

שמחת תורה ופרשת בראשית

Most of us are familiar with epic novels, trans-generational and trans-time, spanning a family from its beginnings until an ending that wraps up and summarizes its legacy to live on or to live no more.

In a certain way, we can look at the *Chamisha Chumshei Torah* in a similar way:

The Torah is the epic of mankind from its inception until a particular point in history – the death of Moshe Rabbenu and the entry of Israel into Eretz Yisroel.

HaKodosh Boruch *kavayochol* has a goal. He desires to share His benevolence and thus creates people who can be the recipients of His largesse. He places Man in a unique and special environment that enhances his ability to enjoy the Divine kindness.

When the experiment sputters with the sin of Odom and Chava in Gan Eden, Hashem allows mankind a full millennium to reset itself and be deserving of that which Hashem wishes to give.

At the end of those ten generations, the plans seem to have failed completely. Hashem has wiped out almost everything; His plans have failed!. Desolation and destruction are almost 100%.

Yet, the tiny bit, Noach, that survives grows and after another millennium there is one individual, Avraham Ovinu, whose personal strength, commitment and integrity may be the one who will allow G-d's plans to reach fruition.

But even that great person does not experience immediate complete success. The results are 50-50, Yitzchak and Yishmael. There is partial success that places his accomplishment above those in the past, but completion is far from being attained.

His half-success continues forward, extending the reach of this auspicious forbear another generation, but, he, Yitzchak, as well, only finds partial success. Again, the results are only 50-50, Yaakov and Eisav, and the partial failure this time seems far more serious than the partial failure of the previous generation.

However the partial success of the third generation turns into a complete success with the remarkable achievement of a cohort of a dozen outstanding individuals, the *Shevatim*.

Of course, this does not mean that there are no ‘bumps on the road’. There are and some most serious ones, often most disturbing in their content. Nonetheless, the success has the highest level of attestation¹.

Amazingly, that success is not destroyed by a multi-century abject downturn in their fortunes, being totally overrun by a foreign group, the Egyptians, that wishes to decimate them in one way or the other.

¹ We read (B'reishis Perek 35/Posuk 22):

וְיִהְיֶה בְּשֹׁכֵן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא וַיִּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת בִּלְהָה פִּילְגֶשׁ אֲבִיו וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל*
וַיְהִי בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר:

It was when Israel dwelled in that land that Reuven went and laid with Bilhah, the concubine of his father and Yisroel heard;

The sons of Yaakov were twelve.

(*Exceptionally there is a break in this verse here and thus it and its translation have been written on separate lines.)

Rashi writes:

ויהיו בני יעקב שנים עשר -...ורבותינו דרשו ללמדנו בא שכולן שוין, וכולן צדיקים, שלא חטא ראובן:

The sons of Yaakov were twelve – Our Rabbis interpreted this phrase to teach us that all of the sons of Yaakov were equal; all were righteous; Reuven did not sin.

Rashi, in our Parshas V'zos HaBrachah brings this verse and its explanation in connection with the blessing that Moshe Rabbenu conferred upon Reuven. We read (D'vorim Perek 33/Posuk 6):

יְחִי רְאוּבֵן וְאֵל יָמָת וְיִהְיֶה מִתּוֹ מִסְפָּר:

Reuven shall live and shall not die; his people shall be counted.

Rashi writes:

יחי ראובן - בעולם הזה:

Reuven will live – in this world

ואל ימות - לעולם הבא, שלא יזכר לו מעשה בלהה:

He will not die – in *Olom HaBo*. That is, the event of Bilhah will be not be remembered there.

ויהי מתו מספר - נמנין במנין שאר אחיו, דוגמא היא זו כענין שנאמר וישכב את בלהה ויהיו בני

יעקב שנים עשר, שלא יצא מן המנין:

His people shall be counted – His people will be counted with the rest of his brothers. This is like it is written, “He laid with Bilhah and the sons of Yaakov were twelve”. That is, he was not excluded from being counted with them.

Miraculously, they not only survive but they arrive at the apex of their history receiving a gift that will propel them along the path of history, the eternal Torah.

But, alas, that gift is destroyed by their own doing when Moshe breaks the *luchos*.

Even the least-informed of our readers will protest that stopping at this point of the sin of the Golden Calf and the breaking of the *Luchos HaBris*, eliminates an ongoing history that includes that which is, at the very least, a partial comeback and continues for four more decades. Why is it correct to stop at this juncture?

In fact, it is Rashi who tells us that the Torah has made a point of indicating that there is a certain stop that occurs when the Luchos are broken, even though the chronology of the Torah continues for an additional forty years.

How does the Torah conclude? We read its final verses (D'vorim Perek 34/P'sukim 10-12):

וְלֹא קָם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר יָדְעוּ ה' פְּנִים אֶל פְּנִים: לְכֹל הָאֹתוֹת וְהַמִּוֹפְתִּים
אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעֹה וּלְכֹל עַבְדָּיו וּלְכֹל אֶרֶץ: וְלֹכֵל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה
וּלְכֹל הַמוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

No other prophet arose in Israel like Moshe who knew Hashem face to face. For all of the signs and the wonders that Hashem sent him to do in the Land of Egypt to Par'o and to all of his servants and to his entire land. And for the strong hand and for the fearful things that Moshe did before the eyes of all of Israel.

What is the epitaph of Moshe Rabbenu that the Torah writes in these few sentences? Rashi teaches:

אשר ידעו ה' פנים אל פנים - שהיה לבו גס בו ומדבר אליו בכל עת שרוצה, כענין שנאמר (שמות לב/ל²) ועתה אעלה אל ה', (במדבר ט/ח³) עמדו ואשמעה מה יצוה ה' לכם:

He knew Hashem face to face – Moshe was comfortable and felt familiar with Hashem and would speak to Him whenever he wished. This is as it says, 'And now I will ascend to Hashem' and 'Stand and I will hear what Hashem will command you.'

ולכל היד החזקה - שקבל את התורה בלוחות בידיו:

And for all of the strong hand – He received the Torah and the *Luchos* in his hands.

ולכל המורא הגדול - נסים וגבורות שבמדבר הגדול והנורא:

And for all the great fearful things – the miracles and mighty acts in the great and fearful wilderness.

לעיני כל ישראל - שנשאו לבו לשבור הלוחות לעיניהם, שנאמר (דברים ט/יז⁴) ואשברם לעיניכם, והסכימה דעת הקדוש ברוך הוא לדעתו, שנאמר (שמות לד/א⁵) אשר שברת, יישר כחך ששברת:

² The entire verse, occurring after the sin of the Golden Calf, reads:

וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרַת וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם אַתֶּם חָטֵאתֶם חֹטְאָה גְדֹלָה וְעַתָּה אֶעֱלֶה אֶל ה' אוֹלִי אֲכַפְּרָה בְּעֵד חֹטְאתְכֶם:

It was on the morrow that Moshe said to the people, 'You have sinned a great sin and now I will ascend to G-d, perhaps I can bring atonement for your sin.'

³ This is the response of Moshe Rabbenu to the individuals who complained that they were ineligible to bring the *Korban Pesach* because they were *tomei*:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֹשֶׁה עֲמְדוּ וְאֶשְׁמְעָה מִה יִצְוֶה ה' לְכֶם:

Moshe said to them, 'Stand and I will hear what Hashem will command you.'

⁴ The entire verse reads:

וְאֶתֶּפֶשׁ בְּשֵׁנֵי הַלְּחָת וְאֶשְׁלַכְתֶּם מֵעַל שְׁתֵּי יָדַי וְאֶשְׁבְּרֶם לְעֵינֵיכֶם:

I held the two tablets and I cast them away from above my two hands and I broke them before your eyes.

⁵ The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה פֹּסֵל לָךְ שְׁנֵי לְחָת אֲבָנִים כְּרָאשֵׁינִים וְכִתְבֹתַי עַל הַלְּחָת אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל הַלְּחָת הַרְאשֵׁינִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַרְתָּ:

Before the eyes of all of Israel – His heart raised him to break the *Luchos* before their eyes as it says, ‘I broke them before your eyes’ and Hashem agreed with his thinking as it says, ‘*asher*-that you broken them’, indicating *y’yasher* –you acted straight and correct when you broke them⁶.

Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Engrave for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones and I will write upon the stones the words that were on the first tablets that you broke.

We read in Masseches Shabbos (87 a):

תניא: שלשה דברים עשה משה מדעתו והסכים הקדוש ברוך הוא עמו:...ושבר את הלוחות. שבר את הלוחות. מאי דריש? אמר: ומה פסח שהוא אחד מתרי"ג מצות, אמרה תורה וכל בן נכר לא יאכל בו, התורה כולה [כאן], וישראל משומדים - על אחת כמה וכמה! ומגלן דהסכים הקדוש ברוך הוא על ידו - שנאמר אשר שברת ואמר ריש לקיש: יישר כחך ששיברת.

The Braisa taught: Moshe did three things based on his own judgment and Hashem agreed with him:...He broke the tablets.

He broke the tablets. What did he interpret to allow this? Moshe said: ‘If regarding the *Korban Pesach*, which is only one of the 613 commandments, the Torah says, “One who has made himself foreign cannot eat from the offering”, here the entire Torah [is in my hands] and Israel are all apostates, certainly they should not receive it!’

From where do we know that Hashem agreed with Moshe? It says, ‘*asher shibartó* –that you broke’ and Reish Lokish explained *yi’yasher kochacha she’shibar’tó*.

⁶ It is readily apparent that there is no linguistic imperative to interpret *אשר שברת* as *אשר שברת* *אשר שברת*. Thus, Rashba in Masseches Shabbos (87 a), cited by *Sifsei Chachamim* here explains that we *must* say that Hashem approved of Moshe’s action in breaking the *Luchos*.

Rashbo’s proof is from Masseches Bava Basra (14 a-b). There, the Gemara discusses whether the fragments from the broken first *Luchos*, *שברי לוחות*, were placed inside the *Aron HaKodesh* or on an extension on its outside.

Rashbo says that it is inconceivable that these fragments would have been placed in this most holy site if breaking them was wrong.

אין קטגור נעשה סניגור! (מסכת ראש השנה 26 א.)

That which was used as a transgression cannot be used for a Mitzvah or for some other type of positive activity.

Thus the placement of these fragments in such an auspicious place indicates their Mitzvah-value. It thus follows, explains Rashbo, that Hashem approved the actions of Moshe Rabbenu and subsequently the verse can be interpreted as it was.

Rashi teaches us that the very last words of the Torah refer us to the nationally and historically⁷ traumatic event of the shattering of the tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were written.

And we want to understand, why would this be the note upon which the Torah concludes?

In this question, we do not minimize the praise that the Torah wished to bestow upon Moshe Rabbenu Olov HaShalom. If it would not be for Moshe Rabbenu we would not have received the Torah.

Rambam writes this as a Halachah⁸.

We understand why breaking the Luchos is a statement of praise for Moshe Rabbenu. It indicates his understanding of the Will of G-d, an understanding that

⁷ We read in the aftermath of *Cheit HaEigel* (Sh'mos Perek 32/Posuk 34):

וְעַתָּה לֵךְ נַחֵה אֶת הָעָם אֶל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי לְךָ הַיּוֹם מִלֵּאכִי! לֵךְ לִפְנֵיךָ וּבְיוֹם פְּקֻדֵי וּפְקֻדֹתַי עֲלֵהֶם
חֲטָאתָם:

And now, you, Moshe, go and lead the people to where I Hashem will tell you; behold My angel will go before you and on the day that I will remember, I will visit their sin upon them.

Rashi writes:

וביום פקדי וגו' - עתה שמעתי אליך מלכותם יחד, ותמיד תמיד כשאפקוד עליהם עונותיהם ופקדתי עליהם מעט מן העון הזה עם שאר העונות, ואין פורענות באה על ישראל שאין בה קצת מפרעון עון העגל:

On the day that I will remember— I listened to you, Moshe, not to destroy them altogether. Always, always when I will visit upon them their sins, I will visit upon them a little of the punishment of this sin with their other transgressions. No punishment comes upon Israel that does not have a little of the punishment of the sin of the Golden Calf.

⁸ See Mishneh Torah LaRambam Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah Perek 8.

There are those who disagree and say that Moshe was not the only possible candidate to receive the Torah.

Most notable among those in disagreement is Rav Yosef Albo in Sefer HaIkkarim (Maamar III/Perek 13 onward).

was at the very height of human capability. Moshe Rabbenu *knew* what G-d wanted, kavayochol.

But, our question is, why should this praise be noted at the Torah's conclusion? The death of Moshe Rabbenu is not only the end of his life; it is the culmination of Torah that was given at Sinai.

הכל הולך אחר החיתום:

Everything is influenced by the conclusion⁹.

What influence does the Torah wish to inform us when this is its conclusion?

In order to consider an approach to solving this question, let us go to the first Posuk of the Torah. We could say that we could go back to the first verse of the Torah from its last verse, upon which we are concentrating, or we could go forward to that first verse since on Simchas Torah that verse of B'reishis Perek 1/Posuk 1 is read immediately following the verse of D'vorim Perek 34/Posuk 12).

We read at the beginning of the Torah:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים... לִיקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

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

Also in Parshas B'reishis there is a similar verse (Perek 2/Posuk 4), but with significant changes.

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:

These are the generations of the heavens and earth on the day of Hashem G-d's making earth and heaven.

Although this verse may appear at first to be a replicate on the Torah's first verse, we note at least two significant differences.

The first difference is that the Torah mentions G-d's Name as *E...lokim* in its opening verse and in the latter Posuk He is called Hashem *E...lokim* for the first time.

⁹ See Masseches B'rachos 12 a.

This principle is said in regard to *Tefilah* but it reflects the idea of the importance of a culmination.

The second difference is that in the final phrase of the latter verse, the word *Eretz*-land precedes *shomayim*-heavens, different than the opening phrase of this verse itself and different from the first verse in the Torah.

Regarding the first question, the absence of the Name Hashem in the Torah's first verse, Rashi writes on the former verse:

ברא א...ל'קים - ולא אמר ברא ה', שבתחלה עלה במחשבה לבראתו במדת הדין, ראה שאין העולם מתקיים, הקדים מדת רחמים ושתפה למדת הדין, היינו דכתיב ביום עשות ה' א...ל'קים ארץ ושמים:

E...lokim created – The verse does not write that *Hashem* created! The reason is that originally the thought arose to create the world by the standards of *middas ha'din* – strict judgment. He saw that the world could not exist in such a fashion and thus [in the latter] verse wrote *Hashem* to precede *E...lokim* and partnered the *middas haRachamim*, the attribute of mercy, with *middas haDin* – the attribute of strict justice. That is what is written, 'On the day that Hashem E...lokim earth and heavens'¹⁰.

¹⁰ The commentary of *Gur Aryeh* is most helpful in both understanding the commentary of Rashi as well as seeing an objection that Gur Aryeh raises against Rashi.

Gur Aryeh writes:

שעלה במחשבה. ואם תאמר מה דהוה הוה, ומאי איכפת בזה אם כך עלה במחשבה, ויש לומר שבא להגיד לך שטוב הוא לאדם שיהיה עומד במידת הדין ושאינן צריך למדת הרחמים, שהרי כך היה רצונו של מקום בתחלה לבראותו במידת הדין, מזה תראה שכך הוא חפצו ורצונו, רק מפני שאין העולם יכול להתקיים בראו במדת הרחמים, ואשרי לו מי שיכול לעמוד במדת הדין, ואין צריך לרחמים:

Originally the thought arose – You may ask: what was, was. Why should we care what the original thought was [if that is not what occurred in practice]?

The answer is that this comes to teach us that it would be good if man could exist on *Middas HaDin* [alone] and not require *Middas HaRachamim*, since that was G-d's Will in the beginning to create him with *Middas Hadin*. From this you see that such was G-d's desire and will. It was only because the world could not exist otherwise that He created it with *Middas HaRachamim*. Happy is the one who can stand before G-d on *Middas HaDin* alone and not need His mercy.

This explanation can account for the unexpected reversal of the words *shomayim* and *eretz* in the second verse. When *shomayim* takes precedence, then *middas haDin* is far more appropriate. After all, in the heavens only justice should prevail.

However, if *Eretz* is to take precedence, then the nature of *Eretz* and its inhabitants must be dealt with. Man cannot survive if only *middas HaDin* is activated in his

אמנם דבר זה הוא עיקר סוד סדר העולם, וידוע הוא, כי אף על גב שהקדוש ברוך הוא ברא העולם במידת הדין - קיום שלו אינו רק ברחמים, שאף שמים לא זכו בדין, כי כל הדברים הגשמים הם יוצאים מן הדין בצד שאינם בעלי צורה מופשטת, ואף המלאכים, ולפיכך לא היה להם קיום בדין אם לא שתף שם רחמים עם הדין, והבן דבר זה.

In fact this is a fundamental hidden principle of the Order of the World. It is known that even though Hashem created the world with *Middas Hadin*, the world only exists because of *Middas HaRachamim*. Even heaven could not continue to exist with *Middas Hadin* alone. This is because all material objects cannot exist before *Middas HaDin* because they are concrete and not abstract – even the angels. Therefore they could not exist by *Middas Hadin* alone if G-d did not partner mercy with judgment. Understand this matter.

ובבראשית רבה (יב/טו) לא אמרין שם שעלה במחשבה לבראתו בדין, רק שנברא בשניהם, וזהו כמו שאמרנו, ולא כמו שפירש רש"י 'שעלה במחשבה':

In Midrash B'reishis Rabba it does not say that such was the 'original thought' to create man with *din*. It says there that man was created with both – *rachamim* and *din* and that is like we said. That is not like Rashi who commented that 'such was the original thought'.

Regarding the fact that neither people nor the heavens can exist if Creation would be judged solely by *Middas HaDin*, the Gemara in Masseches Chagigah (5 a) cites the verse in Iyov (Perek 15/Posuk 15):

הן בְּקִדְשׁוֹ לֹא יֶאֱמִין וְשָׁמַיִם לֹא זָכוּ בְּעֵינָיו:

Behold, He does not trust His holy ones and the heavens are not pure in His eyes.

Regarding the angels, Iyov writes (Perek 4/Posuk 18):

הן בְּעֵבְדָיו לֹא יֶאֱמִין וּבַמַּלְאָכָיו יִשִּׁים תְּהַלֵּה:

Behold, he does not believe in His servants and in His angels He will attribute foolishness.

regard. He requires *Middas HaRachamim* and requires that *middas haRachamim* has precedence over *Middas Ha Din*.

It with this introduction to the Torah that Rashi expands upon that we are able to understand the Torah's conclusion.

If the Torah only had wanted to give Moshe Rabbenu a fitting epitaph, this verse that praises his leadership in breaking the *Luchos* could have been written elsewhere. In fact, we already have seen that praise at the time of the event when the Torah writes:

אשר שברת – יישר כוחך ששיברת

That you broke – You acted straight when you, Moshe, broke the tablets.

What is the justification for writing it this praise once more?

I think that we may offer an explanation as to why the Torah concludes on this sad note – the historical event of the breaking of the *Luchos* and the impending destruction of Israel that could have occurred.

When Israel sinned with the *Eigel HaZahav*, Hashem told Moshe Rabbenu (Sh'mos Perek 32/Posuk 10):

וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִּי וַיִּחַר אַפִּי בָהֶם וְאֶכְלֶם וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל:

Now leave Me and My anger will be incensed against them and I will destroy them and make you a great nation.

Now, that destruction did not occur. Moshe averted it.

We do not contemplate for a moment that Hashem was making an idle threat that He did not 'intend' to fulfil. When Hashem makes a statement it is the ultimate truth. Nonetheless, that destruction did not occur.

We now come to the conclusion of the Torah and we are reminded of the low-point to which our ancestors reached so soon after having Hashem reveal Himself to them on Mt. Sinai.

We continue past the era of the Torah and we read the *Nevi'im* and the often sinful history of Israel and the destruction of the first *Beis HaMikdosh*.

We continue in history and see that despite their sinful nature and despite the ongoing low-level of our ancestors, the Beis HaMikdosh was rebuilt after 70 years, even though it was destroyed again some 420 later.

We view the history of our people – the pogroms, the destructions of communities and the *Shoah*.

We look around and see frightening rates of intermarriage, *Chillul Shabbos*, extraordinary numbers of our people all but cut off from any connection to Judaism. In Eretz Yisroel we see the forces that are working against observance, seeking to legalize civil marriages, to make the Kosel a 'pluralistic' place of worship, to recognize 'marriages' that the Torah refers to as תועבה – abominable.

And we wonder what will be? It is truly frightening.

And that is the message that the Torah gives us as it comes to its conclusion.

It is frightening! The rightful destruction of the Luchos was a tragedy of immense proportions. Is there a future?

The Torah then immediately takes us to the beginning of it all – to B'reishis. And there, in this initial Sefer in which HaKodosh Boruch Hu teaches us of His connection with us, He makes a promise: He will lead the world with mercy and then, only then, will *din* follow.

The promise is His mercy. The promise is that He Yisborach is willing to give us another chance, another attempt and will not write us off from the pages of history.

In fact, *Simchas Torah*, combining the conclusion of the Torah with its beginning, serves as a culmination of the more than seven weeks that began with Elul.

In this period, two messages reverberated. One message was that we have to improve ourselves and we are reminded of the tragedies that occurred to our people over the millennia. When there is sin there is punishment. G-d directs the world and He demands that His Will be fulfilled.

But there was a second message as well. There is an 'open hand' in heaven ready to accept us; the opportunity is always before us to reach out to that hand:

אתה נותן יד לפושעים וימינך פשוטה לקבל שבים

You Hashem give Your hand to the sinners; Your right hand is extended to accepted the penitents.

That is the message that we are to take with us as we conclude this remarkable period of time.

It is truly a reason for *Simchas* Torah because the reading of this day gives us reason to hope, to aspire, to look towards a better future.

It is the message of the Torah that brings us this *Simchah*.

Should we not rejoice?

Chag Sameach

Shabbat Shalom

A gezunte vinter

Rabbi Pollock