



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ה תולדות

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

Nachmanides (49:23) calls Genesis “The Book of Creation”.

השלים הכתוב ספר בראשית שהוא ספר היצירה בחדוש העולם
ויצירת כל נוצר, ובמקרי האבות כולם שהם כעין יצירה לזרעם, מפני שכל
מקריהם ציורי דברים לרמוז להודיע כל העתיד לבא להם

*The book of Bereshit, is the book of Creation of the world and everything in it, and **the events that occurred to the forefathers, which are like a creation** for their children. This is because all the events that happened to them (the forefathers) create a template that hints to all that will transpire with their progeny in the future.*

On the Torah’s opening verse:

(א) בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

1) *In the beginning of Hashem’s creation of the heavens and the earth.*

Rashi comments:

בראשית ברא - אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשוני כמ”ש רז”ל (ב”ר) בשביל
התורה שנקראת (משלי ח) ראשית דרכו ובשביל ישראל שנקראו (ירמ”י ב) ראשית
תבואתו

*This verse calls out for an interpretation. It is to be interpreted as the Sages have rendered it in the Midrash, “**for the Torah, which is called ראשית-reishit, and for Yisrael, who are called ראשית - reishit.**”*

This means that the letter **ב** commencing the word **בראשית** is to be translated as **for**; hence, because the Torah and Yisrael are both called **ראשית - reishit-** via the Torah’s first word Hashem informs us, **“For the Torah and for Yisrael Hashem created the heavens and the earth.”**

It makes sense that Hashem tells us right from the very beginning His reason for creating the world. Otherwise, how would we know? Indeed, mankind in general is perplexed and confused as to what it

should be doing with this life on Earth. The answers run the gamut from one extreme to the other, and many people have never even given the question any thought, just going through life living from moment to moment and from day to day. How privileged we are to know from our Creator what His intentions were for us when creating the world. How privileged we are to know that we are the purpose for which He created this entire universe!

Since the Jewish Nation is the purpose for Creation, the Torah details the Jewish nation's creation as well as its roots. This is why the Torah goes into such detail to describe the lives and events of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

Parshat Toldot is the Torah's only parsha in which all three patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, were alive together. Although we read of Avraham's death at the end of last week's portion, and this week's portion begins with Yitzchak and Rivka praying for children, the Torah is not necessarily written in strict chronological order. The math demonstrating this is quite simple. Avraham was one hundred years old when he had Yitzchak, Yitzchak was sixty years old when he had the twins (Yaakov and Esav), and Avraham died at 175. It comes out that Yaakov and Esav were fifteen years old when Avraham passed away.

One of the Pesach seder's highlights comes at the very end: the famous counting song *Echad me yodea?* (*Who Knows One?*) The song itself supplies the answers: One is Hashem. Then, two are the tablets of the covenant (containing the ten commandments), three are the Forefathers (*Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov* - the Patriarchs), and four are the Foremothers (*Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah* - the Matriarchs.)

This song is based on a lesson from the Talmud (Berachot 16b).

תנו רבנן אין קורין אבות אלא לשלשה ואין קורין אמהות אלא לארבע

The Sages taught: Only three are called Fathers, and only four are called Mothers.

What is the significance of telling us that there is only a certain number and no more? And why wouldn't Adam and Chava (Eve) or Noah and Naama (his wife) also be called patriarchs and matriarchs; didn't all of humanity originate from them?

Parents impart their character and personality qualities to their children. Through nature, *i.e.*, heredity, children receive their genetic makeup and their physical attributes; through nurture, *viz*, love and education, they receive their personalities and character. (This is a very rough breakdown, but it suffices to make the point.)

It is sometimes easy to intuit a child's family name just by looking at him. He looks just like his father. Or, a mannerism or action could be the giveaway. That is something that "only so-and-so does," so his child must have learned it from him. Yet after one generation and, certainly, several, it becomes impossible to tell who the grandparents were; their qualities, as strong as they may have been, will have become diluted by the dominant qualities of the subsequent generations.

The Talmud is telling us that as far away as we may go from our forefathers and foremothers, they still have a direct and tangible influence on our character. Every Jew has certain character traits and good qualities just because he is their grandchild. Each of the forefathers perfected himself in a specific attribute that he passed down to his progeny and which became an indelible part of every Jewish person until the end of time. Because Adam and Eve, or Noah and Naama, did not distinguish themselves in any particular attribute, they therefore imparted no specific attribute to their progeny. Hence, they did not achieve the status of patriarchs or matriarchs.

The Jewish nation is founded by the holiest and greatest forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and the holiest and greatest foremothers, Sarah, Rivka, Leah, and Rochel. Hashem told us in His Torah that these people perfected different pathways of service to Him, and that they each were perfect in their mode. It is no wonder that the Jewish people are such an amazing people. Look who we came from!

Our Sages teach us that Hashem has three principal attributes: (1) חסד - *chessed* - Loving kindness, (2) דין - *din* - strict judgment, and (3) רחמים - *rachamim* - mercy. Each of the forefathers chose to model himself after Hashem and perfect himself in one of these attributes. Avraham perfected חסד - Loving kindness, Yitzchak דין - strict judgment, and Yaakov רחמים - mercy. This means that each of our forebears reached the highest level possible in his particular attribute.

The Talmud (Yevamot 79a) quotes King David;

אמר שלשה סימנים יש באומה זו הרחמנים והביישנים וגומלי חסדים

*There are three signs by which the Jewish people are recognized in the world. Jews are **merciful**, **have a sense of shame**, and **bestowers of loving kindness**.*

These are the three characteristics we received from our three forefathers. **Merciful** from Jacob, **shame** from Yitzchak, and **loving kindness** from Avraham.

Hashem's first attribute is lovingkindness Because Hashem is the beginning of everything, because there is nothing before Him or over Him that can compel Him to do anything. Whatever He does comes "*from the goodness of His heart*," so to speak, and a desire to bestow His goodness and love upon others. This is the source and reason for all that exists.

Avraham perceived the magnitude of Hashem's kindness to all the creatures in Creation and showcased Hashem's kindness to the world through his acts of kindness to others.

Hashem could have created people merely as souls and bestowed upon them spiritual goodness and pleasure for all eternity. However, He wanted the recipients' pleasure to be perfect and without embarrassment. Because the soul comes from Hashem - One Who can only give and not take because He is perfect - the soul would disdain accepting unending pleasure as a gift, having done nothing to earn it. This would taint the pleasure making it bittersweet, maybe more bitter than sweet.

To remedy this problem, Hashem revealed His second attribute: *din* - strict judgment. He created a system whereby we will be able to justly demand (*din*) payment, or reward, for our actions. That is *this* world, where we must choose between right and wrong, good and bad. These choices are ours alone and entitle us to receive reward for our good decisions.

This world was also created entirely with the attribute of strict judgment. How is that? Each of the 118 elements on the periodic table of elements that combine to create all matter on this earth has its exact and unique physical properties. In creating matter, Hashem judged each element to determine exactly what it would be with just so many protons, neutrons, and electrons. These judgments are what make each element unique, whether solid, gas, or liquid. These judgments also determined their boiling and freezing points, their hardness or softness, strength or weakness, color and consistency, etc.

The laws of nature in the universe are also exact to the extreme. In his book "*Just Six Numbers*", Martin Rees, a Royal Society Research Professor at Cambridge University, describes six numbers that are

especially significant. Two of them relate to the basic forces, the next two fix the size and overall “texture” of our universe and determine whether it will continue for ever, and the last two fix the properties of space itself. The book’s essence is to explain how if any of these numbers were just slightly off, the entire universe would cease to exist.

The number N for example is equal to 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (That’s 33 zeros). This number measures the strength of the electrical forces that hold atoms together divided by the force of gravity between them. He explains how if there was even one less zero, only a short-lived miniature universe could exist and no creatures could grow larger than insects.

That is just *one* of the six numbers he speaks about, explaining how essential it is that they each be as exquisitely precise as it is. There are a total of 22 constants in nature that are all extremely exact and work harmoniously to create a universe capable of supporting life. Scientists have discovered that if any of them were even slightly off, like 32 - 0’s instead of 33, life could not exist on our planet, and, indeed, the Earth itself could not exist.

These laws of nature are consistent and unforgiving. If a person leaps from a tall building, gravity will pull him down to earth every time.

Hashem’s third quality *rachamim*, mercy, is a combination of *chesed* and *din*.

Chesed. *i.e.*, unlimited kindness extended whether a person deserves it or not, would not allow for one to earn his reward. *Din* - strict judgment – would mean you get exactly what you deserve. A perfect person would receive great reward. However, someone less than perfect would also receive the exact reward that he deserves, but not only will it not be good, it will be very, very bad. With *din*, for one to succeed he

must be perfect every time; there is no room for error. If one could do everything exactly right throughout his life, he would earn great reward, but this is simply not realistic. Man is far from perfect!

ואמר אם אני בורא אותנו במידת הדין אין לו תקומה

Hashem said: "If I create it with strict judgment, the world will not be able to exist."

The Midrash (פסיקתא רבתי - פרשה מ) explains that originally, Hashem wanted to create man to live in a world with only *din*. When He saw that the world would be unable to endure because the first time that man stepped out of line he would be destroyed for rebelling against the Great and Mighty Hashem, Hashem combined *chesed* and *din* to create *rachamim* (mercy). The *chesed* component postpones the judgment and allows a person time to reflect on his actions and to repent for them. When Hashem ultimately punishes a person, He injects kindness into it, so the punishment is with mercy, and not with his death. On the other hand, the *din* aspect is still there to put a limit to the kindness. When that limit is reached, the attribute of *din* takes over. Hashem's attribute of mercy also allows a person the opportunity to uproot his sin by doing *teshuva*. When a person sincerely regrets his sin, Hashem accepts the pain of his remorse as the punishment for the sin and forgives him. Moreso, if a person does *teshuva* out of love for Hashem, Hashem converts his sins into mitzvot. Since the sin has served as a tool to bring him closer to Hashem, the sin becomes a merit.

Rachamim (compassion) comes from the word רחם - "womb," for this is the attribute that allows for a future, much like a womb, which gives a future to a fetus. For this reason, *rachamim* is also called the attribute of אמת - emmet - *truth* because it allows for Hashem's creation to remain true to its goal and continue to exist.

These three attributes have other appellations: גדול - Great- for *chessed*, גבור - Mighty, for *din*, and נורא - Awesome for *rachamim*. In the Shmoneh Esrei, the silent prayer, after mentioning the forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, we mention these three adjectives – גדול, הגבור, והנורא, the Great, Mighty, and Awesome, because they correspond to the three forefathers.

Hashem's *greatness* is evidenced in the universe that He created. It is great and of immense size. Billions of light years big, with an almost infinite number of creatures and objects in it.

Hashem manifests His great *might* by such a holy and spiritual G-d having created a material world, the exact opposite of His completely spiritual essence. (*Might* is indicative of overcoming a difficult obstacle.) Hashem did this by limiting His spirituality and allowing more and more materialism to appear in creation. In this sense, Hashem exhibited extreme might in, so to speak, overcoming Himself (His spiritual self) and allowing for materialism to appear. He did this until there were tiny tiny particles of matter, even smaller than atoms.

The third attribute, Awesome, is a combination of great and mighty. That would mean combining the vast size of the universe with nature's tiniest particle.

There is a stunning application in creation of how *chesed* and *din* combine to form *rachamim*.

When a hydrogen atom is split, it creates a nuclear explosion, a hydrogen bomb. Temperatures of a nuclear explosion reach those of the interior of the sun, about **100,000,000° Celsius**, and produce an overwhelmingly brilliant fireball. A single hydrogen bomb can produce an explosion equivalent to millions of tons of TNT, capable of causing widespread destruction. Splitting a single atom, yields an atomic

explosion of tremendous size and power. In this we see the magnitude of Hashem's greatness in the smallest particles of matter that Hashem made. How could such an infinitesimally small thing such as an atom ($1.660538921(73) \times 10^{-27}$ kilograms) contain so much energy and create such a powerful explosion? That is absolutely awesome! Only the Awesome Hashem could do it.

This is true of every one of Hashem's creatures and inventions. Look closely at any plant, bug, or animal, and you will find Hashem's out-of-the-box ingenuity and brilliance in each one of them. That is simply awesome, nothing less.

John Ciardi (a poet, translator and etymologist) once said, "Who could believe an ant in theory? A giraffe in blueprint? Ten thousand 'doctors of what's possible' could reason half the jungle out of being."

Each forefather epitomized one of Hashem three main qualities. But how were they able to transfer these attributes to their progeny until the end of time?

These inherent traits of the Jewish nation result from the difficult tests that our forefathers passed. Passing the difficult tests made the benefits that accrued to them from those tests the very fabric of their persona and a trait that would be inherited by every Jew that will ever be born.

Rabbi Chaim ben Isaac Volozhin (1749 -1821) in his commentary to the Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:3) derives this concept from a verse in Proverbs 20:7.

(ז) מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּתוֹמוֹ צְדִיק אֲשֶׁרֵי בְנָיו אֲחֲרָיו :

When a Tzadik goes in righteous ways, praiseworthy are his children after him.

R' Chaim explains: Many of the attributes that the righteous person worked and toiled to acquire become second nature to his children and can be attained with just a small amount of work. As we have seen throughout the generations, even the simplest Jew, when faced with the test of "*your life or your G-d,*" has chosen to give his life instead of bowing to an idol. This is a direct result of Avraham Avinu being willing to give up his life for Hashem by allowing himself to be thrown into the fire of *Ur Kasdim*. Every Jew finds a special place in his soul for the Land of Israel because of the test of "*Lech lecha*" "Go for yourself to the land I will show you," that Avraham passed. His love for the Land of Israel penetrated his being and became a part of him and subsequently all of his progeny after him.

We received the attribute of ***loving kindness*** from Avraham, because Avraham sought to model and perfect the attribute of *chesed*. To this end, many of Avraham's tests were in the area of kindness, and sometimes even required him to curtail his natural *chesed*. For example, the test to send Yishmael away because Sarah perceived that he was having a negative influence on Yitzchak. Avraham did not agree with Sarah, but Hashem told Avraham to listen to her. Avraham's love and compassion for his son should have made it impossible to send him into the wilderness to possibly perish, but Avraham overcame his innate feelings to fulfill Hashem's instruction.

The same is true with the binding of Yitzchak. Avraham's every spiritual hope and aspiration was embodied in his son Yitzchak, and now he is told to kill him? He is a pure and righteous person! He will carry forward all the holy work that Avraham did in the world. Why should he die? Avraham overcame his attribute of *chesed* and willingly complied with Hashem's command.

These tests to withhold his *chesed* reveal that Avraham did not do *chesed* because it suited his good nature. It was deliberate and calculated, and where Hashem deemed it inappropriate, Avraham desisted from it.

Yitzchak chose the opposite attribute to *chesed*, viz, *din* – strict judgment, which means that he did not want to receive any mercy from Hashem. He wanted to receive only what he deserved without any kindness. He lived his life in complete awe of Hashem and never committed a sin. This is why the Torah has so few personal stories about his life. There is little that we can learn from him because of our inability to live our lives without ever making a mistake as he did. This is why on two occasions Yaakov refers to Hashem as פחד יצחק - *the one my father constantly feared*. This is the source of the second attribute inherent in every Jew, **a sense of shame**. Yitzchak, having lived his whole life in awe and fear of transgressing a sin, has imbued his progeny with an innate fear and embarrassment from Hashem.

Yaakov chose to emulate Hashem's attribute of ***rachamim***, and lived his life with both attributes, *chesed* and *din* together. We inherited the attribute *rachamim* from Yaakov. Yaakov is also known for the attribute of אמת - truth, because he lived his life in a perfect balance between the two poles of *chesed* and *din*.

Because Yaakov lived a perfectly balanced life, his children were all righteous. Avraham had Yishmael who took Avraham's attribute of kindness to the absurd extreme. The Torah tells us that ידו בכל - *His hand was in everything* - he took anything he wanted from everyone. "Hey! You! Give me that, I want it! What do you mean you don't want to give it to me? You have to do *chesed*!" Yitzchak had Esav who took Yitzchak's attribute of *din* to the absurd extreme. If anybody crossed him, or did

something wrong, he would immediately judge and punish him, often killing him.

Yaakov also carried the entire future of the Jewish nation within him, like the womb. All twelve of his sons went on to found the Jewish nation comprising the twelve tribes.

In this week's portion, Toldot, we see where Yaakov was tested in the attribute of אמת - truth.

When Yitzchak attempted to give the blessing of Avraham to Esav, Yaakov had to impersonate Esav and literally steal the blessings from his father. This was a major challenge to Yaakov, whose attribute was truth, because now, he had to fool his father. But Yaakov listened to his mother, who told him that Hashem told her that he had to go through this test, and he proceeded to steal the blessings. He had to endure this test without allowing it to influence his attribute of truth in any way.

In future Torah portions we will see other instances where Yaakov's attribute of truth is challenged, and how he passed them all.

We are the grandchildren of the three great forefathers - Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov- who, through their hard work and great commitment and dedication to Hashem, perfected themselves in one of Hashem's attributes. Although the Torah with its 613 commandments is really an instruction book for life, Hashem nevertheless dedicated one fifth of the Torah (the book of Genesis) to informing us who we came from. We should feel the greatest pride and responsibility by the wealth that we have inherited as part of our nature from our forefathers who worked so hard to acquire it.

Just as the forefathers transmitted their exceptional attributes to their children through the work that they did on themselves, so, too, when we work to perfect an attribute within ourselves, our efforts will

also have a positive effect our children. In this way, we continue to make the Jewish people the greatest nation in the world.