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# פרשת בראשית

## *Parashas Bereishis*

### *Whose Land Is It?*

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בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ —  
*In the beginning of God's creating the  
heavens and the earth (1:1).*

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R' Yitzchak said: [God] need not have begun the Torah but from הַחֲדָשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם, *This month shall be for you [the beginning of the months]* (Shemos 12:2), because it is the first commandment which Yisrael was commanded. What is the reason that He began with the Book of *Genesis*? It began thus because He wished to convey the message of the verse בְּחַ מַעֲשָׂיו הַגִּיד לְעַמּוֹ לְתַת לָהֶם נַחֲלַת גּוֹיִם, *The power of His acts He told to His people, in order to give them the estate of nations* (Tehillim 111:6). So that if the nations of the world will say to Yisrael, "You are bandits, for you conquered the lands of the seven nations who inhabited the land of Canaan," [Israel] will say to them, "The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, Blessed is He. He created it and He gave it to the one found proper in His eyes. By His wish He gave it to them, and by His wish He took it from them and gave it to us" (Rashi).

This first comment of Rashi on the Torah is difficult to understand. When the nations of the world accuse the Jewish people of having unlawfully seized the Land of Israel, how will it help to respond to them that the whole earth belongs to Hashem, and He gave this land to the Jewish people? They don't believe in the Creator; why would they accept the claim that Hashem took the land from them and gave it to the Jews?

R' Shalom Schwadron, known as the Maggid of Yerushalayim, notes that the *pasuk* cited by Rashi states, *כֹּחַ מִעֲשׂוֹ הַגִּיד לְעַמּוֹ*, *The power of His acts He told to His people*, not "to the nations." This implies that the response is directed at the Jewish people, not at the other nations. Furthermore, Rashi states, "By His wish He gave it to **them**, and by His wish He took it from **them**." If this response were directed at the nations, it should have said, "By His wish He gave it to **you**, and by His wish He took it from **you**." Clearly, this response is not said to the nations of the world; it is addressed to the Jewish people.

But why do the Jewish people need to hear this response? The nations of the world are the ones who are claiming that the Jews are bandits; how does it help to give an answer directed at the Jews themselves?

Some explain that once the nations of the world accuse the Jewish people of being bandits, some of the Jews begin to doubt their own claim to the Land. The incitement of the nations creeps into the Jews' worldview and shakes their confidence in their right to Eretz Yisrael.

We see this phenomenon even in our days, as unfortunately some Jews today have been influenced by the toxic beliefs of the nations, and feel that the claim of the nations is justified. To these Jews who doubt our claim to the Land, we respond, "The whole earth belongs to Hashem, and He gave it to us." For the Jewish people, who believe in Hashem, this answer is effective, for it dispels the notion that we stole the Land from the other nations.

### □ *Our Conviction Is Contagious*

We can explain Rashi's comment another way as well. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin 37a*) relates that a heretic said to R' Kahana, "You say that it is permitted for a *niddah* to be secluded with her husband; but is it possible for a fire to come in contact with

fiber-chips and not char them?" How, he was asking, can a couple possibly refrain from sinning during that time?

R' Kahana answered that Hashem testifies about the Jewish people that they are סוּגָה בְּשׂוֹשָׁנִים, *hedged with roses* (*Shir HaShirim* 7:3): Just the Torah's prohibition alone serves to prevent a Jewish couple from violating the prohibition of cohabiting while the wife is a *niddah*, and they require no actual barrier besides this "hedge of roses."

How could R' Kahana use the Torah's words to answer this heretic, who did not believe in the Torah? If he did not trust that the Jewish people could refrain from sinning when secluded with their wives, why would he trust the Torah's testimony that they are hedged with roses?

The answer is that R' Kahana himself lived with clear, unshakable belief in the truth of the Torah. To him, there was nothing more real and genuine than the Torah, and if the Torah says that the Jewish people guard themselves against sinning, then he believed this with tangible, absolute faith. And because his conviction was so deep and real, it automatically influenced those around him. Therefore, the heretic accepted his words. The pure truth spoken by R' Kahana eviscerated all arguments and doubts to the contrary, and with his faith he managed to convince even a heretic.

In a similar vein, a certain *bachur* in the Ponovezh yeshivah who was plagued with doubts in *emunah* approached the *Mashgiach*, R' Yechezkel Levenstein. He asked if he could share these doubts with him and receive answers to his questions of faith.

"*Emunah?*" the *Mashgiach* cried out. "I see Hashem clearly, the way I see my own ten fingers!" Immediately afterward, the *bachur* related that all of his questions vanished.

Because the *Mashgiach* lived with such tangible faith, his conviction radiated to those around him, to the extent that when this *bachur* saw R' Yechezkel crying out how clearly he believed in Hashem, all his doubts dissipated.

This insight into the power of a person's conviction sheds light on Rashi's words as well. If the Jewish people would tell *themselves*, "The whole earth belongs to Hashem, and He gave it to us," and they would absorb this belief firmly, then the nations would stop bringing grievances against them. The power of the Jewish people's conviction would radiate to their surroundings to the extent that it would ward off any claims that they stole the Land. If so,