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תשפ״ז

סדר הבריאה, and the דגים — תורה, עבודה

Dovid Kopel

The Unusual Place of דגים

There is something unusual about the place of דגים (*fish*) in the תורה.

A בהמה (*animal*) requires שחיטה (*ritual slaughter*). An עוף (*a bird*) requires שחיטה. A fish requires no שחיטה whatsoever. The גמרא in חולין כז ע״ב explicitly connects this distinction to the origins of these creatures. בהמות, created from the dry land, require two סימנים (*signs*). עופות require one. But דגים, created from the מים (*water*), require none.

Moreover, although fish are בעלי חיים (*living creatures*), they are not considered בשר (*meat*) for the purposes of בשר בחלב. And perhaps most strikingly, **fish have no place in the entire system of עבודת הקרבנות.**

A בהמה may be brought upon the מזבח (*altar*). An עוף may be brought as a קרבן (*offering*). Even סולת (*fine flour*), שמן and יין have their place in the עבודת המקדש. Yet fish are entirely absent from the sacrificial service.

This is not merely a question about the particular הלכות (*laws*) of שחיטה or בשר בחלב. It is a broader question about the place of דגים within creation and עבודת ה׳ (*service of Hashem*).

Why should this particular form of animal life be so fundamentally different?

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The First Living Creatures

Perhaps we can begin by looking at the סדר הבריאה (*the order of creation*).

On the fifth day, הקב״ה commands:

> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יִשְׁרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שֶׁרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל הָאָרֶץ עַל פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמָיִם. (בראשית א:כ)

Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.

The first בעלי חיים emerge from the מים. And it is these creatures that receive the first explicit ברכה (*blessing*) of ריבוי (*multiplication*):

> וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹקִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת הַמַּיִם בַּיַּמִּים וְהָעוֹף יִרֶב בָּאָרֶץ. (בראשית א:כב)

And God blessed them, saying: be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.

Only afterward, on the sixth day, is אדם created and given his own ברכה of פרו ורבו.

The כלי יקר on בראשית א:כ discusses the distinction between דגים, the עופות and the בהמות, associating them with different spiritual מדרגות (*levels*). The fish, living entirely within the מים, are associated with צדיקים (*righteous people*).

This invites us to consider the significance of the מים themselves.

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תורה, the תלמידי חכמים, and אדם

חז״ל (*the Sages*) repeatedly associate מים with תורה. The גמרא teaches, in בבא קמא יז ע״א, אין מים אלא תורה.

And in ברכות סא ע״ב it is רבי עקיבא who famously compares ישראל to fish living in water. Just as fish cannot survive outside the מים, so too ישראל cannot exist without תורה.

Perhaps we can suggest that the סדר הבריאה reflects a particular progression.

First comes תורה, which חז״ל teach preceded the creation of the world (פסחים נד ע״א).

Then come the דגים, representing תלמידי חכמים (*Torah scholars*), whose entire existence is immersed in תורה.

Only afterward comes אדם.

But why should the תלמידי חכמים precede אדם? Surely the human being must first exist before he can become a תלמיד חכם.

Perhaps the answer is that **the תלמיד חכם does not merely emerge from an established society. He is responsible for preparing the foundation upon which that society can be built.**

When we establish a city, the בית המדרש (*the study hall*) must come first. We do not merely build homes and businesses, establish a functioning community, and afterward decide that there should also be a place for תורה. The בית המדרש is the foundation around which the community is established.

We find precisely this principle when יעקב אבינו descended to מצרים, where the תורה tells us:

> וְאֶת יְהוּדָה שָׁלַח לְפָנָיו אֶל יוֹסֵף לְהוֹרֹת לְפָנָיו גֹּשְׁנָה וַיָּבֹאוּ אַרְצָה גֹּשֶׁן. (בראשית מו:כח)

He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to show the way before him to Goshen.

רש״י, citing the מדרש, explains:

> לתקן לו בית תלמוד שמשם תצא הוראה. (רש״י שם)

To establish for him a house of study, from which teaching would go forth.

Before יעקב brought his family to settle in גושן, he sent יהודה ahead to establish a בית המדרש.

The תורה must already have its place before the community arrives.

Perhaps this is the significance of דגים preceding אדם. The תלמידי חכמים must pave the way. They establish the spiritual foundation upon which the rest of mankind can build.

The תורה comes first. Then those whose lives are wholly immersed in תורה. Only afterward does אדם enter the world that has been prepared for him.

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The דגים and אדם — What Comes Later Is Not Necessarily Greater

There is, however, a further question.

In discussing the relationship between דגים and תלמידי חכמים, my Rebbe recalled a question that had troubled him.

The תנאים are described as נוני ימא, the fish of the sea, while we belong to the מדרגה (*level*) of אדם. But how can this be? אדם is, לכאורה (*seemingly*), the תכלית הבריאה, the culmination of creation. If אדם occupies a higher מדרגה than the creatures that preceded him, how can we belong to that מדרגה when the תנאים were incomparably greater than we are?

My Rebbe recalled asking Rav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg זצ״ל this very question.

The Rosh Yeshiva's answer was simply, **"Yes."**

My Rebbe also brought the words of the רמב״ן on בראשית ב:ג, who explains that the six days of מעשה בראשית (*the work of Creation*) correspond to the six thousand years of the world's existence. Each day of creation reflects a particular stage in the unfolding of history. The fifth day corresponds to the fifth millennium, while the sixth day corresponds to the sixth millennium.

This gives the סדר הבריאה a significance beyond the chronology of creation. The days also reflect the progression of the world toward its תכלית (*purpose*).

My Rebbe considered two possible ways of approaching the difficulty.

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A Different בחינה, Not a Greater מדרגה

Perhaps we need not resolve the entire question. We can acknowledge the difficulty of understanding how אדם represents the תכלית הבריאה while recognizing that different generations may possess different בחינות (*aspects*).

As my Rebbe expressed it, **"We're not, and we are."**

We are certainly not greater than the תנאים. Their greatness in תורה, in קדושה (*holiness*) and in spiritual refinement is beyond our comparison. Yet there may be something that belongs specifically to our generation, something that earlier generations did not possess in precisely the same way.

I suggested that we find something analogous in the distinction between the תלמוד בבלי and the תלמוד ירושלמי. We generally פסקן according to the בבלי, but this certainly does not mean that the חכמי בבל were necessarily greater or more refined than the חכמי ארץ ישראל. Each has its own place in the development and clarification of תורה.

Similarly, we live in עקבתא דמשיחא, whereas the תנאים did not. We are closer to the coming of משיח (*the Messiah*). This does not make us greater than they were. Nevertheless, our position in

the unfolding of history gives us a particular relationship to the תכלית הבריאה that earlier generations did not possess in the same way.

Perhaps that is sufficient to recognize the distinction without resolving it entirely.

We are not greater than the תנאים. Yet we may possess a particular בחינה that belongs to our place in history.

What comes later is not necessarily greater. But it may possess something precisely because it comes later.

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The Particular מדרגה of אדם

My Rebbe then considered the question from a more fundamental perspective.

If אדם truly is the תכלית הבריאה, occupying a מדרגה above the other creations, what could it mean that we belong to אדם while the תנאים belong to דגים?

Perhaps there is something particular about אדם that has developed through the generations. Not necessarily in קדושה or spiritual refinement, but in man's ability to understand and work with the physical בריאה.

My Rebbe pointed to the extraordinary developments in human knowledge. Quantum theory, string theory, computers, technology, and our increasing understanding of the human body. We possess forms of knowledge and capabilities that earlier generations did not have.

In this sense, perhaps there are כוחות (*capacities*) of אדם that have become revealed more fully in later generations.

We have developed an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the physical world. We can investigate aspects of creation that were previously inaccessible. We can accomplish things that earlier generations could scarcely have imagined.

But my Rebbe was careful to emphasize the danger in this very observation.

It is all too easy to look at these accomplishments and conclude that we have become greater people. This is the danger of **כחי ועוצם ידי**. We begin to confuse our growing mastery of the physical world with genuine human greatness.

Modern civilization has devoted extraordinary effort to developing better washing machines, televisions, computers, and countless other conveniences. But has all this advancement made us greater people? Have we become more refined? Have we advanced in תורה or קדושה?

Perhaps we have simply developed **"fancier toys."**

The ability to understand and manipulate the physical world is a genuine capacity. But it does not, by itself, establish greatness. These כוחות can be employed לטוב, or they can be used otherwise.

Perhaps, then, this is another way of approaching the distinction between דגים and אדם.

The תנאים may have occupied a מדרגה of תורה and קדושה incomparably beyond our own. Yet later generations may have developed particular capacities associated with אדם, especially in understanding and working with the physical בריאה.

This would not make us greater than the תנאים. It would only suggest that the מדרגה of אדם includes certain כוחות whose expression has unfolded over time.

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Two Ways of Understanding the Distinction

These are two different approaches, and perhaps we need not decide between them.

The first leaves the deeper question open. We can recognize that later generations possess particular בחינות without claiming that they are greater than earlier generations. We are not, and we are.

The second attempts to identify something more specific about the מדרגה of אדם. Perhaps it includes the capacity to understand and exercise influence over the physical בריאה, a capacity that has developed in ways not previously revealed.

But even according to this second possibility, we must not confuse the development of human capabilities with the development of human greatness.

A generation may accomplish things that earlier generations could not, while remaining far beneath them in תורה, in קדושה and in refinement.

We may possess כוחות that the earlier generations did not possess. But that does not mean we have become the people they were.

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The Place of דגים in עבודה

We can now return to our opening question.

Why do דגים require no שחיטה? Why are they not considered בשר for בשר בחלב? And most significantly, why do they have no place upon the מזבח?

Perhaps the distinction between תורה and עבודה (*service*) offers us a direction.

The world of קרבנות (*offerings*) involves bringing something from the physical world and offering it to הקב״ה. A בהמה is brought to the מזבח. Its blood and its limbs are dealt with according to the דיני הקרבנות. Through this עבודה, something from the physical world is brought into the service of הקב״ה.

But the דגים are different.

Their very existence is within the מים. And if מים represent תורה, the fish represents the תלמיד חכם who lives entirely within that world.

Perhaps his essential function is not represented by an animal being brought upon the מזבח. Rather, it is to establish the תורה that directs and sustains the entire world of עבודה.

The משנה in אבות א:ב teaches that the world stands upon three things: on תורה, on עבודה and on גמילות חסדים (*acts of kindness*). These are distinct foundations, even as they work together.

We should not suggest that the תלמיד חכם has no need for עבודה, or that תורה somehow replaces the obligation of serving הקב״ה. Certainly, the greatest תלמידי חכמים were themselves devoted to עבודה.

Rather, perhaps the fish represents a particular aspect of their role: **the establishment and transmission of תורה as the foundation upon which the broader life of עבודת ה׳ becomes possible.**

This may help us appreciate why דגים stand apart from the animals brought as קרבנות. But the connection remains something to investigate. The גמרא explicitly relates the absence of שחיטה to the fish's origin in מים; it does not establish that their exclusion from קרבנות follows from their association with תורה.

Nevertheless, the combination of these distinctions invites a deeper examination.

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The ברכה of ריבוי

This also brings us back to the ברכה of פרו ורבו.

The fish receive the ברכה of ריבוי before אדם himself. On the level of פשט (*simple meaning*), this is a ברכה for the multiplication of living creatures in the waters. Yet perhaps we can suggest an additional significance within the symbolism of דגים and תורה.

The תלמיד חכם is not merely someone who possesses תורה. He teaches it. He establishes a בית המדרש. He raises תלמידים who will themselves transmit תורה to the next generation.

There is a ריבוי of תורה that precedes and sustains the development of the community.

Before there can be a city built around תורה, there must be those who establish and transmit it.

This is not to diminish the importance of the broader community. Quite the contrary. The purpose of establishing the בית המדרש is that an entire community may live according to תורה.

The תלמיד חכם prepares the way, and those who come afterward are then able to build upon that foundation.

✦

The Foundation and the תכלית

Perhaps we can now see the סדר הבריאה in a different light.

The תורה precedes the world.

The דגים emerge from the מים before אדם is created.

They receive the ברכה of ריבוי before אדם.

And only afterward does הקב״ה create אדם, the culmination of מעשה בראשית.

This is not necessarily a progression from lesser to greater קדושה. Nor does the fact that אדם comes last make the דגים less significant.

Rather, each occupies its own place.

The תורה is the foundation. The תלמידי חכמים establish that foundation within the world. And אדם is charged with building a life and society upon it.

The בית המדרש must come before the city. Yet the city must still be built.

And perhaps this brings us back to the question that troubled my Rebbe.

We may belong to a later stage in the unfolding of creation without possessing the greatness of those who preceded us. We may even possess certain כוחות that earlier generations did not have. Yet those capacities do not make us greater people.

The accomplishments of a later generation are possible only because of the foundations established by those who came before.

The greatness of those who came before us is precisely what makes possible the עבודה of those who come afterward.

Perhaps this is part of what the דגים teach us.

The foundation must come first. But the foundation is not the end of the building.

And what comes later is not necessarily greater than what preceded it. Rather, it carries the responsibility of bringing forward what those who came before have made possible.

May we be זוכה to remain close to the מים of תורה, to recognize that all our accomplishments stand upon the foundations established by the great תלמידי חכמים who preceded us, and to use the כוחות we have been given in the service of הקב״ה.

May our thirst for תורה never diminish, and may we be זוכה to the great סעודת לויתן, when the תכלית of creation will finally be revealed.

✦

מראי מקומות

1. בראשית א׳:כ-כח — creation of aquatic life, the ברכה of פרו ורבו, and the subsequent creation of אדם.

2. חולין כז ע״ב — the distinction between בהמה, the עוף and the דגים regarding שחיטה.

3. שולחן ערוך יורה דעה פז׳:ג — fish and the prohibition of בשר בחלב.

4. בבא קמא יז ע״א on אין מים אלא תורה.

5. ברכות סא ע״ב for רבי עקיבא's משל of the fish and the fox.

6. פסחים נד ע״א on תורה preceding the creation of the world.

7. בראשית א׳:כ-כב on כלי יקר — the spiritual distinctions among the creatures of water, air and land.

8. בראשית מו׳:כח with רש״י there — יהודה sent ahead to establish a בית תלמוד in גושן.

9. בראשית ב׳:ג on רמב״ן — the six days of creation corresponding to the six thousand years of the world's history.

10. אבות א׳:ב, which teaches that the world stands על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים.

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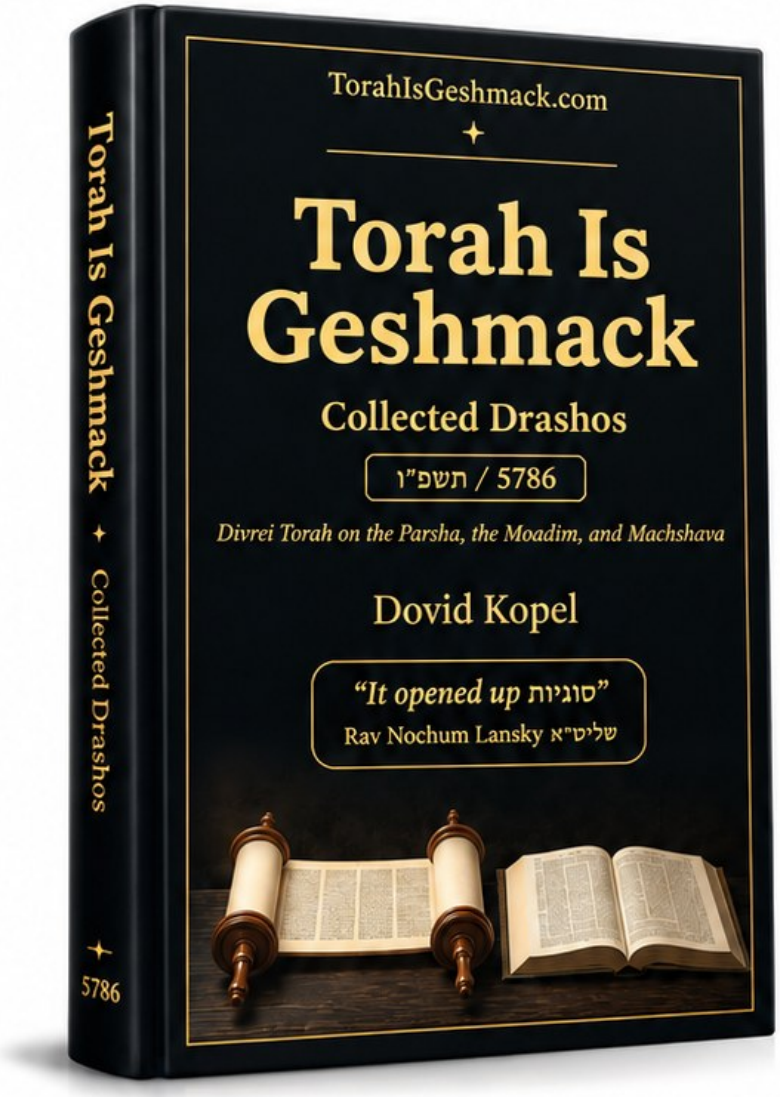
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