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בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

(בראשית א, א)



*In the beginning G-d created the
heavens and the earth.*

(BERASHIS 1,1)

LIVING LESSON 1

Hashgacha Pratis

LIVING LESSON 2

*Torah, Creation, and the
Purpose of Existence*

LIVING LESSON 3

Hashem's Greatness

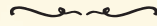
LIVING LESSON 4

Dirah B'tachtonim

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*The Torah—A Manual
for Life*

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ



In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth.

Hashgacha Pratis

Before Hashem created the world, nothing existed. There were no stars, no trees, not even light and darkness! Then, Hashem created everything. This is called bria h yesh me'ayin—creation of something from nothing.

Since the world was created from absolute nothingness, it needs to constantly be forced into existence. Every single second, Hashem actively recreates the world. If Hashem were to stop creating the world for even a moment, Chas V'Shalom, everything would instantly disappear.

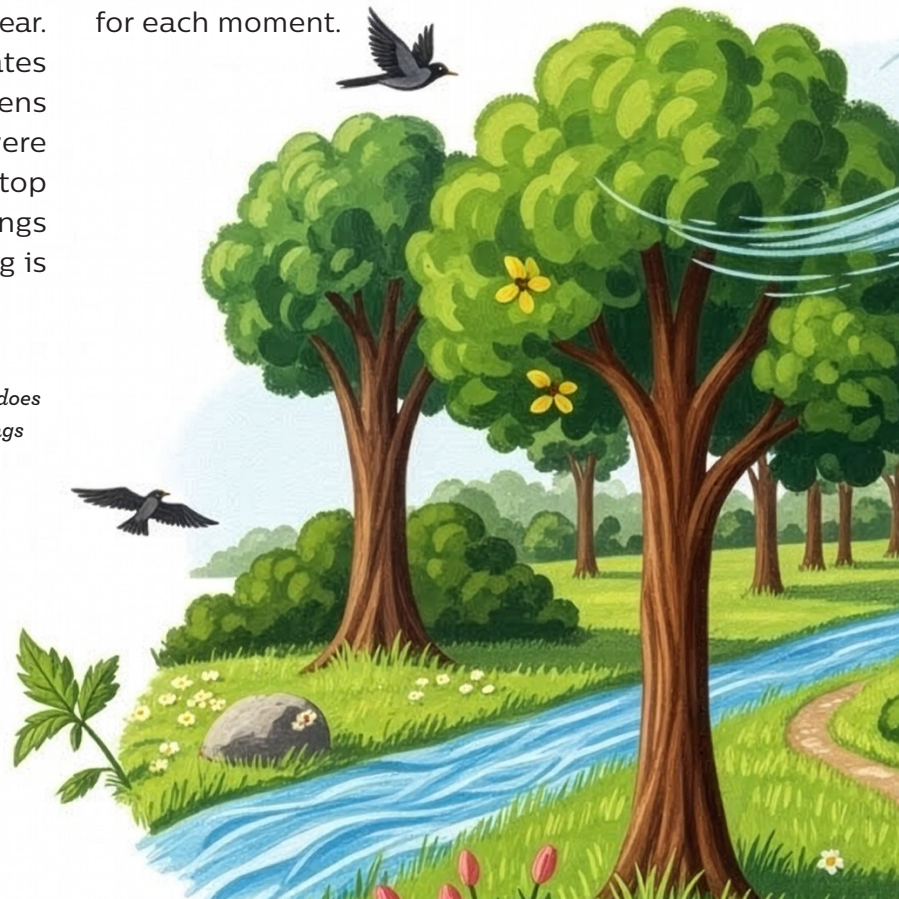
Because Hashem continuously recreates the world, everything that occurs happens with a specific purpose. If something were unnecessary, Hashem would simply stop creating it. While it may seem that things “just happen,” the reality is that everything is meticulously planned.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

If everything that happens is part of Hashem's plan, how does that change the way we should react to good and bad things that happen to us?

When something happens, it signifies that, at that precise moment, Hashem decided that this is how the new world should look.

Understanding this can help us feel calm in every situation. Since Hashem constantly recreates the world the way He wants it, everything is always exactly how it should be. There's no such thing as a mistake or something that shouldn't have happened. Everything that happens is according to Hashem's precise plan for each moment.





Happiness and Strength

The passuk in Bereishis¹ tells us, “ויסף אברהם ויקח אשה ושמה קטורה” ויסף אברהם ויקח אשה ושמה קטורה—Avraham married Keturah and she gave birth to Zimran and Yakshan.”

On a deeper level, the passuk teaches about Avraham’s faith in Hashem:

The name Keturah can be translated as “connect.” This means that Avraham connected to Hashem by realizing that Hashem controls everything that happens in the world. This understanding led to Zimran—song. He became happy because he knew that he had nothing to worry about. Even when things didn’t seem good, Avraham had Yakshan—strength—because he knew that by strengthening his trust in Hashem, everything would turn out fine.



Trapped

Gemara Yerushalmi states,⁵ “ציפור מבלעדי שמיא לא יבדא” Without Hashem’s decision, no bird would get trapped.

Hashem decides and is involved in every minute detail of the world around us. Even the decision regarding which birds will be trapped is made by Hashem Himself!

On a Mission

The Medrash teaches,⁶ “אפלו על ידי נחש, אפלו על ידי צפרדע בכל הקדוש ברוך הוא עושה שליחותו, אפלו על ידי נחש, אפלו על ידי צפרדע” Hashem uses everything to do His will; even snakes, mosquitoes, and frogs are used to fulfill His wishes.

Every creation in the world has a purpose and a mission to accomplish. Even the smallest and seemingly insignificant animals have a reason for their creation. Everything in this world serves a purpose.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Even seemingly insignificant creations and events have a purpose. Can you think of a time when something small or unexpected turned out to be important?



Did You Know?

Global impact

Everything that occurs in the world contributes to Hashem’s grand plan for all of creation. Even minor events in our personal lives not only affect us but also impact the world around us.

Every event is like a puzzle piece that plays a role in Hashem’s grand plan for the entire creation.³

Individual Attention

The Aseres Hadibros begin with a personal statement to every Jew – אני ה' אלוקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים – I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Egypt.

Hashem was telling B'nei Yisrael that He watches over and takes care of every individual. Hashem didn't just free a nation from captivity; He liberated each individual person from there. Hashem oversees every individual and guides their lives personally.⁴





A Pricked Finger

The busy kitchen echoed with the sounds of preparation for Shabbos. The Mareh Yechezkel, a respected Rav, was carefully preparing a block of sugar for the Shabbos meal. As he worked, a sudden sharp pain shot through his finger; he had pricked himself with the knife and started to bleed. But instead of feeling upset, a smile spread across his face. His eyes sparkled with joy as he declared, “The Gemara in Chullin tells us, ‘A person does not prick his finger below unless it is decreed from above.’ This wasn’t an accident,” he continued, “but a message from Hashem.”

He didn’t get upset because he understood that everything, even this small pain, was part of Hashem’s plan—a result of Hashgacha Pratis.⁷



Extra Food for Thought

How can we train ourselves to find meaning and connection to Hashem even in difficult or frustrating situations?

How can small, everyday actions, like being kind to someone or davening, contribute to Hashem’s plan for the world?



Pearls of Wisdom

Food for all

A Jew should never worry about where they will get food or money. If Hashem provides for every creature in the world—from the birds in the sky to the smallest insect on land—surely, He’ll take care of the needs of B’nei Yisrael—His beloved children.⁸

Anger Management

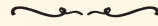
Understanding that Hashem manages and controls everything in the world can help prevent a person from becoming angry. Even if someone has wronged you, it was Hashem who arranged for that to occur. Yes, they shouldn’t have behaved that way, but if that person hadn’t done it, another shliach would have carried out Hashem’s plan. When we understand that even events that appear negative are part of Hashem’s plan, we can maintain control over ourselves, even when others wrong us.⁹

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How might the idea of hashgacha pratis change your initial reaction when someone treats you unfairly or unkindly?



בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ



In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth.

Torah, Creation, and the Purpose of Existence

The very first word in the Torah, בְּרֵאשִׁית, begins the story of how the world was made. However, it also contains a secret message! You can interpret it as ב' ראשית, which means “two firsts”. What are these two “firsts?” They are the Torah and B’nei Yisrael, both of which are referred to as ראשית.

In the first word of the Torah, Hashem hints at the reason He decided to create a world: everything was created so that we, B’nei Yisrael, can learn the Torah and do what it says. When we do that, we fulfill the very reason why the world was made!

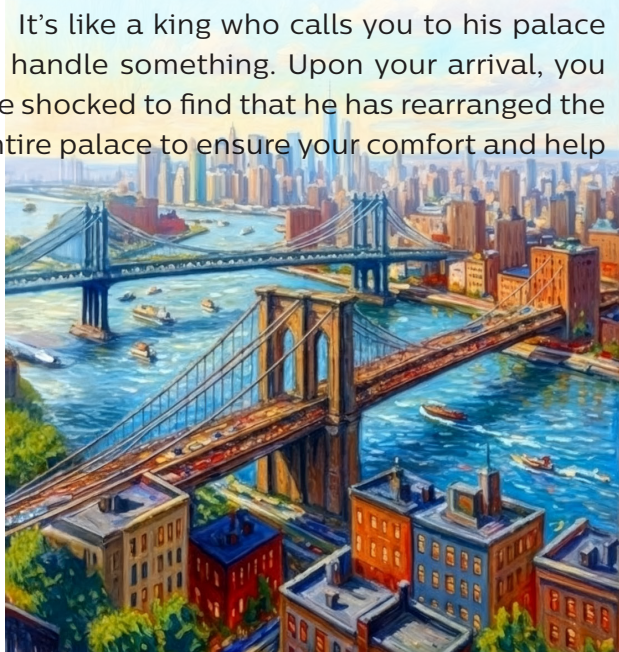
It’s like a king who calls you to his palace to handle something. Upon your arrival, you are shocked to find that he has rearranged the entire palace to ensure your comfort and help

you accomplish the task he requested. Surely, you will do everything in your power to fulfill the king’s request.

The same applies to the world around us: when we recognize that Hashem created it all so we can fulfill the task He entrusted to us—to follow the Torah—we will strive to complete our mission, no matter the obstacles in our way.¹⁰

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

If the Torah and B’nei Yisrael are called “two firsts”, how are they connected to each other? How do they rely on each other to fulfill their purpose?



ere,
is

Word Power

Day One

זה היום תחילת מעשיך—Today [Rosh Hashanah] is the first day of creation.¹³

Why does the Torah refer to Rosh Hashanah as the first day of creation when Hashem began creating the world six days earlier, on the 25th of Elul?

In reality, the plan for creation truly began when Adam was created on Rosh Hashanah, marking the start of our mission in the world. Rosh Hashanah is regarded as the true first day of creation because it signifies the beginning of humanity fulfilling its purpose.¹⁴

Our Sages Say

All the Stars

וכולן לא בראתי אלא בשבילך—Hashem tells B’nei Yisrael, “I have created more than one hundred trillion stars in our galaxy, and all of them were only created for you!”¹⁵

Did You Know?

Make it Useful

Since the world and everything in it was created for us to serve Hashem, we should utilize everything we encounter for avodas Hashem. When you see something, ask yourself, “How can I use this to do a mitzvah or learn about Hashem?”

By using something to serve Hashem, we help fulfill the purpose for which it was created.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Why is it important to use even regular, everyday things to serve Hashem?

Pearls of Wisdom

Necessary Challenges

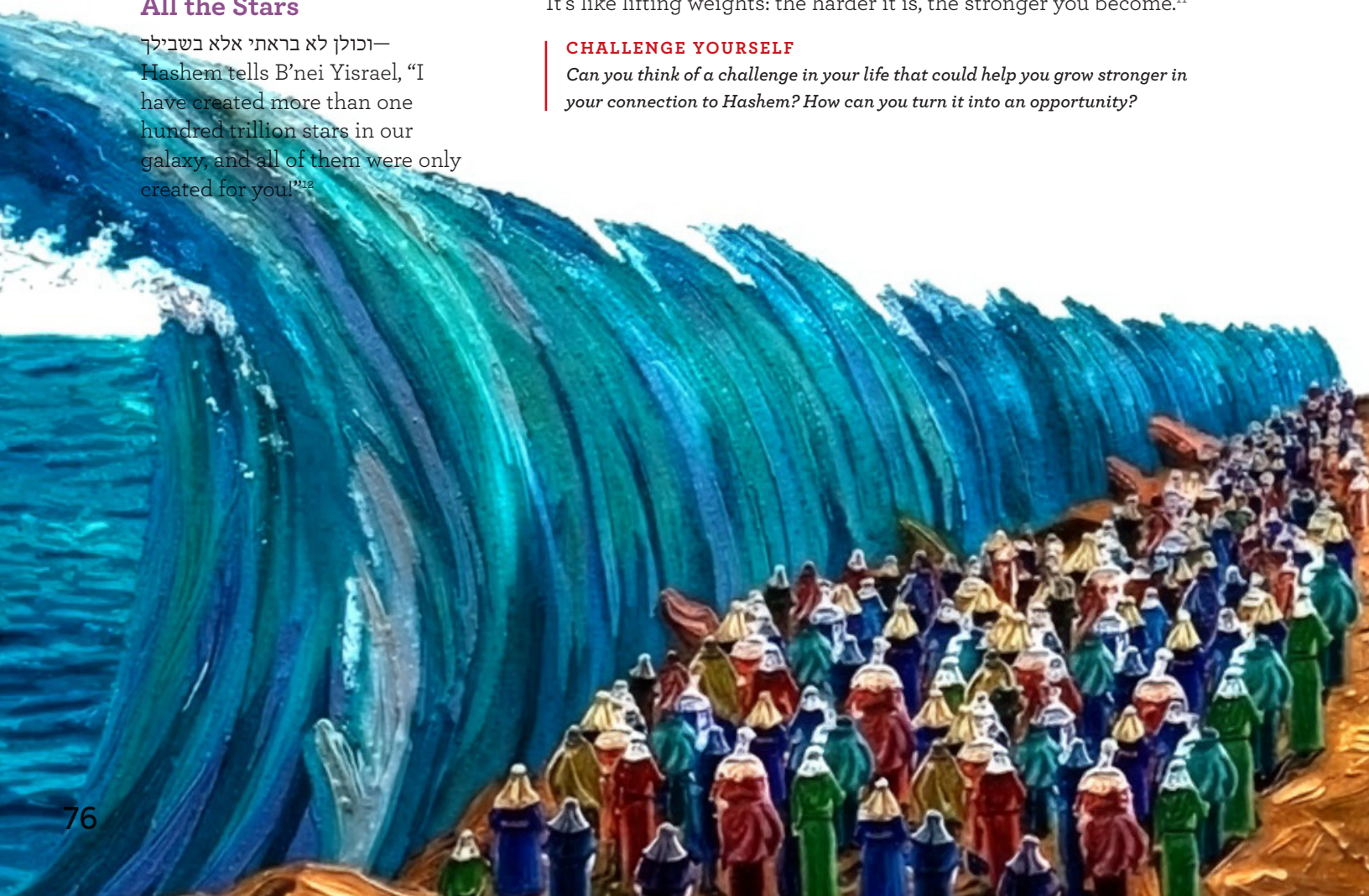
It is impossible for anything in the world to oppose Torah and mitzvos, since everything was created solely to help B’nei Yisrael fulfill the Torah and mitzvos. Even challenges exist to strengthen our commitment to Hashem.

When we encounter something that appears to challenge the Torah, we should recognize that it exists only for us to overcome it, thereby strengthening our commitment to Hashem.

It’s like lifting weights: the harder it is, the stronger you become.¹¹

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Can you think of a challenge in your life that could help you grow stronger in your connection to Hashem? How can you turn it into an opportunity?





The Sea's DNA

During the time of the Baal Shem Tov, there was a Jewish scholar who used science and philosophy to conclude that Krias Yam Suf wasn't a miracle but a natural event. He decided to travel to the Baal Shem Tov to ask about his conclusion.

When he arrived in Mezhibush, before he had a chance to meet the Baal Shem Tov, everyone was summoned to the Shul. Once the entire town gathered in the Shul, the Baal Shem Tov stood up and delivered a sermon that refuted the conclusions this man had drawn about Krias Yam Suf.

The Baal Shem Tov explained: The first passuk in the Torah states, בראשית ברא אלקים, meaning that Hashem created the world. The name אלקים has the same numerical value as הטבע, nature. This indicates that the laws of nature originate from Hashem. At the beginning of creation, Hashem established a natural law dictating that the sea would part when B'nei Yisrael needed it. Therefore, when the time came for Krias Yam Suf, the nature of the sea caused it to split, as that was how Hashem had created it.

This was a tremendous miracle. From the time the sea was created, its natural order was designed to part for B'nei Yisrael when the time would come. The very nature of the world was built to meet the needs of B'nei Yisrael.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

The Baal Shem Tov explained that nature comes from Hashem. How does that change the way you see the world around you, and how might it influence your actions?



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Hashem's Greatness

Imagine a wealthy king whose treasure houses are filled with gold and precious gems. Praising him for the pennies he also possesses would be insulting. Why compliment someone's pennies when they have gold?

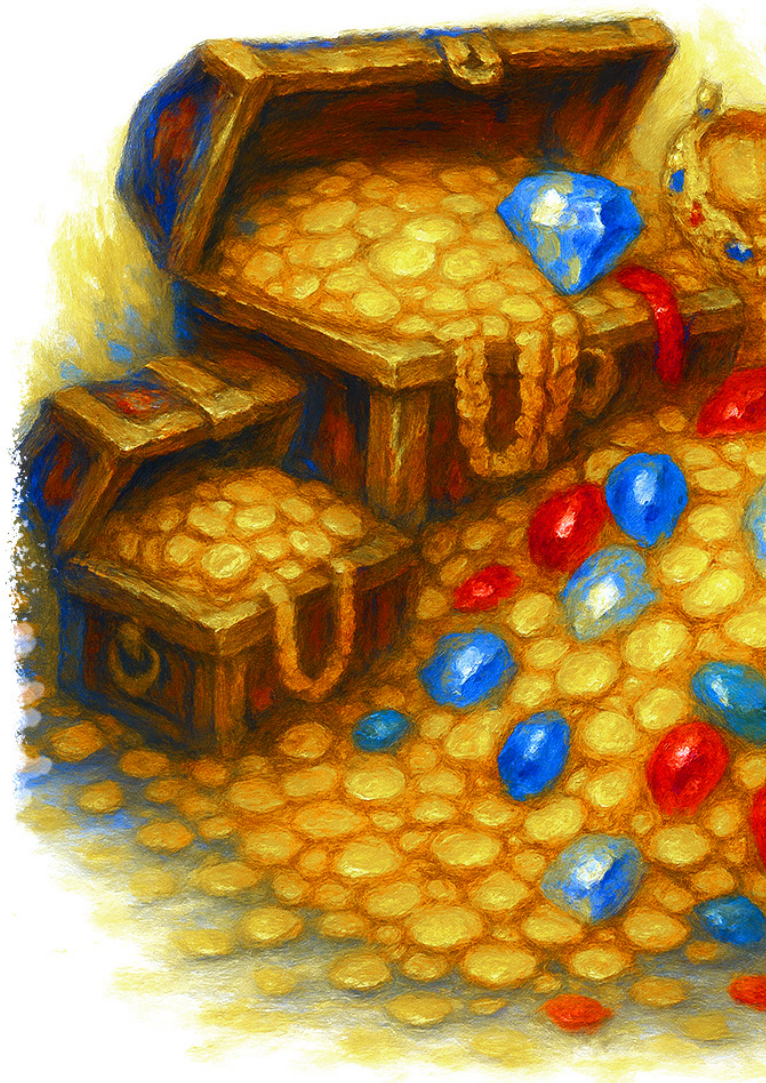
The same holds true when considering the creation of the world in relation to Hashem's true greatness. Hashem Himself is far greater than the world He created. To Him, the act of creating the world is like pennies—something small and insignificant. Hashem is exponentially greater than the world.

Indeed, the passuk teaches, אני ה' לא שניתי – I, Hashem, have not been changed [by the creation of the world].¹⁵ When someone creates something, it changes them. They might feel tired from hard work, take pride in their accomplishments, or dedicate time to completing the task. The creations people make have an impact on them. For Hashem, however, the creation of the world was so trivial that it caused no change in Him whatsoever.

Understanding this can help us prioritize Hashem over the distractions of the world, for He is infinitely greater than everything around us.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

If the world is like “pennies” to Hashem, why did He create it?





Did You Know?

Bright Gems

Precious gems are shiny and can illuminate their surroundings. However, their true value lies in their beauty and rarity. Similarly, Hashem's greatness is not in His ability to "shine" and create the world but in His essence. Creating the world does not define His greatness—it is simply something He does. His essence is far greater and beyond our understanding.¹⁸

Only You

Not only is our physical world insignificant to Hashem, but even the spiritual worlds, including Olam Habah, are nothing compared to Hashem's essence.

When the Alter Rebbe was in a state of deep dveykus, he would say, "I don't want anything, I don't want Your Gan Eden, I don't want Your Olam Habah, I only want You alone."¹⁹



Word Power

Letters of Creation

אתה־הוא ה' לבדך את [אתה] עשית
את־השמים—You are the only G-d.
You created the heavens [and
everything else].¹⁶

This passuk can be read with a full stop: "You are Hashem alone. את—the letters from ת-א created the heavens." This is because Hashem Himself is far greater than creation. When Hashem chose to create the world, He utilized a small revelation of Himself—the letters of the Alef-Bais—to limit His power and create the worlds.¹⁷



Pearls of Wisdom

Self-sacrifice

B'nei Yisrael have the power to ignore all the temptations of life and serve Hashem wholeheartedly. We can even bypass the human desire to live if living forces us to go against Hashem. This is called mesiras nefesh.

The reason we can go on mesiras nefesh is that, although Hashem's connection with the rest of the world is superficial, He is intimately involved with our neshamos. Therefore, our neshamos are the most real thing we can feel. If we have to choose between the world and our neshamah's connection to Hashem, we will automatically choose our neshamah—willing to give up our lives for our connection to Hashem.





The Important Part

R' Zalman Moshe Hayitzhaki was once invited to a farbrengen after davening. After his lengthy davening, he arrived at the farbrengen and saw the table the hosts had set up, adorned with fancy dishes and plenty of food. This sight greatly upset him, and he spoke strongly against the excess.

R' Zalman Moshe had just finished davening, during which he tried to recognize the insignificance of the world around us. The first thing he saw was a table full of food. The food at farbrengens shouldn't be important; the emphasis of a farbrengen is coming closer to Hashem. Is it any wonder he was so upset?



Our Sages Say

Unchangeable

“אתה הוא עד שלא בראת את העולם ואתה הוא משבראת את העולם”—You [Hashem] were the same before and after You created the world.”²⁰

The world is so small compared to Hashem, it may as well not exist. Every day before davening, we recite this line to remind ourselves of Hashem's greatness. When we observe the magnificence of the world around us, yet remember its insignificance to Hashem, we awaken a desire within ourselves to connect with His greatness.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How can we remind ourselves of Hashem's greatness every day?



Extra Food for Thought

How does understanding Hashem's greatness help us with our daily challenges?

Is it possible to be involved with the world without becoming too attached to it?

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In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth.

Dirah B'tachtonim

Hashem created heaven and earth. On a broader level, heaven represents all spiritual creations, while earth signifies all physical creations. Hashem created both—the physical and the spiritual. The purpose of the world is to unite these two, demonstrating that everything is really from Hashem.

In our lives, we have aspects that resemble heaven—like davening and learning—and aspects that resemble earth—such as eating, drinking, and sleeping. Our task is to merge both—bringing heaven down to earth—demonstrating that they are both creations of Hashem and can be used equally to serve Him.

When we perform a mitzvah with a physical item, we bring a bit of heaven down to earth. By making a bracha on our food or using our sleep to gain the strength to serve Hashem, we elevate the earth and connect it with heaven, fulfilling the goal of creation.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How can simple, everyday actions become holy?

What does it truly mean to unite “heaven” and “earth” in our own lives?



Did You Know?

Body and Soul

Hashem created us with both a soul and a body—merging heaven and earth in our lives. To fulfill our mission in the world, we need both: a soul without a body cannot perform Torah and mitzvos, and a body without a soul cannot connect to Hashem.

Although it may seem that a soul is more significant than a body, both are equally important for our mission of making the world a holier place.²¹

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Why is staying connected to the physical world important for our purpose?



בראשית

The first letters in the word בראשית stand for בראשונה רצה—From the beginning, Hashem wanted to dwell in B'nei Yisrael, thereby elevating their physicality and making it holy.²⁶



Miniature World

Chazal teach²² כל מה שבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּאָדָם בְּרָא בְּאָרֶץ לְדוֹגְמָא לוֹ—Whatever Hashem created in man He created in the world.

A person is considered a mini world.²³ Just as the world consists of heaven and earth, a person’s life is composed of both heavenly—spiritual—moments and earthly—physical—moments. Our job is to bring holiness into every moment of our lives.

In All Your Ways

אֵיזוֹהִי פְּרִשָּׁה קְטַנָּה שְׁכַל גּוֹפֵי תוֹרָה תְּלוּיִין בָּהּ בְּכֹל דְּרָרְכִיד דְּעָהוּ—What small portion of Torah does everything depend on? The passuk²⁴ “Know Hashem in all your ways.”²⁵

This passuk emphasizes making every moment of the day holy and connected to Hashem, even while performing ordinary tasks. Infusing holiness into everything we do is the essence of the entire Torah!

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

If a person is a “mini-world,” what part of us is “heaven” and what is “earth”?



Buttered Bagel

When the Alter Rebbe first traveled to the Maggid of Mezritch, it was decided that he would study with the Maggid’s son, R’ Avraham the Malach. R’ Avraham would teach the Alter Rebbe Chassidus, and the Alter Rebbe would teach R’ Avraham Gemara and Halachah.

One time, after learning a profound concept in Chassidus, R’ Avraham noticed the Alter Rebbe eating a bagel with butter.

“After learning such great and holy ideas, you lower yourself to indulge in such physical pleasure?!” R’ Avraham asked.

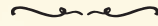
The Alter Rebbe replied, “After learning those lofty concepts, I felt my soul attempting to leave my body, striving to return to Hashem. But I understand that this is not what Hashem

desires. Hashem sends neshamos to this world to dwell here and make it holy, not to flee from it. Therefore, immediately after learning those

ideas, I needed to indulge in a worldly pleasure to calm the urge and keep my neshamah within my body.”



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The Torah—A Manual for Life

Have you ever studied the design of a beautiful building? Every part of the building works together to create a perfect structure. The windows let in light at just the right spots, and each room is the ideal size and in the perfect location.

How did the builders know where to place each component?

Before the building was constructed, someone sat down and thought: “What is the purpose of this building? How will it be used?” Based on that, he created a blueprint, a map that showed the builders exactly how to construct the building.

Likewise, Hashem created a blueprint for us to follow as we “build” and perfect the world around us. This blueprint is the Torah, which serves as our map for life—guiding us constantly at every moment of the day.

If we want to lead a wholesome life, we should follow a life based on the Torah. By adhering to the manual created for us, we can be confident that our lives will be fulfilling and meaningful, exactly as they were intended to be.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How is the Torah like a blueprint for building something?

If the Torah is a “manual,” what is the purpose it helps us achieve?





Our Sages Say

Building Tools

התורה אומרת אני הייתי כלי אמנותו של ה'—הקדוש ברוך הוא I was Hashem's tool [to create the world].²⁷

Chazal teach that Hashem used the Torah to create the world. In fact, the Torah itself preceded the world by two thousand years.²⁸

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

What does it mean that the Torah existed before the world was created?



Word Power

The First

The letter ב at the beginning of a word can mean “with.” Therefore, the word בראשית can be read as ברא אלקים ב-ראשית—with the ראשית, Hashem created the world.

The Torah is sometimes called ראשית. According to this, the passuk teaches that the world was created with the Torah.³¹



Did You Know?

Human Creators

The Torah wasn't only used to create the world at the beginning of creation; the way the world functions now is also based on the Torah. Therefore, if a Rav gives a Halachic ruling, the world changes to fit the new ruling Torah.²⁹ The Torah literally runs the world!

When we learn Torah, we receive some of that power and can effect changes in the world around us.³⁰

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Can learning the Torah actually change things in the world around us?



Pearls of Wisdom

GPS for Life

The world can sometimes be a confusing place, and it can be easy to lose our way. Hashem gave us the guide and map to navigate life. The Torah tells us the meaning and purpose of everything that happens to us and what we are supposed to do. We have the guide for life; let's follow it.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How does the Torah help us understand the meaning of things that happen in our lives?





Everything's in Torah

The Ramban's student, Avner, strayed from the path of Torah and became an important minister.

One Yom Kippur, Avner sent guards ordering the Ramban to appear before him. When the Ramban arrived before his former teacher, Avner slaughtered a pig, roasted it, and ate it. The Ramban cried, "What caused you to fall so low?! What compelled you to abandon the holy teachings of the Torah?"

"You were once teaching the Torah portion of Haazinu," Avner explained. "You taught that in this short parsha of fifty-two pessukim, the Torah encodes all the details of the history of the Jewish people until the coming of Moshiach. You claimed, too, that encoded in its words are the names of every Jew to have ever lived."

"This is obviously absurd!" Avner scoffed. "How could 4000 years of history and millions of names be compressed into 614 words?"

"What I said is absolutely true," declared the Ramban. "And is still believe in it."

"If so," replied Avner, "my name must be found there too. Where in Haazinu is my name, and what is my fate?"

The Ramban davened for clarity and finally said: "Your name, Avner, can be found in passuk chaf vav. The third letter in these words is: אמרתי אפאיהם:זכרם מאנוש שבתה מאנוש זכרם spelling Avner."

In this passuk, Hashem is rebuking the Jewish people for turning away from the path of the Torah and becoming so corrupted that He wanted to destroy them.

Avner turned white and began to cry bitterly. "Is there any hope for me?" he begged. "Is there anything that I can do to return to Hashem?"

The Ramban looked compassionately at his former student. "The passuk itself provides the way to return. It says that Hashem will scatter B'nei Yisrael until their memory is erased. You must go into exile to do teshuvah."

Avner boarded a ship and was never seen again.³²

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Is it possible that all of history is somehow found within the Torah?

What lesson can we learn from the story of Avner and his name being in the Torah?



- 1 בראשית כ"ה, א, ב
- 2 אזור אליהו חיי שרה
- 3 חלק ב' עמוד שס"ט ספר המאמרים קונטרסים
- 4 אגרות קודש חלק י"א עמוד 143
- 5 תלמוד ירושלמי ברכות ט, א
- 6 בראשית רבא י, ז
- 7 ויגד מרדכי וירא
- 8 כד הקמח, פרנסה
- 9 תניא אגרת הקודש סימן כ"ה
- 10 שיחות קודש י"ג מנחם-אב תשל"ט
- 11 לקוטי שיחות חלק ג' עמוד 820
- 12 ברכות לב:
- 13 נוסח התפילה מוסף ר"ה
- 14 לקוטי תורה נצבים מ"ז, ג ובכ"מ, בראשית רבה א, ד
- 15 מלאכי ג, ו
- 16 נחמיה ט, ו
- 17 כ"מ בדא"ח
- 18 ספר המאמרים תרנ"ה עמוד 209
- 19 דרך מצותיך שרש מצות התפלה פרק מ'
- 20 תנא דבי אליהו רבה כ"א
- 21 ספר המאמרים
- 22 קהלת רבה א, ט
- 23 תנחומה פקודי ג'
- 24 קהלת ג, ו
- 25 ברכות ס"ג, א
- 26 אגרא דכלה, צרופי בראשית ח
- 27 בראשית רבה א, א
- 28 בראשית רבה ח, ב
- 29 ירושלמי כתובות א, ב
- 30 שיחות י"א-י"ב סוף תשמ"ג
- 31 בראשית רבה א, א
- 32 Seder Hadoros, y. 4954

Endnotes

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