

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!

By Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva (Bava Basra 11a):

"If your G-d loves the poor, for what reason does He not support them Himself?"

Rabbi Akiva responded with a parable: "To what is this matter comparable? It is comparable to a king of flesh and blood who was angry with his son and put him in prison and ordered that he should not be fed or given to drink.

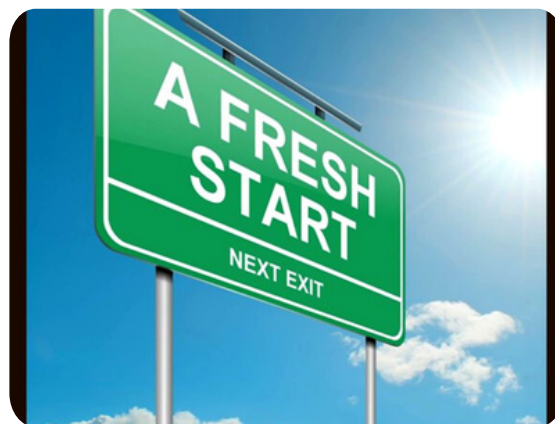
"And one person fed and gave him to drink. If the king heard about this after his anger had abated, would he not react by sending that person a gift?"

This week, we begin reading the Torah from the beginning once again. Bereishis is not just the first Torah portion because it comes first chronologically; it is also read first because it contains a teaching that will help us approach the rest of the Torah and the new year.

"And G-d blessed the Seventh day and sanctified it: because in it He rested from all His work which G-d had created to do" (Gen.2:3).

Rashi writes that the word "to do" means to fix. That is, that we should fix the world.

We all want to make a difference during our 120 years in this world. But sometimes, our inner Turnus Rufus might say, "Who do you think you are?! If G-d made the world in a certain way, who are YOU to try to change creation?"



Yet feeding the poor and helping the needy is not changing the way G-d made the world – it is the way G-d made the world!

G-d created the poor specifically because he wants us to help them.

And that's the inner reason why Bereishis is the first portion in the Torah. At the beginning of the year, at the beginning of the cycle of reading the Torah again, we learn that G-d created the world incomplete, and then put you and me here to fix whatever we see that needs our help.

(Based on Toras Menachem 5716, vol.15, p.189) 

THE FIRST RASHI

The very first of Rashi's commentaries on the Chumash states that there will be gentiles who will accuse us of being thieves, having stolen the Land of Israel. In such a case, Rashi writes, we should respond that the entire world was created by G-d, and he gave the Land to the Jewish People.

The fact that Rashi writes this in his commentary which is designed for even the youngest of students, indicates that this answer is the most straightforward answer. Moreover, this answer is true, and when we tell it to people with strength and confidence, people will accept it!

-Lubavitcher Rebbe, Motzei Shabbos Bereishis 1977

Just Me שו"ת A Question

Q: Is it permitted to "give back" land for peace in Israel?

A: The entirety of the Land of Israel was given to the Jewish people as an eternal inheritance. We are not permitted to give any land to anyone.

Yet the darkness of exile is so great that there are Jews who claim that "you are thieves," and therefore we have to do what's just and give back land...

Such statements are against halacha, G-d forbid, and so much so that there are those who say that we need to steal land belonging to Jews and give it to them, claiming that this will save lives -- at the very time that it is clear that the opposite is true! Returning any land will place all the Jews of Israel in grave danger, chas v'shalom.

As has been addressed numerous times, there is a clear halacha in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 329:6):

"In a city that is near the border, even if they just come for straw and hay [i.e., they claim that is all they wish for], we desecrate the Shabbat [i.e., by picking up arms to protect ourselves]. This law applies even if they haven't come, but want to come."

(Source: Lubavitcher Rebbe, Simchas Torah day 1978).

א געזונטען ווינטער

Where Do You Live?

By Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

A chassid from the town of Kharkov came for an audience with the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Rebbe Rashab. The Rebbe asked him, *vos hert zich in Kharkov?* -- what's happening in Kharkov?

The chassid replied, "Kharkov is great! We learn Torah, we daven, the mikvah is clean... there's always a cup of coffee available in shul, people really care for each other!"

The Rebbe Rashab gave him a gold coin.

This chassid had been joined by another chassid from Kharkov, who also desired an audience with the Rebbe.

Vos hert zich in Kharkov?, the Rebbe asked the second chassid.

"Terrible! People don't care about each other, nobody learns Torah, the mikveh is dirty..."

Some time later, these chassidim were discussing their respective interactions with the Rebbe. When the second chassid found out that the first chassid had been given a gold coin from the Rebbe, he was irked, to say the least.

Word reached the Rebbe Rashab (if I recall correctly, his brother Reb Zalman Aaron relayed the contents of the conversation between the chassidim), and the Rebbe Rashab summoned the chassid. "I heard you have some complaints..."

"Yes! Why didn't I receive a gold coin from the Rebbe? I told the truth about Kharkov!"



"You think I don't know what's going on in Kharkov?" responded the Rebbe. "I just wanted to know: **Which Kharkov do you live in?!**"

After Adam eats the forbidden fruit, G-d says, "Did you eat from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen. 3:11).

Adam responds, "The woman whom You gave to be with me gave me from the tree and I ate."

Rashi comments: "*Here man showed his ingratitude.*"

Adam had a beautiful home. A beautiful wife. Life was great. Yet instead of appreciating what he had, he complained that the woman had been given to him in order to cause him to sin, whereas in fact she had been given as a helpmate.

Adam had a once in a lifetime opportunity to say, "My G-d, what have I done?"

He missed this chance, instead displaying his ingratitude.

Others suffered in Auschwitz, yet managed to recite daily blessings of thanks to G-d.

To a great extent, one's satisfaction and happiness is dependent on how one decides to view the vicissitudes of life.

We have a once in a lifetime opportunity -- which repeats itself nearly every moment of each day -- to decide which Kharkov we live in. 

Hold On To Your Etrog

The Arizal says that Etrog stands for

אל תבואני רגל גאווה

"Let not the foot of the arrogant overtake me" (Tehillim 36:12).

The Etrog can thus be viewed as representing a suspension of self (in Hebrew, *bittul*), not allowing oneself to be overtaken by arrogance.

Rabbi Levi Y. Schneerson suggests that this concept can explain the statement in the Talmud (Sukkah 35a) that the Etrog dwells on its tree from year to year.

The Etrog weathers all seasons, enduring the changing temperatures. Only one who has a suspended sense of self ("*bittul*") will be able not only to endure, but to grow from the vagaries of time.

Maintaining an Etrog-approach will help us weather the storms of life. May we all be blessed to endure, to rise above and to succeed beyond our wildest dreams! 

אזוי ווי מען
שטעלט זיך אוועק
שבת בראשית אזוי
פירט זיך א גאנץ יאר

*The way you set
yourself up on
Shabbos Bereishis
is the way it goes for
the entire year!
(Chassidic saying)*

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