation, severing all ties with the Reform communities of Hungary, others argued that he was giving up an opportunity to influence those communities positively. His *talmidim* defended his position by citing this Rashi. The Torah did not refrain from teaching us a lesson in *middos* because of the potential harm this might cause the wicked. Our own spiritual needs must always be prioritized over the responsibility to influence others.



The Prohibition of Eating Meat

הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב.

Behold I have given you all the grass (Bereishis 1:29).

Rashi explains that Adam was not permitted to kill an animal and eat its meat; only Noach was given permission to do so.

Rashi's wording implies that the prohibition was only to kill an animal for its meat, but not to eat the meat of a previously slaughtered animal. The Rambam (*Melachim* 9:1, see *Kesef Mishnah*), however, writes that Adam did not have the prohibition of *eiver min hachai* because he was prohibited from eating all meat in any case.

Rashi understands that the reason for the prohibition was because man was not yet permitted to cause an animal suffering for his benefit. The Rambam understands that the prohibition was because the wicked generations preceding the *mabul* were on par with the animals, as the *pasuk* says, *And the excess of man over an animal is nothing (Koheles 3:19)*, and it would not be appropriate for them to eat an animal's flesh. Only after the *mabul*, when the wicked generations had been replaced

by Noach and his family did mankind become distinct from other creatures. At that point, it was permitted for him to use the animals for his own benefit.

The Torah Perspective on Veganism

When Rav Moshe served as *Rav* in Johannesburg, he was confronted by community members who were uncomfortable with slaughtering animals for meat. He gave a public address to explain the Torah perspective on the matter:

“Performing the *mitzva* of *shechitah* with a blessing and consuming the meat of the animal fulfills the true purpose for which these animals have been created. Refraining from slaughter does not help the animals, rather it keeps them from fulfilling their true purpose. This is like a surgeon who does not perform life-saving surgery because of the suffering it will cause the patient. He has not helped the patient but harmed him.

“A majority of those who are ideologically opposed to consuming meat live like animals. Such people may actually be justified in their beliefs, as the Gemara teaches that an *am haaretz* should not eat meat as he is no better than the animal itself. But for an upstanding Jew there is no basis for refraining from consuming meat.

“It is important to note that many of these people are not truly merciful; it is merely an external show. The Nazis were the leaders of the anti-slaughtering movement, claiming that it was cruel to the animals. Yet they had no qualms committing the most horrific acts to innocent women and children.”



The Gift of Shabbos

ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה.

And Hashem finished on the seventh day the work he had done (Bereishis 2:2).

Rashi notes that this *pasuk* implies that the work was concluded on the seventh day itself. He explains that the world, though physically complete, still lacked *menuchah*. *Menuchah* came with the arrival of Shabbos, and the world was truly finished. *Tosafos* (*Sanhedrin* 38a) adds that *menuchah* is not merely the absence of labor but a distinct creation.

The *menuchah* of Shabbos is not physical rest alone. When a Jew refrains from *melachah* on Shabbos, he experiences a deep sense of serenity that transcends nature. This elevated state was only introduced into the world on Shabbos.

The Brisker Rav explained the *nusach* of *tefillah*: *You did not give it to the nations of the lands ... and in its rest the uncircumcised shall not dwell*. The first praise refers to the laws of Shabbos. The second refers to the unique *menuchah* of Shabbos, a gift granted only to *Klal Yisrael*. Even if a non-Jew were to fully observe the prohibitions of Shabbos, he would not attain this *menuchah*, for it is a gift reserved exclusively for *Klal Yisrael*.



Torah of Eretz Yisrael

וזבה הארץ ההיא טוב.

And the gold of that land is good (Bereishis 2:12).

The Midrash teaches that this hints at the higher quality of Torah studied in Eretz Yisrael.

Torah study is not a mere intellectual pursuit, but a tool through