

## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

*In the Beginning (Bereshis 1:1)* Bereshis, says the Rokeach, is the same letters as *bris aish*, a covenant of fire. The Rokeach explains that the meaning behind this is that Bris Milah saves a person from the fires of Gehinnom, as it says in Eruvin 19b, Avraham Avinu sits at the entrance of Gehinnom and saves any person who has a Bris Milah from entering.<sup>1</sup>

The Talmud says (15b) that a person who reads the Shema and is meticulous in pronouncing its letters correctly, merits to have Gehinnom cooled off for him. Maharal (Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Havodah) quotes the Gemara (Pesachim 54) that Gehinnom was created on Monday the second day of creation, and explains that the first day was called *echad* since it was a day of unity, there was only one day at that point. Conceptually however, the second day was the opposite of unity, for it was the beginning of multiplicity. People have a close relationship with their creator, and that relationship is fundamentally unbreakable, which is the opposite of the concept of Gehinnom which implies an apparent distance from Hashem. Everything at its deepest point is really attached to the will of Hashem. Bris Milah is the covenant of Avraham, the “father of many nations,” and the one who brought together converts from all walks of life into the monotheistic way of life. Yechezkel (33:24) said “Avraham was *echad*.” Avraham was the great unifier who united the word. The Midrash expresses this (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 8:10) “Rabbi Berechia taught, ‘we have a young *achos*’ this refers to Avraham who unified *icha* everyone who would ever walk this planet”. For Avraham showed everyone that God is one. The *bris*, the covenant of Avraham is the antidote to the fires of Hell.

When our sages taught (Nedarim 22a) that ‘anyone who gets angry, all forms of hell come upon him,’ perhaps this reflects that reality that an angry person alienates others and ruins relationships. This is Gehinnom; disunity and lack of connection. It also disconnects him from Hashem, since anger at ones experiences and circumstances indicates a lack of awareness that the benevolent creator actually is engaged in his life and designing his experiences.

Someone who remains cognizant of their deep connection to Hashem, is impervious to Gehinnom, they will always remain attached. As the Midrash says (Tanchuma,

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<sup>1</sup> R. Shlomo Kluger (Chochmas Shlomo, Chayei Sara p. 108, and 123) writes that this applies to women as well, based upon the gemara (Avodah Zara 27a) that women are considered as if they are circumcised. See also Megadim Chadashim to Bamidbar p. 2)

## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH PARSHAS BERESHIS

Reeh 13) “Her home does not fear the snow, for her household is clothed in wool.’ The word wool is *shanim* and can also be read *shnayim*. Her family does not need to fear Gehinnom for they are armed with *shnyaim* two things, *milah* and *priyah* – the two steps required for a correct Bris Milah.”

***In the beginning... (Gen. 1:1).*** It says in the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Chagigah* 10a) that R. Yonah said in the name of R. Levi that G-d created the world with the letter *bet* (ב), because that letter represents the idea of “blessing” (ברכה, which starts with the letter *beis*); and He did not create the world with the letter *alef* (א), because that letter represents the concept of “cursing” (ארורה, which starts with the letter *alef*). God said that if He would create the world with the letter *alef* which represents cursing, it would have no chance to last. So He created the world with the letter *bet* so that maybe it will last. See Maharal’s *Tiferet Yisrael* (ch. 34) for a deep explanation into this rabbinic tradition concerning the correlation between blessing and multiplicity. **R. Eliyahu Guttmacher**<sup>2</sup> (1796–1874), a student of R. Akiva Eiger (1761–1837) who cites this Yerushalmi when discussing the custom of naming a child after one of their ancestors. Sometimes, people want to name a newborn child who is a girl after a male relative, or vice versa. In such cases, they do not give the child a name of the opposite gender, but rather find a similar name which has one or two letters the same, and given that name to the child. R. Guttmacher writes that this idea is justified in light of the Yerushalmi cited above, which says that the word *bereshis* is associated with *bracha* just because the first letter of *bereshis* is a *beis* like *bracha*. This shows that a name or word can be associated with another name or word simply by sharing one or two letters with that name or word. Nonetheless, R. Guttmacher notes that in order for this case to be truly analogous to the Yerushalmi, one should optimally strive to have the *first* letter of the child’s name match the *first* letter of the relative’s name, just as the *first* letter of *bereshis* matches that of *bracha*.

***In the beginning... (Gen. 1:1).*** The *Baal ha-Turim* (Gen. 1:1) writes that the word *bereshis* can be descrambled to spell out the words *bais rosh* (literally, “the house at the head”), which alludes to the First Temple. The *Peirush ha-Rokeach* already suggests this idea, and even finds a more detailed allusion to the First Temple: The word *bereshis* is spelled בראשית. If we treat the letter *beis* as a word on its own, it becomes *bayis*

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<sup>2</sup> *Drashos Vichiddushei Rabbi Eliyahu Guttmacher, Margolios Tovah*, pg. 3 s.v. *yesh lilmod*

## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

(“house”), then next three letters form the word *rosh* (literally, “head”, but in this context, “the first” like *Rosh Hashanah*, or *Rosh Chodesh*), and the last two letters, *tav* and *yod* have a numeric value of 410. The First Temple stood for 410 years, and thus the first word of the Torah reads "The First Temple will stand 410 years. This idea can be further explained by the midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 12:6 s.v. *vayehi*) which tells us that from the moment that the world was created until the building of the *mishkan* (precursor to the Temple) the *shechina* (Divine Presence) did not rest in this world. It was only when the *mishkan* was built that finally God's presence found a place in this world. Thus, the very building of this world, which we are taught (Tanchuma to Nasso 16) was created for the very purpose of "providing God a dwelling place down below" is hinted to in the first word of creation, since it is creation's purpose, and that process was fulfilled most fully and magnificently in the Temple in Jerusalem.

***In the beginning... (Gen. 1:1).*** R. Mordechai HaKohen of Tzfas (1523–1598) in *Sifsei Kohen Al ha-Torah* explains the ideas behind two more ways of descrambling the word *bereshis* which conjure the creation of Man: *rav ashis* (“I will place a master”) and *shir taav* (“He desires a song”). He explains that G-d desired, so to speak, that there will be an entity on Earth that will sing His praises in the same ways that the angels in the Heavens sing His praises. To that effect, He created Man and charged man with the responsibility of singing G-d’s praises on Earth. By creating Man, G-d also placed a master over all the creatures of the physical world.

***In the beginning... (Gen. 1:1).*** Another permutation of the letters of *bereishit* spells out the words *bris* (covenant) and *aish* (fire). *Peirush ha-Rokeach* explains that this alludes to the fact the covenant of circumcision (*bris milah*) has the power to save one from the fires of *Gehinnom*, as the Talmud (*Eruvin* 19a) says that Abraham stands at entrance to *Gehinnom* in order to save anybody has a circumcision.<sup>3</sup> This can be explained in accordance with the Maharal (*Nesiv ha-Avodah*). The Talmud (*Brachos* 15b) says that if one reads *Kriyas Shema*, and is particular with the pronunciation of each letter, then they will cool of *Gehinnom* for him. Maharal explains that this is

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<sup>3</sup> See also my *Va'ani Bashem Atzapeh* to Tehillim 84. When Mishlei 31:21 speaks of the Woman of Valor, it says that nobody in her household fears snow, because everybody is wearing special color-garments (*shanim*) which will keep them insulated. Rashi and *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Reay* 13, and *Tanchuma Buber Bereshis* 33) explain that the *shanim* here actually refer to the two (*shnayim*) stages of circumcision—cutting the foreskin (*milah*) and peeling the remaining skin (*priyah*)—which insulates an individual against the “snow” of *Gehinnom*.

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## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH PARSHAS BERESHIS

because *Gebinnom* was created on the Second Day of Creation—the day which epitomizes the concept of separation (because on that day, G-d separated the waters above from the waters below, and because the number two itself conveys the idea of a split), while *Kriyas Shema* is the ultimate declaration of the Oneness of G-d. This is why reading *Kriyas Shema* counteracts the effects of *Gebinnom*. In the same way, the act of circumcision is also something which unites, rather than divides. This is because through his circumcision Abraham became the “father of many nations” (Bereshis 17:5) in that he assumed the responsibility for the worldwide dissemination of monotheism. In the same way that Maharal explains why *Kriyas Shema* counteracts the effects of *Gebinnom*, circumcision has the power to do the same. With this in mind, we can understand the Gemara (*Nedarim* 22a) which says: Anyone who gets angry—all sorts of *Gebinnom* dominate him. The *Peirush ha-Rosh* explains that this means that his time in This World will be like *Gebinnom* for him. This is because one who regularly becomes angry separates himself from the rest of society, and whenever there is separation and multiplicity (which contrasts with the Oneness of G-d, and the universal message of Abraham), the horrors of *Gebinnom* reign free. This may be alluded to in the Gemara’s wording which refers to “sorts” of *Gebinnom*, implying that *Gebinnom* itself is not monolithic, but is comprised of multiple elements.

**God created...** (Gen. 1:1). The Ostrovtzer Gaon (1851–1928)<sup>4</sup> explains that the word *bara* (“He created”) alludes to the three areas in which a special blessing is required to be successful: Children, Life, and Sustenance alludes *Bara* . בני חיי ומזוני<sup>5</sup> to Children because the Hebrew word *ben* (“son”) is translated by the Targumim into Aramaic as *bara*. Life is alluded in *bara* because life depends on being healthy, the Hebrew word for which is *briyus*. Finally, Sustenance is hinted to in the word *bara* because when the Torah describes Joseph’s ten brothers travelling to Egypt to find food (Gen. 42:3), the word for “food” is *bar*. Moreover, the Ostrovtzer Gaon points out that the *gematria* of the word *bara* (ברא = 203) equals the same as the phrase “Children, Life, and Sustenance” (בני חיי ומזוני = 203).

***In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth* (Gen. 1:1).** R. Mordechai HaKohen of Tzfas writes in *Sisei Koben Al ha-Torah* that the Torah

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<sup>4</sup> *Kovetz Asifas Chachamim* (Malnitz, 5688), cited by *Olas Shabbos be-Shabbato* (Bobov), p. 1. See also *Siach Sarfei Kodesh* (vol. 1, pg. 12 in the new print) who cites this explanation in the name of R. S. Y. of Bialeveig in the name of his grandfather R. Yerachmiel.

<sup>5</sup> Moed Kattan 28a

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## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH PARSHAS BERESHIS

describes G-d as creating the world with His name *Elokim* because that name appears as though it is in the plural form. He explains that this because all elements of creation include male and female aspects. For example, the sun is called a *shemesh* (male) and a *chamah* (female), and the moon is similarly called a *yareiach* (male) and a *levanah* (female).<sup>6</sup> Adam was also created with two faces, a male and female face (see *Brachos* 61a). Even trees and plants have male and female components (i.e., the pollen and stamen), and even work instruments are usually made up of two parts (like the two blades of scissors, or like a mortar and pestle). Because of this, the Torah uses the name *Elokim* describe G-d because that name is all-encompassing and includes each partner in these pairs, as both were created by G-d.

***In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth (Gen. 1:1).*** The Chida, R. Chaim Yosef David Azulai in *Pnei David* (37) cites *Midrash Mei ha-Shiloach* which makes an amazing claim based on this verse: This opening verse of Genesis contains all the vowelization marks of Hebrew, except for the vowelization mark *shuruk* because the word *shuruk* (שֵׁרֻק) has the same letters as the word *sheker* (שֵׁקֶר, “falsehood”), and the world was created through only truth, not *sheker*. This Midrash further claims that anybody who only speaks the truth will never stumble in sin. This lesson may be illustrated by a story cited by *Sefer Chassidim* (647): A Rabbi once told an overly wicked man, “I can give you a *tikkun* very easily, all I ask is that you accept upon yourself one easy thing: to only say the truth.” By taking up a vow of truthfulness, the this wicked man stopped sinning because every time he was on his way to sinning, he thought to himself: “If somebody will ask me, from where I am coming or to where I am going, I will be forced to tell him the truth and I will be embarrassed.” Because of this, the wicked man resolved to stop sinning, and eventually repented his wicked ways. This is also alluded to in the end of *Makkos* where R. Simlai said that the prophet Habakuk encapsulated the entire the Torah by saying “A righteous man lives through his trustworthiness”, if one simply resolves to be “trustworthy” and only say the truth, then he will automatically become a righteous man.

***In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth (Gen. 1:1).*** R. Aharon ben Yosef HaKohen (one of the Tosafists) notes in his work *Sefer ha-Gan* that this verse contains seven words, each one of which correspond to one of the seven days

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<sup>6</sup>This idea is already found in the *Tikkunei Zohar* 13b.

## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

of creation, and one of the seven books of the Torah.<sup>7</sup> [Though there are 5 books of the Torah, the Talmud (Shabbos 115b) says that *Vayehi Binsoab* (*Bamidbar* 10:35-36) is in a certain respect its own book, thus breaking Bamidbar from 1 book into 3. There are therefore many Rabbinic teaching about the 7 books of the Torah, as well as those that speak of 5 books.

***And God said, 'let there be light' (Gen. 1:3).*** *Paneach Raza* explains that the first appearance of the word *ohr* (“light”)<sup>8</sup> in the Torah proceeds eighty letters from the beginning<sup>9</sup> because “light” is dependent on the mouth (*peh*, and the numerical value of the letter *peh* is 80). He explains that true enlightenment only comes from the Torah, which itself comes from G-d’s Divine Mouth. He also writes that when King David authored Tehllim 119, which contains eight verses per each letter of the entire Hebrew Alphabet, he purposely did not mention the word light or any conjugations thereof until he reached the letter *peh* (Tehillim 119:130). Moreover, he points out that in the liturgical *yotzer* poem recited by some on Yom Kippur, each stanza represents a different letter of the Hebrew Alphabet and contains a word for light, except for the stanza of the letter *peh*. This is because the letter *peh* itself is the *entirely* light (because it is the source of light), so light need not be mentioned again.<sup>10</sup> R. Nosson Nota Shapiro also mentions in *Megaleh Amukos* (74) that the word “light” does not appear until after eighty letters in Genesis, and in Ps. 119 until the verses of the letter *peh*. He further writes (§182) that Moses ascended to his leadership position over the Jewish People at the age of eighty (see Ex. 7:7), because the letter *peh* (=80)

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<sup>7</sup> Even though we commonly think of the Torah as containing Five Books, the Mishnah (*Yadayim*, ch. 3) teaches that there are actually seven, because Num. 11:35–36 is considered a separate book. Therefore, what we call the Book of Numbers actually consists of three books: Num. 1:1–11:34, Num. 11:35–36, and Num. 11:37–36:13). When added to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, we get seven books in total.

<sup>8</sup> *Beer Shlomo* asks that if one counts, one will see that there are really 93 letters from the beginning of Genesis until the word *Ohr*. However, the truth is that this is not a difficulty because when *Megaleh Amukot* cites this tradition, he writes that there are 80 letters until the verse *And G-d said, 'let there be light'* (which there are), even though it is only after an additional 13 letters in that verse that the word *ohr* appears.

<sup>9</sup> The same explanation appears in *Peirush ha-Rokeach* (*Parshat Emor*, pg. 286) and *Sefer ha-Tagin* (pg. 51). See also Rabbeinu Efrayim (*Parshat Bereishit*, pg. 9) who writes that light was created with the letter *peh*. See also *Regel Yesharah* (s.v. 2) who discusses this (and cited the *Megaleh Amukot* cited below), *Igra de-Pirka* (at the end, §20), and *Igra de-Kallah* (*Parshat Bereishit*).

<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the *Rokeach* (*Hilchos Yom Kippur* §216) points out that in the preceding stanza, the word light appears twice in order to make up for its absence in the next stanza. See also his *Peirush ha-Rokeach* (to *Parshas Bereishit*, pg. 55) where he also makes this point.

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## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

is the secret behind light. Nonetheless, the assertion of the *Paneach Raza* and *Megaleh Amukot* concerning Ps. 119 is questionable because in v. 105, which is obviously before v. 130, the word *obr* already appears. This question is raised by *Beer Shlomo* (1<sup>st</sup> edition, Letter 2, 3).<sup>11</sup>

***And it shall divide between waters and waters... and it divided between the waters under the firmament and the waters above the firmament (Gen. 1:67).***

R. Yonasan Steif (*Amaros* to Gen. 1:6) explains that the Upper Waters are called “waters” but they are not actually “water” in the same physical sense as the Lower Waters. Rather, they are some sort of spiritual entity which are called “waters” because they serve as the spiritual root of the Lower Waters. This can be understood through an approach taken by R. Isaiah Horowitz known the as *Shelah*. R. Horowitz explained (*Shelah*, introduction, *last bayis*, pg. 10b) that the language of the Bible is called *Leshon HaKodesh* because every word in that language that denotes a physical element of reality also reflecting a spiritual reality. The source of this idea is the Bible’s use of the word “waters” for both something wholly physical and for something wholly spiritual.

***And God said, ‘the land should grow forth a growth—grass which sow seeds...’ (Gen. 1:11).***

R. Meir Yakov HaLevi Horowitz, a son of the legendary R. Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz of Frankfurt,<sup>12</sup> notes that the word *growth* (אֶשֶׂה) is superfluous in this verse. To account for this extra word, he points to a Mishnah (*Avos* 1:11), in which Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says that the world stands on three elements: Justice, Peace, and Truth (דִּין שְׁלוֹם אֱמֶת). The acronym which reflects these three elements is א״שׁד, so the Torah uses an extra word to teach that at the beginning of creation, G-d made sure that the land exude these three attributes.

***And they shall be for signs and for holidays, and for days and for years (Gen. 1:14).***

Rashi explains that when the luminaries do not shine as usual, it is a bad sign. The work *Daf Al Daf* (to Sukkah 29a) cites the testimony of R. Aryeh Pinsky who said that when he was a child (circa. 1955) , he merited to learn Chumash/Rashi with

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<sup>11</sup> See *Beer Shlomo* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Letter 2, 5) for an answer to this question, as well as *Megadim Chadashim Bereshis*, pg. 12) for another answer.

<sup>12</sup> R. Pinchas Horowitz, in the end of his work *Haflaah* (to Tractate *Kesuvos*) laments the untimely death of R. Meir Yaakov, his son and student to boot, who died at the tender age of 26. He praises R. Meir Yaakov as somebody “full of Torah and Fear of G-d, outstanding in his sharpness and expertise”.

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## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

his grandfather R. Eliyah Lopian in Yeshivat Kaminitz in Jerusalem. When they reached the verse “and they shall be signs...”, R. Lopian taught him the this comment of Rashi and added that on the day before the First World War broke out, he remembers that there was darkness outside in the middle of the day.

**And for holidays (Gen. 1:14).** *Sefer ha-Gan* (pg. 119) notes that the word “holidays” (מוֹעֲדִים) does not use the simple spelling, but is rather spelled out in full, the extra letter *vav* appearing in the word. He explains that this alludes to six (*vav* = 6) holidays which requires *Kiddush* in a cup of wine: Pesach, Shavuot, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Rosh HaShannah. He also finds two other connections between wine and the letter *vav* in the Bible: In Song of Songs, there is no verse which begins with the letter *vav* except for “And your palate is like good wine” (Song of Songs 7:17). And in Ps. 104 which discusses G-d creating the world, there is no verse which begins with the letter *vav* except for “And wine gladdens the hearts of Man” (Ps. 104:15).

**And G-d made two great luminaries... (Gen. 1:16).** Rashi explains that originally the sun and the moon were equal, but the moon complained against this arrangement and argued that two kings cannot function in tandem, so G-d made the moon smaller. This does not mean that beforehand, the sun and the moon literally radiated the same amount of light, and the moon later lost some of its luminescence. Rather, as Chasam Sofer explains (Toras Moshe to Bereshis 1:16, see also *Likkutei Basar Likkutei*), it means that originally, both the sun and the moon were independent sources of light. After the moon complained, it lost its independent ability to exude light and had to rely on the sun’s light. In effect, the relationship between the sun and the moon transformed from that of two equal partners to one of a giver (sun) and receiver (moon). Based on this, R. Isaac Chaver in *Afikei Yam* (to *Kesuvos* 2a) explains why the Mishnah (*Kesuvos* 2a) rules that a virgin should get married on Wednesday. It was on Wednesday that the relationship between the sun and the moon became that of a giver/influencer and receiver, and this paradigm mimics the relationship between man and wife where biologically, the man gives to his wife, and she takes that and uses what he "gives" her to create life.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Torah obligates a husband to

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<sup>13</sup> See further Likkutei Chaver ben Chaim to Bereshis 1:16 s.v. *vayaas*, and R. Moshe Shapiro (1935–2017) in *Afikei Mayim* (Chanukah, Topic 4 p. 43–45). (Note also that בחולה נשאת ליום הרביעי is ר"ת לבנה R.C.K.)



## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

support his wife financially, since it sees his obligation as being the provider. R. David Zacut Modina in *Zecher David* (Maamar 1, Ch. 81, pg. 581 in the Ahavat Shalom edition) cites the unpublished manuscript of the work *Ot Brit* (Ch. 11) that there is a custom to name one's daughter as they reach the end of their first month, because women are compared to the moon. Moreover, R. Avraham Chaim Schorr in *Toras Chaim* (to *Sanhedrin* 42a) explains that G-d set aside Rosh Chodesh as a special holiday for women because women are compared to the moon, especially because their monthly menstrual cycle resembles the month orbit of the moon.<sup>14</sup>

**And G-d said, 'Let us make man' (Gen. 1:26).** R. Nosson Nota Shapiro writes in *Megaleh Amukos* (Veeschanan, Ofen 74) that the word "let us make" (נעשה) is an abbreviated notation for "He consulted with Shamai [and] Hillel" (נמלך עם שמאי הלל). The Ostrovtzer Gaon (1851–1928) explains the deeper meaning of this cryptic passage in *Meir Eini Chachamim* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, pg. 5). With this in mind, R. Shapiro explains why Shamai and Hillel are called "the Fathers of the World" (*Beresbis Rabbah* 1:15, *Chagigah* 12a). He also writes that the name Moses (משה) is an acronym for "Moses, Shamai, [and] Hillel" (משה שמאי הלל) and "Everything they heard from Sinai" (הכל שמעו מסיני). I wrote about this at great length in my book *Melo Chaf Nachas*.

**And G-d said, 'Let us make man' (Gen. 1:26).** Rashi explains that here the Torah teaches us the proper behavior that a man should always be humble like his Creator, because G-d consulted with His Heavenly entourage before creating man. *Likkutei Chaver ben Chaim* cites in the name of R. Mordechai Bennet that for this reason the rabbis taught (*Sotah* 4b) that anybody who becomes haughty has denied the fundamental truth of G-d's existence. At first glance, this is deeply challenging to understand. He brilliantly explains that it is because the Torah speaks here in the plural, as though G-d partnered with someone/something else in creating man, in order to teach that one should always be humble. However, if somebody rejects this

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<sup>14</sup> Fascinatingly, it is related in the name of R. Naphtali of Ropshitz (see *Divrei Yitzchak* 71) that when one recites *Kiddush Levana* and prayers that the moon should not deviate from its normal cycle (שלא ישנו את תפקידם), one should have in mind that this also refers to his wife who should have a regular period. The first two letters of the middle words of that phrase spell out the word *ishti* (אשתי)—"my wife". Just as the moon waxes for two weeks, then wanes for two weeks, so should a woman optimally be ritually pure for two weeks, and then ritually impure for two weeks. See also what I wrote in *Birchasa ve-Shirasa* (to *Brachos* 56b) about the man who saw himself kissing the moon in a dream.

## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH PARSHAS BERESHIS

lesson and acts haughtily, then he has effectively demonstrated that humility is not important, and therefore he must understand that G-d literally did partner with another entity to create man when he said "Let us make man," which would deny the basic monotheistic teachings of Torah, a viewpoint tantamount to a denial of G-d.

***And G-d saw everything that was made, and—behold!—it is very good (Gen. 1:31).*** The Midrash (*Beresbis Rabbah* 9:7) explains: R. Nachman bar Shmuel bar Nachman<sup>15</sup> said in the name of R. Shmuel bar Nachaman, “Behold! It is very good” refers to the *Yetzer ha-Tov* (a person's inclination to do Good) and “And behold! It is very good” refers to the *Yetzer ha-Ra* (one's evil inclination). R. Yosef Engel explains in his work *Otzaros Yosef* (*Drush* 8, 2:5) that the meaning of this Midrash is that a person should always be in the middle-of-the-road for all character traits. Given that framework, if one is “very good”, then he is again not in the middle of the road, but leaning to extremism, which is considered “bad”.<sup>16</sup>

***And the Heavens, the Earth, and their legions were finished (Gen. 2:1).*** The Gemara (*Chullin* 60a) explains: R. Yehoshua ben Levi said that all of creation was made at their proper height, and everything was created according to their knowledge and according to their desire, as it says: “And the Heavens, the Earth, and their legions (*tzvaam*) were finished”, do not read it as *tzvaam* (“their legions”) but as *tzivyonim* (“their desire”). Rashi explains that “their knowledge” refers to their consent; meaning, G-d told everything that he will create it, and it consented. Rashi also explains that “their desire” refers to the fact that everything that was created took whatever form they chose. R. Chaim Yosef David Azulai (*Midbar Kedemos*, Yod 23) cites his great Grandfather R. Avraham Azulai (*Chesed Liavraham*, Maayan 4, Ein Yaakov, Nahar 11) that when God decides that a woman will conceive a child, God speaks to the soul and instructs it to enter that body, but first sends it with an Angel to choose its own physical form. Tall, short, capable, or handicapped, attractive or unattractive, poor or wealthy etc. The soul then chooses what it wants. He extrapolates that from the above cited gemara, and concludes that no person can complain and say "why is my friend more attractive than I am," since each person chose their own circumstances. The Zohar (Vol 2 96b) however seems to contradict this idea, and says that God decrees which body each soul will enter and that though

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<sup>15</sup> This is not a typo!

<sup>16</sup> See what I wrote in *Birchasa ve-Shirasa* (to *Brachos* 33a) concerning the statement that it is forbidden to have mercy upon one who does not have intelligence.

## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

a person might not want it, they are forced into it! It seems to me that there is no contradiction at all. Certainly God, who is Infinite and all knowing always does what is best for each soul. Though he is allowing a soul to "choose", it must be kept in mind that this is before a soul is sent to this world. At that stage, it does not have any lack of clarity. The yetzer hara does not exist in a person yet (Sanhedrin 91b) and thus I suggest that the meaning of "choosing one's own circumstances" is that God allows a person to go through the process of seeing how exactly the way he or she is created is just the way they need to be. In that family, that body and that life. Of course this happens against our will - it must happen. It's what is right. God knows best. But it helps us since on a deep level in our soul, which then impacts the human psyche, we have been "shown" that we are right. We have the capacity to know that on the deepest level. Perhaps that is the lesson of this teaching.

***“Hashem blessed the seventh day and made it holy, for on it He rested from all of His work that Elokim created to do.” (Gen. 2:3)*** The Midrash (Bereshis Rabbah 2:3) teaches, “Rebbe says these are the *sheidim* (generally translated as demons). Hashem created their souls, but when it was time to create bodies for them, He instead sanctified the Shabbos and did not create them.” Rav Chaim Vital in Eitz Hadaas Tov (Vol. 2, 155) write “Our sages taught that the spirits of *sheidim* were created at twilight on *erev Shabbos* and since Shabbos arrived, their bodies were never created. The obvious question is that the Creator or everything does not require time to accomplish things, he creates things instantly, and certainly cannot be described to have run out of time. Why did He not just create their bodies a bit earlier. The meaning here is that the merit of Shabbos prevents these *sheidim* from taking form. If they were to have bodies, they would destroy the world... Shabbos arriving means ‘the merit of Shabbos.’”

Rav Yitzchak Hutner (Sefer Hazikaron, Zichronos, p. 73-74) writes, “The seemingly baffling position of the Rambam (Commentary to the Mishna, Avodah Zara Ch. 4) that there is no such reality as *sheidim* despite the many teachings of our sages asserting that there are *sheidim* is actually incredibly enlightening and amazing. Here is the way to understand this. Our sages teach (Avos Dirabbi Nosson 31) that everything that exists in the world exists in each and every human, and vice versa.

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## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH PARSHAS BERESHIS

Human minds have imaginations. With ones imagination, one can imagine things to himself that are not actually real in the outer world. But it is a real part of a person's imagination, and only exists as such. Since there is such a power within a person, there certainly is such a reality in the greater world too. That is what *sheidim* are. They are *metzius bilti metzius* (the existence of something that doesn't exist). When we speak of something as 'merely imaginary,' we mean that such a thing doesn't exist, but someone who is attempting to understand the inner working of the human psyche, as he explores what happens in a persons brain is certainly dealing with something that is "real." When the Rambam writes that *sheidim* do not exist, this is no contradiction at all to all of the discussions in the Talmud about *sheidim*.<sup>17</sup>

Based upon Rav Hutner's understanding of *sheidim*, Rav Chaim Vital's explanation of the Midrash is deeply understandable. Another midrash (Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer 20) writes "Adam Harishon observed the first Shabbos and the Shabbos protected him from all of the raging thoughts in his heart, at it says in Tehillim (94:19) 'when my thoughts were at war withing my, your comforting words settled my spirit.'" Rav Hirsch (Commentary to Tehillim) explains that the word *rav* means at war, rather than "many," and explained "when I had lost the common destination of my thoughts, and they seemed to wander wildly making it hard for me to determine what path was straight and true, it was your Torah that smoothed them over and calmed that bitter internal confusion." The Rokeach (Siman 56, and the same if found from the Arizal in Likkutei Torah to Tehillim 94) writes that the first letters of the phrase cited from Tehillim in the midrash **בְּשַׁבָּת בְּרַב שְׂרַעְפֵי בְּקִרְבֵי תִנְחוּמֵיךָ** spell out **בְּשַׁבָּת** – "on Shabbos." According to the way Rav Hirsch explains the passuk, we can deeply understand this Midrash, as well as the calming effect that Shabbos is expected to have on one's inner raging thoughts and conflicts. If *shedim* are associated with these internal sorts of thoughts and imaginations, then the Shabbos experience of restoring

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<sup>17</sup> See also Mamarei Pesach (Maamar 18:7, p. 105) of R. Yonason David (Rav Hutner's son-in-law,) who sums this up "See the Sefer Hazikaron of *Maran Zecher Tzadik vkadosh livracha* regarding the Rambam's position that *sheidim* simply do not exist in reality but are simply imaginary, and how people asked about this Rambam due to all of the places where it is implied that *sheidim* do exist. He explained there that as far as a discussion of what exists externally in the world, the Rambam explained that there are no *sheidim*. But when speaking of mental illness or imagination in the mind of a person who experiences things, in that context even those imaginary things are to be described as real." See also Ein Ayah to Brachos 6a for an extensive treatment of the idea of *sheidim* where he explains one by one the various sorts of human weaknesses that are described as *sheidim*,

## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

inner calm is just the solution to deprive these *sheidim* of taking any permanent form and remaining relegated to the world of the imaginary where they can then be smoothed over.

Rav Hutner elsewhere explains (Pachad Yitzchak, Shabbos, 5:8) that during the week, we recite a in the morning blessings “mah rabu maasecha Hashem, how varied are your creations, Hashem!” Whereas on Shabbos we say “mah gadlu maasecha Hashem, how *great* is all of your creations Hashem.” On Shabbos we can see how each and every thing has its place in the world, for it is a taste of the world to come, when everything is perfect. Everything has its role in the grand scheme of the world. The apparent conflict and confusion that exists during the week is absent on Shabbos. Perhaps this can help shed a small bit of light on the ever mysterious concept of *sheidim* and the amazing role of Shabbos in maintaining our clarity and equanimity in the face of life’s challenges.

***Hashem blessed the seventh day (Bereshis 2:3)*** The Midrash (Bereshis Rabbah 11:4) explains that this means Hashem blessed the Shabbos with delicious foods.

The Talmud (Shabbos 119a) tells a story. “Caeser said to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, ‘Why does the fragrance of Shabbos food smell so delicious?’ He replied, ‘We have a certain spice called Shabbos which we use.’ Caeser said to him, ‘Give us some of it!’ He said to him, ‘For anyone who observes Shabbos, the spice is effective, and for one who does not observe Shabbos, it is not effective.’” R. Yitzchak Eliyahu Landau of Vilna (Lishmoa Bilimudim, Shabbos there s.v. tavlin) wonders “The statement that ‘we place this in the food’ seems to be untrue. Why would R. Yehoshua ben Chananya say this? Perhaps this can be explained by the Midrash (cited above) that Hashem blessed the Shabbos with delicious foods. The Shabbos itself changes the taste of the foods, just as if one added a spice. Now regarding Shabbos, the Talmud also teaches (Shabbos 10b) that Hashem said to Moshe ‘I have a good gift in my treasure house called “Shabbos” and I wish to bestow it upon the Jewish people.’ This means that only the Jewish people who observe Shabbos were given this gift. Only they can experience this unique taste in the food.”

The Ben Yehoyada (Shabbos 119a s.v. tavlin) explains further, “this was not, *chas vshalom*, a falsehood, but rather the spiritual experience of Shabbos and its holiness

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## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

actually extend to influence food that was cooked in honor of the Shabbos.” He then tells a remarkable story that occurred in Baghdad some generation before him that he had heard. “A Jew once decided to convert to Islam, and went to the government to officialize the matter. According to the laws, no conversion to Islam was complete until a Jewish *chacham* would come and speak to this person about the topic. Once hearing this presentation from the *chacham* and deciding to proceed nevertheless with his conversion, such a conversion would then be considered sufficiently wholehearted and complete. So it was here; the *chacham* came and tried everything he could to influence this would-be renegade to abandon his plans to convert to Islam. But nothing that he said made any perceivable impact. Just as the *chacham* was getting ready to leave, a childhood friend of the almost converted man arrived, and shared with the *chacham* that this fellow had always had a deep love for the eggs cooked in the *hamin* (the Shabbos stew) eating seven or eight eggs every week. The Rabbi came back to him and as his last plea, said to the man, ‘If you convert to Islam, how will you replace the delicious eggs of Shabbos? This deliciousness cannot be found in any other place, only in the homes of Jews who observe the Shabbos! The result was immediate! The man decided not to abandon his Jewish faith, all because of the eggs of Shabbos.’”

***Dust of the earth (Bereshis 2:7)*** Rashi explains “The dirt used to create Adam was taken from the place where the altar that would eventually be built, as if to say, ‘if only he will achieve atonement and be able to survive.’”

The Maharal (Gur Aryeh, here) explains that a person was created out of the material from the location that would eventually serve to help him improve, so that he would be closer to repentance, so that even if he were to sin, it would be natural for him to purify himself from the spiritual filth.<sup>18</sup>

Humans were not created in order to be perfect, the very system from the beginning was meant to be one where we learn from challenge and failure. Nobody learns how to walk without falling down. “The righteous one falls seven times, and then gets up.” (Mishlei 24:16)

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<sup>18</sup> See also Korban Haedia to Yerushalmi Nazir 2:7 where he asserts that the dirt of the mizbeach represents subduing ones desires.

## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

*And he closed the flesh where she had been (Bereshis 2:21)* Our sages taught (Bereshis Rabbah 17:9) that the very first appearance of the letter *samech* is found in the Torah at this verse, in the word *vayisgor*.<sup>19</sup> Because once the woman was created, the Satan was created to prosecute. This implies that the letter *samech* represents the power of Satan. In Brachos (4b) however, teaches that the letter “nun” is not mentioned in Ashrei because it represents downfall, but that the letter *samech* which follows nun represents supporting those who have fallen, and indeed that passuk beginning with samech says “Hashem supports all those who have fallen...” Which would clearly indicate that the letter *samech* represents support.

The Rokeach (al Hatorah p. 80) writes that a woman is called an *ezer* (helpmate) which is translated by Onkelus as *samech*, a support, since she supports her husband, and protects him from sin. It therefore uses the letter *samech* in the description of her creation, and not regarding the creation of anything else. There are also, he points out, 60 (which is the numerical value of the letter *samech*), letters in the commandment “you shall not covet your neighbors wife etc.,” in the second version of the commandments.

The letter *samech* emerges as a letter with two different possibilities.

There are only two verses in all of Torah that start with the letter *samech*, one is Shemos 32:8 “*Saru maber* – they have quickly turned away from the path...” and the other is Bamidbar 14:19, “*slach na* – forgive now.” The Ohalei Shem (to Parshas Yisro) explains that these two verses hearken back to the two times that the letter *samech* appears in the luchos! One is “you shall not make a *pessel* - an idol,” *pessel* has a *samech* and the other is “*notzer chesed lalafim* – he preserved kindness for thousands...” *Chessed* has a *samech*. The wickedness that led them to follow the Satan and build a golden calf is attributed to the *samech* and relates to the first verse in the Torah that starts with a samech as well as the first time that the samech is used in the luchos. But it also represents forgiveness and kindness, as seen by the other time a verse begins with samech, and the other times it’s used in the luchos. This is why the letter *samech* follows the downfall of the letter *nun*.

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<sup>19</sup> The midrash mentions that there is actually an earlier samech in the word *hasovev* (2:11) but that its not relevant since it’s only about rivers. Perhaps the midrash means that this is the first time that the letter *samech* is used in relation to human beings.

## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH PARSHAS BERESHIS

Rav Shlomo Eiger (Cited at the end of the Sefer Toras Emes) says that the reason that we give a woman a ring when getting married is in order to represent the letter *samech* so that a person will remember that there is divine assistance represented by the *samech* and one need not fall into the hands of the wrong *samech*.<sup>20</sup>

Rabbenu Efraim (to Bereshis 2:21 p. 26 s.v. vayisgor) adds, “the letter Samech is the 18<sup>th</sup> of the alef bet if you include the final letters in the list, since marriage is ideal at 18 years old (Avos, Chapter 5) and this also corresponds to the 18 women that a Jewish king may marry. (Sanhedrin 21a). You will find that the word “woman” appears exactly 18 times in the section of the Torah that speaks about the Sotah, as well as the word “woman” appearing exactly 18 times in the part of the Torah speaking about forbidden sexual contact. A woman even has 18 days where she is halachically impure, 7 days of niddah and 11 of zivah (see Arachin 9a).

### ***And they were both naked and they were not embarrassed (Bereshis 2:25)***

“And he [King Shaul] also took off his clothing and he too prophesied before Shmuel and collapsed naked all of that day and all of the night, and it was therefore declared, Shaul is also one of the prophets.” (Shmuel 1, 19:24). The Radak there explains, “When prophecy comes upon a person, he no longer feels his physical senses, and he collapses... He will even at times take off all of his clothing due to his complete disconnection to his physical existence in that state, as he is left at that time with only his intellectual capacities.”

R. Yonasan Eyebchutz (Tiferes Yonasan to Bereshis) explains that before the first sin, there was no embarrassment, rather they were closer to the ideal which is expressed by the nudity of a prophet, where the physicality of the body is entirely irrelevant to a person. A prophet, he explains, who has the divine presence resting upon him must have no item no item between him and that divine spirit that is resting upon him.

***The serpent convinced me (Bereshis 3:13)*** The Megaleh Amukos (Parshas Yisro) cites the Raavad to Sefer Yetzira explains these words *hanachas hishiani*, the serpent

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<sup>20</sup> See also R. Avraham Schorr's Halekach Vihalibuv 5762 to Vayakhel Pikudei p. 160.



## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

convinced me. The fourth letter of the alphabet is *dalet* which means a door. There is a *dalet* in the name of God *Adonai* as well as in the name *Shaddai*. He explains that when King David asked Hashem to open for him the gates of righteousness, he was actually referring to the two gates that were closed to Adam when he sinned. The names of Hashem when missing the two *dalets* make up the letters of **ש** and **א** which is the word **השיאני** convinced me. See also Nefesh Chaim of R. Chaim Palagi (Mem, 187) citing the Chida (Devarim Achadim, Drush 11 p. 43c) and Chomas Anach (Mishlei 8:34) regarding the verse “to diligently seek my *dalets* – my doors.” See also R. Palagi’s Chaim Legufa (Dalet, 6, and 8 citing the Shem Shmuel to Shemos).

Some of the meaning behind all this can be explained as follows. The letter *dalet* relates to the word *dal* and impoverished person, according to the Gemara in Shabbos 104a, and as further explained in Pri Etz Chaim (Shaar Chag Hamatzos, ch. 7 s.v. ha lachma anya) and Sefas Emes (Purim 5663 s.v. Bemigillah nikrau). When humility is introduced to the word Ani, and Yesh, words meaning “me” and “existence,” via adding the letter *dalet*, that humility converts those words into names of God. It is lack of focus on self and the ability to humble oneself which converts self-centeredness into awareness of the Divine. Our sages in fact say (Sotah 5a) that for a person who is arrogant, Hashem says “He and I cannot live in this world at once.” They also teach (Brachos 43b) that “a person who walks with arrogant posture, even for just 4 cubits, it is as though he is pushing away the Divine presence.” The sin of Adam Harishon was a sin of arrogance, thinking that though God instructed one thing, he knew better. Our sages tell us (Shabbos 146a) that when the Jewish people stood at Sinai, the spiritual filth that had come upon humanity at the sin of Adam and Chava was removed from them. For Sinai was an experience of true humility, the Torah was given on the lowest mountain, and revelation was only possible through Moshe, humblest of all men ever to walk the earth. When they worshipped the golden calf however, some of that filth returned upon them, (as Chida explains in Netzotzi Oros to the Zohar). The golden calf was built when the Jewish people decided that they considered that Moshe should have been back, using their own minds to decide right and wrong, and whether building an idol was a wise idea, despite the reality that they were instructed not to. They ought to have waited a bit longer, for their calculations were off. Had they acted with humility realizing that

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## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH

### PARSHAS BERESHIS

perhaps they were incorrect, they'd never have built this calf. The Parah Aduma, we are taught, is a correction of the mistake of the golden calf. Now Parah Aduma is the mystery of the Torah, it is the one mitzvah that is truly beyond even the wisest of men. Shlomo Hamelech himself expressed that he could never understand this mitzvah. Which makes Parah Aduma the antidote to the arrogance of the sin of Adam, and the Golden Calf. Being in touch with true humility means that we know our limits, and what we cannot know. It was only Moshe who was given the secret to the Golden Calf, only the truly humble person who knows that there are things that he cannot possibly know, can truly be considered knowledgeable.

***He will crush your head (Bereshis 3:15)*** The Ben Ish Chai (Ben Yehoyada to Sanhedrin 110a s.v. kol hacholek) notes that the letters *zayin, mem and resh* which spell the word *zemer* (song) are the letters that come just before the letters for *nachash* – serpent *nun, ches, and shin*. The serpent is crushed by song. King David composed the Tehillim which are *zemiros* in order to effectively combat the yetzer hara, which is represented by the serpent.

***Because you listened to the voice of your wife (Bereshis 3:17)*** The Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 4:5) teaches that Hashem says to us, “Listen to me. For no person loses from listening to me. The Rabbis explained, you find people who listen to their wives and therefore lose out, and others who listen to their wives and benefit from that. Adam listened to Chava and lost out terribly, as it says ‘because you listened to the voice of your wife etc.’ Rav Yitzchak compared this to a king who instructed his servant, ‘Do not taste anything until I get back from the bathhouse.’ The servant's wife, however, insisted that it would be a good idea from him to taste the food and make sure it was properly salted and spiced. He did so. When the king came back, he said ‘I instructed you not to eat, and you did!’ He said, ‘Master! It was your maidservant, who you gave to me, who got me to eat.’ ‘Are you more loyal to my maidservant than you are to me?’ asked the King. Hashem told Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Chava however fed him. Rabbi Avin explained, she didn't ask him, she simply cried and whimpered with her voice and he ate from it. The verse says as much when it says ‘since you listened to the voice of your wife,’ it was not her words, but rather her voice that persuaded him. Hashem said, ‘did you eat from the tree that I instructed you not to eat from?’ He replied,

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## RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH PARSHAS BERESHIS

‘your maidservant gave it to me...!’ ‘And you were more loyal to Chava and you were to me?!’ It was then inevitable<sup>21</sup> that he would be removed from gan eden. This is an example of a man listening to his wife and thereby losing.

The Midrash is teaching that the depth of Adam’s sin was not simply disobeying Hashem, it was that there was another being whose loyalty was primary to him. Listening to the voice of another person instead of God. It would be one thing should a person sinned due to personal lack of discipline, or other weaknesses. It’s quite different when a person does not make God and His will the primary source of his values, and instead put Hashem second.

This idea can be further understood based upon the Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim, 3:8) “There is a well-known saying of our Sages, “Thoughts about sin are more dangerous than sin itself.” I can offer a good explanation of this saying: When a person is disobedient, this is due to certain weaknesses fundamental to human nature; for man sins when compelled to by his animalistic tendencies. Human thinking, on the other hand is part of a persons true essence,—a person who thinks sinfully sins therefore by means of the much nobler portion of himself... This uniquely human element (Human thinking and reason), with all its faculties should only be employed in suitable work, in attempts to attach to higher things, and never to reach down to reach things that are lowly.”

This can also be understood based upon the words of the Imrei Emes of Ger (Quoted by his son, the Pnei Menachem, cited by R. Avraham Schorr in Halekach Vihalibuv 5763, p 279, as well as 5762 p. 265) to explain the adage, “There is nothing that can stand in the way of ‘will.’<sup>22</sup>” *Ain licha davar haomed bifnei baratzon.* The Imrei Emes explained that despite a person having the urges to do things that are sinful, there is no *yetzer hara* stopping a person from wanting the right things. It may be hard

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<sup>21</sup> The word *miyad* which can sometimes be interpreted as immediately can also mean inevitably – meaning that something is a direct cause, but not necessarily occurring immediately. See R. Yaakov Weinberg’s comments in Yeshurun Journal Vol. 3 p 280, addressing the word *miyad* in Rambam’s Mishneh Torah, especially to explain the teaching (Hilchos Teshuva 3:1-2) that a person who has committed more sins than mitzvos died *miyad* from his sins. This also explains that Rambam’s comment (Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 2:2) that a person who considers Hashem’s creations and wondrous deeds and sees His endless wisdom will *miyad* love Hashem and praise Him and glorify Him and desire an intense desire to know His great name...”

<sup>22</sup> This statement is not found in Talmud or Chazal, is oft cited by later Torah writers. See Michlol Maamarim Upisgamim where it is suggested that this is based in a similar comment found in the Zohar.

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## **RABBI SHOFF ON CHUMASH**

### **PARSHAS BERESHIS**

for you to become a huge tzaddik, but there is nothing at all preventing you from “wanting” to become a huge tzaddik. That part is easy! Someone who doesn’t even bother to “want” to be good, is really in bad shape. After all, nothing is ever stopping a person from wishing something! Adam, therefore, is punished severely when he sins due to his choice to listen to other ideas other than those that are Truth, Hashem’s ideas. Had he simply sinned due to the animalistic urges that people have, at least that could be attributed to the Yetzer Hara. But someone who listened to some other ideology, and didn’t even “want” to do the right thing ideologically at least, has committed a greater sin. This caused the expulsion from Gan Eden.

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