

The Gutman Edition



RAV SHAUL ALTER
on **Chumash**
Bereishis

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Divrei Berachah from the Rosh Yeshiva* for the Sefer Alei Deshe on Elul-Tishrei

I am happy to hear that the sefer is close to publication. I cannot comment on the quality of the work, as I cannot read English. However, I know that entire communities will gain from this English edition.

The Torah was written on stones in seventy languages, as the commentaries explain, not necessarily so that the nations should understand it—in fact, according to one opinion, the writing was covered with plaster. It was because the Jews would eventually be exiled and scattered in all sorts of places. When the Torah was written in all of these languages, this served to purify the *galus* somewhat.

Chazal objected to the translation of the Torah to Greek; that is because the intention was bad. The purpose then was to extract the Torah from its holy confines and put it in foreign hands. But when done as a mitzvah commanded by the Torah, it was a means of *taharah*.

The Torah uses words with roots in foreign languages. Chazal point out *totafos*, for example. The explanation given by the Shelah and others—all languages used for Torah learning are rooted in the original *leshon hakodesh* with which Hashem created the world—can be relevant here, in a sense.

I am in no way comparing my words to the Torah, as obviously there is no comparison. Yet perhaps the above can apply in some way to ‘small-talk of Torah’ (*pitpatya d’Oraysa*), and certainly it applies to the *pesukim* and *maamarei Chazal* quoted within.

This work was produced to benefit the public, and *ashrei chelkam* to all who had a part in it.

* Delivered on the *Libeinu B’Toraso* hotline to Yitzchok Rozenthal.

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Introduction

With Hashem's help, we are pleased to present ***Alei Deshe on Chumash***, a selection of talks and *derashos* given by the Gerrer Rosh Yeshiva, *HaRav HaGaon* Rav Shaul Alter *shlita*.

Since 5781, we have published ***Alei Deshe***, a weekly newsletter of the Rosh Yeshiva's talks on *parshas hashavua*, rendered into English. With Hashem's help, this *gilyon* has been well received around the world. At the request of many—and with encouragement from the Rosh Yeshiva, who has spoken many times of the great benefit to the *tzibbur* in publishing *divrei Torah* in English—we have decided to compile this *sefer* based on the hundreds of previously published *gilyonos*, on all the *parshiyos* of the Torah.

This follows the first *sefer* in the ***Alei Deshe*** series, on Elul and the *Yamim Nora'im*, which with Hashem's help was warmly received. Countless readers found it a source of *chizuk*, reflection, and *avodas Hashem*. This showed us the need and the privilege of continuing to make the Rosh Yeshiva's Torah accessible on further topics as well.

The talks delivered by the Rosh Yeshiva on many occasions over the years, and primarily at *shalosh seudos* every Shabbos, are full of *chiddushei Torah* on topics of *Chassidus*, *cheshbon hanefesh*, *teshuvah*, *emunah*, and *avodas Hashem*. Spoken with deep understanding, in a clear, penetrating style, with a true love for *Klal Yisrael*, their purpose is to inspire the listener and draw him close to *avodas Hashem*.

This *sefer* was compiled from a careful selection of the talks that appeared in years of *gilyonos*. They are adapted for the reader's benefit, while the content and spirit remain faithful to the source.

The English translation was done professionally and with care, with minor clarifications added where necessary.

If anything is not understandable, the mistake is ours.

We would like to take this opportunity to express profound gratitude to all those who took part in publishing the *Alei Deshe gilyonos*, from which these talks were culled.

First and foremost, to the premier supporter of the project, Rav Yosef Wassertheil and family, the initiators and supporters of these *gilyonos*. Their part in both the substance and the spirit of this undertaking is truly priceless.

Likewise, we thank the generous people who have taken part in supporting and distributing the *gilyonos* over the years: Rav Shaul Wassertheil and family, Rav Pesach Kohenstam and family, Rav Zev Alter and family, and Rav Refael Yehudah Rotman and family.

Special appreciation to the patron of the present edition, Rav Yehudah Leib Avraham Gutman and family, whose generous support made the publication of this *sefer* possible.

With quiet devotion and mighty love of Torah, they undertook to support the printing and distribution of this edition, as part of the larger initiative of spreading the Torah of the Rosh Yeshiva *shlita*. May their patronage bring *berachah* and *hatzlachah* to them and their children, with good health, *parnassah*, and *nachas* from all their descendants for many years to come.

We hope that this *sefer* will be a source of *chizuk* and *hisorerus* to every reader. And may it be a *zechus* for the Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* and his family, whose Torah and devotion continue to illuminate the path of so many.

Maareches Alei Deshe

Yitzchok Rosenthal — Yisroel Yosef Rottenberg

Bereishis

Lessons from Creation

The Story of Creation¹

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Bereishis 1:1).

Rashi, citing Chazal, questions why the Torah begins by recounting the Creation. Since the Torah is Hashem's instruction to us, wouldn't it be more appropriate to open with the first mitzvah, that of Rosh Chodesh in *Parshas Bo*? Chazal answer that the Creation is recounted as a rejoinder to the claim of the nations over Eretz Yisrael. They claim that we are thieves, who took Eretz Yisrael and removed them from their land. The Torah declares that Hashem created the world; it is His, and He does with it as He sees fit.

The Rebbe Reb Bunim² points out that Chazal never resolved the difficulty. The question was that even if mentioning the Creation is important, it should be written after the *mitzvos*, as the Torah is primarily a book of *mitzvos*. The point that we must counter the

1. Bereishis 5783.

2. Kol Simchah.

claim of the nations only explains why it was necessary to mention the Creation, not why the Torah should open with that story.

Yet it is difficult to understand Reb Bunim's question. If Creation is to be mentioned, it should be first, in chronological order. By explaining the purpose of mentioning Creation, the ordering of the topics is automatically explained.

The Maharal³ phrases the question differently: The Gemara (*Nedarim* 22b) says that if Klal Yisrael had not sinned, they would not need all the *mussar* of the *nevi'im*; it would suffice to have the *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*, and Sefer Yehoshua which discusses the apportionment of Eretz Yisrael. Even if it is necessary to discuss the Creation, why does it belong in the Chumash? It would have been fitting to be in a *sefer* of its own.

The Maharal answers that most *mitzvos* of the Torah are, in fact, connected to Eretz Yisrael. The Beis Hamikdash and its *avodah*, as well as many agricultural *mitzvos*, are tied to the land of Eretz Yisrael. Since most *mitzvos* depend on Eretz Yisrael, it must be made clear that Bnei Yisrael are its rightful inhabitants.

But the question remains. Perhaps the first chapter of Bereishis, which recounts the Creation, belongs in the Torah, but why is it necessary to have the remainder of Sefer Bereishis and the beginning of Sefer Shemos?

The Sfas Emes explains⁴ that Chazal here should not be taken literally: We do not find non-Jews asking this question, and even if they did, there would be no point in answering. They have no interest in our answers, and those who reject our connection to Eretz Yisrael would not find our answer persuasive.

The "claim of the nations" mentioned in Chazal are the foreign ideas in our hearts. Each of us feels that we live in our own merit,

3. *Gur Aryeh*.

4. 5631 s.v. *b'Rashi*.

and have rights to our place in the world. For the generation that entered Eretz Yisrael, this foreign idea would take the form of: *We chased out the Canaanim with our own force, and we retain the right to Eretz Yisrael.* But this, the Torah teaches us, is a form of thievery: The land belongs to Hashem, and He gives it to whomever He wishes.

To forestall these ideas, it is necessary to learn about the lives of the *Avos* and *galus Mitzrayim*. It is not enough to know that Hashem created the world. We must know how to purify ourselves so that we may be the rightful inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael.

Our Potential for Greatness⁵

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַמָּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים וְגו' וְאֶת הַמָּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשָׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה
וְאֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים.

And God made the two great luminaries . . . and the lesser luminary to dominate the night; and the stars (Bereishis 1:16).

Rashi writes, citing a Midrash,⁶ that upon minimizing the moon, Hashem gave it a large entourage of stars in appeasement. These stars are not only great in number, but in significance as well.

The *pasuk* in Tehillim (147:4) states, מוֹנֶה מִסְפָּר לְכוֹכָבִים לְכֹלם שְׁמוֹת, יִקְרָא – *He counts the number of the stars, to all of them He assigns names.* The Sfas Emes⁷ questions why we praise Hashem for His knowledge of the number of stars. Wouldn't it be a greater praise to say that Hashem created the stars? Certainly, if He created them, He is able to count them.⁸ The Sfas Emes explains that stars are not countable because they are beyond what is described by numbers. When

5. Bereishis 5782.

6. Bereishis Rabbah 6:4.

7. Shemos 5638.

8. See Maharal Chiddushei Aggados, Sanhedrin 39a.