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I The Temple

The world usually translates the first word of the Torah as “In the beginning.”
Bereishis does not mean “In the beginning.”

The Medrash² says that *Bereishis* means “Because of the beginning.” G-d created the world because of those people who know the secret of beginning.

Some people only know the secret of the end. For them, the world was a waste of time. Just suffering. Just survival.

The Medrash teaches us what is called a beginning: Israel is called a beginning; the Beis Hamikdash is called a beginning; Abraham is called a beginning.

The world is called a beginning. Do you know why the world is called a beginning? The whole world is always beginning.

Imagine if, G-d forbid, someone is going to commit suicide. You know what you do? You take a walk in the forest, not in the middle of the market. You go out to the forest where the world is the way G-d created it. What do you feel?

You feel like beginning all over again. Why so?

Because G-d created the world with beginnings, and the whole world is filled with beginnings.

Imagine that I'm overwhelmed and sad and I don't know what to do — I open the window to get myself some fresh air. What does air do to me? Fresh air gives me the strength to begin again.

Why is Yerushalayim so holy? Yerushalayim is so holy because if you just remember Yerushalayim, it gives you strength to begin.

What happened in the Holy Temple when people visited it?

Here comes a sinner, all his life he has sinned; everything is wrong. His soul is bankrupt. He walks into the Holy Temple — he walks out dancing. What happened to him? He has the strength to start. It's a new beginning.

We leave the Holy Temple different from the way we entered it.

How do we enter Yerushalayim?

How do we enter the Holy Temple?

Do you know what it means to purify yourself and come to the Holy Temple? It doesn't mean you leave your baggage outside and then you go in.

To come to the Holy Temple means you'll be standing before G-d. To stand before G-d means you have to take all your baggage in with you.

Imagine you have to see the President. You can't walk into his office with all your furniture, or even with a shopping bag. You leave everything outside. But when it comes to G-d, unless you come with everything, you're still not completely standing before Him. If you left something outside, only part of you is with Him — you're not fully with Him.

On Friday night, at the end of Lecha Dodi, we say "*Bo'ee b'shalom,*" — "Come in peace the Sabbath Queen," and we turn around and look behind us.

What are we looking for? We look around to see if there is anything we might have forgotten to bring into Shabbos with us.

Some people say that in order to really be "in Shabbos," we have to leave all our baggage outside and be a little bit *Shabbosdik* for a day.

This is not real. *Mamesh* being “in Shabbos” means that we take everything we have and bring it with us into the Holy Day.

When we go for a walk, we don’t turn around to see if we forgot anything, because we don’t take everything with us for a little walk.

But when we move to a new place, we go back and make sure that we took everything. You’re not supposed to walk into Shabbos — we are supposed to *move* into Shabbos. And if we really move into Shabbos, then before we enter we turn around and say, “*Bo’ee b’shalom*”, Come in peace. And right then we turn around to see if there is anything we forgot to bring into Shabbos with us.

We are supposed to come into Shabbos with everything we have. This is how a *Yiddele* walks into the Beis Hamikdash.



There is a little land. In that little land, there is a little city.

In that city there is a little street, and in that street there is a little wall.

When you stand by that Holy Wall, you can hear the footsteps of our father Abraham, and you can hear the trumpet of the Great Day to come. You hear the past and you can hear the future.

You can hear the singing of the Levites. Or, you can hear us crying, going into exile.

You can hear the 6 million crying out of the gas chambers, and you can hear the *Yiddelach’s* tears in Siberia.

You can only see clearly if your eyes are filled with tears. When you stand by the Holy Wall and your tears are flowing, you see 6 million tears by that Holy Wall. You see the tears of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You see the tears of King David. You can see the tears of your own children; you can see the tears of the whole world. You can hear people singing, singing the songs of yesterday, of tomorrow, of the Great Day to come.

The holiest time of the day is between day and night, when it’s not night and it’s not yet morning. Night doesn’t want to leave the

Holy Wall, and the day doesn't want to drive out the night. They make peace between each other by that Holy Wall and they say, "let's be together, day and night, night and day." This is the holiest time by the Wall.

I was standing one early morning between day and night by the Holy Wall, and I was saying Kaddish for my father. But when you stand by that Holy Wall, you say Kaddish for the whole world. Sometimes you feel like saying Kaddish for your own soul, and sometimes you feel like saying Kaddish for tomorrow.

Then you hear the words "*Yisgadal V'yiskadash Shmei Raba*," — "May G-d's Name become great and sanctified," and you remember there is one G-d, and you know that the Great Morning is coming. You know that day and night will get together. The living and the dead, we and the whole world.

This is my song, the song of tears, because on that Great Day the tears will march through the world, and the whole world will join them. The tears will clear the world and prepare the world. Everything will come together. We will all come together. It will be a new morning. A new beginning.



The first line of the Torah says, "*Bereishis bara Elokim es hashamayim v'es ha'aretz*" — "In the beginning G-d created heaven and earth." And the verse continues, "*V'ha'aretz haysa sohu vavohu*," — "And the land was in chaos," "*v'Ruach Elokim merachefes al pnei hamayim*" — "And the Spirit of G-d was upon the waters."³

The Medrash asks, "What was the Spirit of G-d which was upon the waters?"

The Spirit of G-d refers to *rucho shel* Mashiach, the spirit of Mashiach.

Then it says “*Vayomer Elokim yehi ohr*”⁴ — “G-d said, ‘Let there be light’” — “*va’yehi ohr*” — “and there was light.” That means that someday, when Mashiach comes, it will be the time for G-d to say, “Let there be light.”

Now listen to this. “*V’ha’aretz*,” — “and the land” — this is the Holy Land. What other land could the Torah be talking about?

“*V’ha’aretz haysa sohu vavohu*,” the land was *mamesh* in chaos — this is the *churban* Beis Hamikdash.

“*v’Ruach Elokim merachefes al pnei hamayim*” — “And the Spirit of G-d was upon the waters.”

The Medrash asks: “What were these waters?” And it answers, “These were all the tears that were shed over the destruction.”

Who was crying over the destruction? The Jewish people were crying. G-d was crying.

In Hebrew, there is no singular term for water. *Mayim* is always plural. Since *mayim* can mean the tears, it’s always two tears.

In other words, when I am crying, G-d is crying. There has never been one tear in the world. With every tear that someone sheds, G-d is crying also. Two tears, at least. Every time. No one has ever cried alone.

We know that the first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are *alef* and *beis*. And the strangest thing is: “*Bereishis bara*,” the phrase describing the creation of the world, begins with *beis*. And the Ten Commandments, the Torah, begin with *alef*.

What caused the destruction of the world? The *alef* and the *beis*, the physical world and the Torah, never got together.

It’s the same thing for us in our personal lives. The conflict inside every human being is a conflict between the *alef* and the *beis*. Our *beis*, our physical world, has not been completely integrated into our *alef*, the Torah.

Or that some of our *alef*, our Torah, didn’t get deep enough into our *kishkes*, our physical being. The *alef* and the *beis* just never got together — which results in destruction.

4 Bereishis 1:3

We try our best. We hang on a little bit, bouncing back and forth between the *alef* and the *beis*, clinging to both but without them being connected. We just aren't whole. We are not completely natural and not completely unnatural; we are a little bit good and a little bit evil — a little bit in the world, a little bit following our nature, a little bit connected to Yiddishkeit — everything a little bit.

This is chaos. Do you know what “*Sohu vavohu*” means? Chaos means that everything is there — but not in the right place.

Imagine that I come into your house and it's *mamesh* chaos. This doesn't mean there's no kitchen, no bathroom. Chaos means that the couch is on top of the stove. What's going on here? I mean, I know you need a couch and you need a stove, but not in the same place.

If you have a bed and table, it's beautiful. I'm glad you have a table and you have a bed. But will you please put it all in order? Otherwise it seems like total destruction, “*sohu vavohu*.”

Chaos. Everything is there, but not in the right place. It never came together.

You see what it is: It is possible for a couple to hang on to each other for 2,000 years, but they never really got together. Still, it's also not bad enough to divorce each other. It's not living, but it's also not dying. Then, something happens, and they just can't go on the way they are going now. So they separate. Do you know what happens then? Suddenly, after they separate, they realize that they really belonged to each other. You see, their staying together was not the cure — their cure was the separation.

The way things are now is no good. Too much chaos. Half here and half there.

Inside, we know that we cannot live with only the *alef* or the *beis*. Even if we have both, we need them together. So the world — and we in our own lives — start getting the *alef* and the *beis* back together again.

Do you know where this happened? Where did everything find its right place?

The Holy Temple. We went into the Temple with everything we

had. All our shame, fears, and guilt. We came out singing. How? What happened?

The Holy Temple put everything in its right place. In the Holy Temple, G-d brought the *alef* and *beis* together again. The Beis Hamikdash is where everything came together. The complete integration between the Torah and the World.



Sometimes, I tell my child to close the door, and she doesn't want to do it. So then I say, "I want you to close the door!"

How close am I to my child at that moment? Not very. It is my wants against hers.

Now open your hearts wide.

Anything which has to do with "wanting" doesn't have closeness. There is no love going on, no real yearning.

If, G-d forbid, I am sick, my mind says to my foot "Do me a favor and move." But my foot doesn't move. Do you know why? My foot is not close to my mind. When they are close, everything happens automatically.

Do you know what happened in the Beis Hamikdash? Reb Nachman calls it *He'aras haratson*⁵ the "enlightenment of will" — G-d's Will was shining into us so strongly that it was like my foot responding to my mind without any trouble.

It was not that G-d "wanted" me to do something or was trying to get me to do certain things. In the Holy Temple, what G-d wanted me to do was so real and so clear, that it filled me with light and such a longing that all my life should be according to G-d's Will. I was as connected to G-d as my foot is connected to my brain. Our beings were all together and all together with G-d.

In the Holy Temple, all our fears, doubts, arguments... they all faded away in the Oneness of G-d.

5 *Likutei Halachos*, Orach Chayim Hilchos Birkas Harei'ach



According to Kabbalah, the two most important letters in the Hebrew alphabet are *mem* and *samech*.⁶ Moshe Rabbeinu gave us the Torah in 40 days — in *mem* days, because the numerical value of *mem* is 40. The form of *mem* at the end of a word is like a box. So *mem* surrounds you. Being like a box, the *mem* also has corners — and sometimes you can hurt yourself on a sharp corner.

But the *samech* — it’s a whole different thing. The *samech* is round, with no corners. Aharon HaKohen is the master of the *samech*. “*Somech Hashem l’chol ha-noflim*” — “G-d is a support to all who are falling.” *Samech* supports you. That’s something else.

Moshe Rabbeinu begged G-d to give the Torah through Aharon. He argued with G-d for eight days, but G-d said no. What was Moshe really asking G-d? He wanted us to be given the Torah of the round, supportive *samech*, not the Torah of the *mem*, of the forty days. A different Torah.

The truth is that you need the Torah of the *mem*. Imagine if I tell my children, “I love you, and anything you do is okay with me.” They’ll say, “So mazel tov, I’ll do anything in the world I want to do.”

There has to be a *mem*. There has to be a sharpness of corners that tells us, “Listen, if you do this, it’s wrong; and if you do that, it’s right.” The world has to know that killing is wrong, stealing is wrong, and other things are good. There has to be a *mem*, even if it hurts a little bit.

But after the *mem* comes the *samech*. You know friends, we’ve always had the Torah. We stood on Mount Sinai, we received the Torah, and we still have it. So what’s our problem?

Our trouble is that when it comes to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the Beis Hamikdash, you need the *samech*. In fact, the Temple is the center for the *samech*. “*Yerushalayim harim saviv la*”⁷ — “Jerusalem

6 Based on Tractate *Megillah* 3a

7 Tehillim 125:2

is surrounded by mountains.” It is surrounded, cushioned, supported by the mountains. And Yerushalayim is the center. What’s a *samech*? It is always round. A center doesn’t have corners, so it can’t hurt you. The center of our round *samech* is the Holy City of Jerusalem.

And this is our problem, this is what it means to be in exile. We know the Torah of the *mem*, but we don’t know the Torah of the *samech* anymore...

In the Temple, we had the *mem* and the *samech*. We were directed, we knew G-d’s Will. It was clear. That’s the *mem*. And we were supported, surrounded, and loved. That’s the *samech*.

Can you imagine what it felt like? Can you imagine being there for even one moment?



In the Holy Temple, the most important part was the singing — the singing of the holy tribe, the Levites.

According to our tradition, there were 50,000 instruments and 100,000 voices. They would alternate every few minutes, day and night. They would sing and play for the One, for the only One. Every note and every melody was the deepest prayer in the world. Those songs and prayers reached so deep, they reached into the deepest depths of every human being. You cannot hear those melodies and those prayers without returning to the One, to the only One.

Sadly enough, since the destruction of the Holy Temple, we do not sing these songs. “*Eich nashir es shir Hashem al admas neichar*,”⁸ How could we sing these holy songs on unholy soil?

On the other hand, how can you live without those holy melodies?

How can a Jew live for one moment without hearing a song of the holy Levites?

Do you hear them late at night in your dreams?

Do you hear the Levites?

Do you hear the 100,000 voices and the 50,000 instruments?

I remember that, when I was a little boy, I would always ask my father and my mother, “Don’t you remember one melody from the Holy Temple?”

But they didn’t know any. I asked great rabbis to teach me one melody. But they couldn’t.

I was desperate, just about to give up. Then one day I met an old Chassid from Russia who had spent ten years in Siberia. This person was ready to live and die for G-d a million times a second.

I asked him, “Don’t you know at least one melody from the Beis Hamikdash?”

The Chassid smiled at me. He put his holy hand on my shoulder and said what I had been hoping for so many years to hear: “My dear young man, let me tell you. When I was young I met an old Chassid who told me something he heard from other Chassidim: according to the Ba’al Shem Tov, the way we chant the prayers of the High Holidays is a little bit, and maybe all of it, from the Holy Temple.”

Do you know what this means? This means that in a way, we can still enter the Holy Temple today. The Levites are still singing.

In fact, the Holy Temple is still standing.

Let me explain.

Everyone thinks that the Holy Temple was destroyed. It’s not true. Three times a day, when we pray, it’s as if we are in the Holy Temple.

The first Holy Temple was built because of Avraham, who was the first one to pray the morning prayer. Sadly enough, it was destroyed.

The second Holy Temple was built because of Yitzchak and the afternoon prayer, but sadly enough it was also destroyed.

The third Temple will be built because of our holy father Ya’akov, and it can’t be destroyed because our holy father Ya’akov initiated the evening prayer. Ya’akov Avinu opened our hearts even while we were in the lowest, darkest night. You can still hear him saying to every Jew who ever lived until Mashiach comes, “Don’t give up, G-d is with you. You are always in Yerushalayim; you are always in the Holy Temple.