The mission of **Torah Is Geshmack** is to bring out the richness and enjoyment of Torah for everyone, and in doing so bring them closer to Hashem.

פרשת בראשית תשפ״ז

Before the First מצוה

Why the Torah could not begin with the first מצוה*, and how a receiver is made before anything is given*

Dovid Kopel

רש״י opens his commentary on the Torah with a question that is almost impossible to take literally. He asks, בשם רבי יצחק, why the Torah begins with Creation. If the Torah is principally a book of מצוות, it should have begun with the first מצוה addressed to כלל ישראל:

> הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֹאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחָדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה (שמות יב:ב)

This month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first for you among the months of the year.

What would that Torah look like? It would open in the middle of מצרים. The nation of כלל ישראל would already exist. משה would already have been born and chosen. Nine plagues would already have taken place. There would be no Creation, no אדם, no מבול, no אברהם ושרה, no עקידה, no יעקב and his children, no descent to מצרים, and no explanation of who this people is or why it is standing there. We would begin with a command addressed to a nation whose entire formation had been omitted.

And רש״י answers that the Torah begins with בראשית because the nations will accuse us of theft. They will say that we stole the land of the seven nations, and we will answer:

> כֹּחַ מַעֲשָׂיו הִגִּיד לְעַמּוֹ לָתֶת לָהֶם נַחֲלַת גּוֹיִם (תהלים קיא:ו)

He declared the power of His deeds to His people, in order to give them the inheritance of nations.

The entire world belongs to הקב״ה. He created it, He gave the land to them, and ברצונו (*by His will*) He took it from them and gave it to us.

It is a strange answer. Does an entire חומש exist merely to answer an accusation from people who do not accept the authority of the Torah in the first place? If they believed בראשית ברא אלקים, there would be no argument. If they do not, quoting it will not persuade them. And are the opening chapters really "for them" rather than for us?

The פסוק itself says otherwise. כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו — He told the power of His deeds to His people. The nations ask the question, but we are the ones who require the answer.

Perhaps רבי יצחק is not saying that the Torah could truly discard ספר בראשית. He is exposing what we might imagine we do not need. If Torah were only a book of commandments, then law could begin with the first national מצוה. If it were only a history book, one could debate how much

background to include. But Torah is neither merely a history book nor merely a legal code. Torah is רצון הבורא, the disclosure of the will of the Creator. Before it tells us what to do, it must form the human being and the nation capable of receiving that will.

That is why the question of theft is not incidental. It goes to the heart of what it means to receive anything from הקב״ה.

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The First Theft

What did we allegedly steal? ארץ ישראל. Yet what gives this small piece of land its singular value? Its deepest value is not material. It is the land in which Torah becomes the life of a people, where the calendar becomes agricultural and national, where the מצוות התלויות בארץ (*the mitzvos that depend upon the land*) apply, where מלכות and נבואה, along with סנהדרין and מקדש, can reach their full expression. The קדושה of the land and the Torah of the people illuminate one another.

That creates an apparent circle. The nations call us thieves for taking the land, but the very Torah that gives the land its ultimate meaning is the source that declares it ours. We cite the Torah to justify our inheritance of the place whose supreme value is itself defined by Torah.

The circle is broken once we understand that רש״י is not offering an argument in the court of international diplomacy. He is teaching us what a נחלה (*inheritance*) is. Something does not become ours merely because we can seize it. It becomes ours when it is given within the רצון of the true Owner, and when we become capable of receiving it.

The first human being was placed in a world in which everything had been prepared for him. Every tree was available except one. The first sin was therefore not committed by a starving man in an empty world. It was the act of taking the single thing that had not been given to him. Before history produces nations who call בני ישראל thieves, the Torah presents the first human being confronting the difference between gift and theft.

This also helps us understand why אברהם insisted on purchasing מערת המכפלה. Although הקב״ה had promised him the land, when שרה died, אברהם refused to treat the promise as permission to appropriate another person's field. He bowed, negotiated publicly, insisted on paying כסף מלא (*full price*), and established the purchase before the people of the city. חז״ל identify מערת המכפלה as one of the places regarding which the nations cannot accuse ישראל of theft.

אברהם is not uncertain about the promise. He is teaching his children how a promise becomes a קנין (*acquisition*). His אמונה does not erase the process. Precisely because the land is a divine gift, אברהם refuses to turn it into an act of taking without the proper process.

The ultimate נחלה is not only the land. משה says near the Torah's conclusion:

> תּוֹרָה צִוָּה לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה מוֹרָשָׁה קְהִלַּת יַעֲקֹב (דברים לג:ד)

משה *commanded us the Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of* יעקב.

The Torah begins with the challenge to our inheritance of the land and ends by naming Torah itself our inheritance. But a מורשה is not a possession that remains ours automatically. חז״ל read the word with the force of betrothal: אל תקרי מורשה אלא מאורסה — do not read it as an inheritance

but as a betrothal. It is a bond that creates obligation and demands fidelity. The Torah is given, but it must still be acquired.

There is an astonishing סוגיא in חולין that gathers the central pieces of this problem onto a single דף. The גמרא first discusses the diminution of the moon and the fact that ישראל will count days and years by it. It then teaches that the vegetation stood at the opening of the ground and did not emerge until אדם came, recognized the necessity of rain, and prayed. Creation itself waited for human עבודה. Later on that same דף, the גמרא speaks of פסוקים that appear so unnecessary that they seem fit to be burned, yet are actually גופי תורה, essential bodies of Torah. The examples are historical פסוקים showing how lands passed lawfully from one nation to another, thereby establishing the legitimacy of the later acquisition by ישראל.

The moon, the prayer of אדם, and the title to the land are not three unrelated subjects. Together they say that הקב״ה creates a world and then leaves room for human participation. The gift is real, but the receiver must pray, judge, sanctify, work, and acquire. Even an apparently dispensable history of who possessed which land becomes a גוף תורה because Torah is teaching how divine will enters human history without abolishing human responsibility.

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A World Prepared in Stages

The גר״א, in אדרת אליהו, reads the six days of Creation as a carefully ordered preparation. Light and darkness establish the conditions for what follows. The separation of waters and the appearance of land make vegetation possible. Vegetation sustains animal life, and the animal world prepares the setting in which man will live. Each stage supplies what the next will require.

הקב״ה did not need six days. He did not need any sequence at all. He could have brought a completed universe into existence in one moment. The staged creation teaches that this world is built through an order of גילוי (*revelation*), preparation, and growth. The end is already present in the intention, but it is reached step by step.

The creation of the sun and moon makes the question unavoidable. The Torah first calls them שני המאורות הגדולים, "the two great lights," and only afterward speaks of המאור הגדול and המאור הקטן, "the great light" and "the small light." Why would הקב״ה create the sun and moon as equals only to diminish the moon afterward? If the intended order required one great light and one small light, He could have created them that way from the beginning. If their equality was correct, why undo it? Why give the moon a greatness that would then be taken away?

This cannot be a correction to a plan that failed. The order itself must be the plan. Before the history of imbalance begins, the Torah states the intended greatness of both. It presents the end before setting the process into motion. The remaining question is why reaching that end should require a process at all. The same is true, of course, of אדם הראשון, as we will soon see.

If a person wants to produce a large feast, he can call a caterer, place an order, and pay the bill. The food may be excellent. But if he deeply cares for the guests, he learns what each person enjoys, plans a menu, buys every ingredient, prepares every dish, and arranges the table. If the guests could see all the thought and labor that preceded the meal, they would not experience only the food. They would experience the will and love contained within it.

ספר בראשית is, כביכול (*so to speak*), the record of that preparation. It shows not merely that a world appeared, but that everything required for the human being was anticipated and built. The world is not dumped before אדם with the hope that he survives. It is ordered toward him as an act of הטבה (*the bestowing of good*). When אדם opens his eyes, the table has already been set.

Yet complete הטבה cannot mean that the entire work has been done for him. The רמח״ל explains that for good to be complete, the recipient must become בעל הטוב — the owner of that good. He must acquire it rather than merely find it attached to him by circumstance. הקב״ה therefore created both possibilities, שלימות and חסרון (*completeness and lack*), and gave man the means to remove the חסרון and acquire the שלימות through his own choice. This is the structure often called נהמא דכיסופא, bread received with shame. A gift becomes complete when the receiver does not remain passive before it, but grows into someone capable of possessing it by earning it.

Everything has therefore been prepared for אדם, but it has not been completed by אדם. The table is set, yet the relationship to the feast must still be acquired. אדם himself is not finished.

The Torah tells us that הקב״ה brings the creatures to אדם לראות מה יקרא לו — "to see what he would call it." The Torah never records a direct command, "Name the animals." הקב״ה brings them before him and waits to see what human דעת will do.

Naming is not arbitrary labeling. The רמב״ן explains that אדם recognized the nature of each creature and gave it a name suited to that nature. A מדרש expands the scene: the creatures pass before אדם, he identifies each one, names himself אדם because he was taken from the אדמה, and even recognizes the Name by which the Master of the world is to be addressed. The first recorded exercise of דעת by אדם is to see, distinguish, and name. My Rebbe has said that the main difference between לשון הקודש and other languages is that other languages associate terms with their reference. We call a "chair" such, and it is recognized that way. Whereas in לשון הקודש, a כסא is truly a chair in its essence; the letters that comprise it are deep ideas that actually describe its essence.

But through recognizing everything else, he discovers something about himself. Every creature appears within its species and as part of a pairing. אדם can tell what each one is, and therefore he can also tell what none of them is: none is an עזר כנגדו, an equal human counterpart. חז״ל describe אדם protesting that every creature has its בן זוג (*mate*) while he has none; הקב״ה waits until אדם himself asks for what הקב״ה has already declared he needs.

אדם was not literally alone. He had a relationship with הקב״ה, and he was surrounded by the animal world. But הקב״ה is above him, and the animals are beneath him. Neither can stand opposite him as another human דעת and another human will. To be לבדו (*alone*) does not mean that no one else exists. It means that no equal other exists with whom he can build a shared life.

That is why the solution is not merely companionship. The language is deliberately paradoxical:

> וַיֹּאמֶר ה׳ אֱלֹקים לֹא טוֹב הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה לּוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (בראשית ב:יח)

I will make for him a helper corresponding to him.

She helps him precisely by being כנגדו, standing across from him. A mirror does not help by disappearing. A true counterpart can disagree, demand, resist, reveal a blind spot, and call forth a capacity that solitude never requires.

חז״ל describe אדם הראשון as דו פרצופין, a single creature with two faces or sides, whom הקב״ה then separated. At first he is "one," but it is a unity with no distance and therefore no encounter. It is complete only superficially. הקב״ה divides the one into two so that the two can turn toward one another and choose to become one:

> עַל כֵּן יַעֲזָב אִישׁ אֶת אָבִיו וְאֶת אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד (בראשית ב:כד)

He shall cling to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The first oneness is given. The second oneness is acquired. Between them lie separation, encounter, choice, loyalty, and עבודה.

The heavens and the human being are built around the same principle. The sun and moon are first named as two great lights, then one is diminished, and history is directed toward renewed light. אדם is first one, then divided into two, and commanded to build his way back toward והיו לבשר אחד. In both, an original wholeness is disrupted so that a deeper relationship can be acquired. Creation does not value separation for its own sake. It creates the distance across which giving, receiving, loyalty, and love can become real.

This is the beginning of בין אדם לחבירו (*between a person and another person*). A person alone may obey a command, but he cannot practice the full range of חסד, patience, yielding, responsibility, forgiveness, אמת, and שלום. Nor can Torah be possessed in isolation. Among the forty-eight ways through which Torah is acquired, פרקי אבות includes closeness with friends, discussion with students, bearing another's burden, judging another favorably, and establishing another in truth and שלום. The Torah's receiver is not a brilliant solitary mind. It is a person capable of relationship, and ultimately a קהילה (*community*).

The creation of woman is introduced by ויבן — "and He built." חז״ל hear within that word בינה, an added power of understanding. בינה is the ability to distinguish one thing from another, to grasp the בין — the between — that separates them, and then to relate them without erasing their difference. Before there are two, there can be no בין. Before there is בין, there can be no בינה of relationship.

The word ויבן also means building. חז״ל say ביתו זו אשתו — "his house means his wife." She is not an appendix to the creation of man. The creation of אשה is the culmination of the human בית. The Torah announces לא טוב היות האדם לבדו, "It is not good for man to be alone," and then reports ולאדם לא מצא עזר כנגדו, "but for אדם no corresponding helper was found." Later, שלמה gives the answer in the exact language of finding and goodness:

> מָצָא אִשָּׁה מָצָא טוֹב וַיָּפֶק רָצוֹן מֵה׳ (משלי יח:כב)

One who has found a wife has found good, and has obtained favor from Hashem.

The human creation is complete only when a given existence becomes a chosen relationship. That is already the pattern of Torah itself.

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Knowledge, Boundary, and Work

The word עדן may carry a רמז (*hint*) of its own: read עד נ׳, up to fifty. חז״ל teach that fifty gates of בינה were created in the world, and that משה received all but one, receiving the fiftieth only on the day of his passing. Fifty represents a limit that the human being approaches but does not simply possess. As is known, כלל ישראל was close to approaching the fiftieth level of טומאה in מצרים, which accelerated their need to be freed.

That image belongs in גן עדן, where אדם is surrounded by abundance but confronted by one boundary. He is placed there לעבדה ולשמרה — "to work it and to guard it." Even גן עדן is not passive consumption. It demands עבודה and שמירה. The garden is a gift whose reception requires a boundary.

That is also how Torah is given. We count forty-nine days toward the fiftieth. We labor below, and the fiftieth is received as a gift. Torah is called both a gift and a קנין, and שלמה teaches both truths in a single פסוק:

> כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם תּוֹרָתִי אַל תַּעֲזֹבוּ (משלי ד:ב)

For I have given you a good teaching; do not abandon My Torah.

It is נתתי, something הקב״ה gives, but it is also לקח טוב, something taken up and acquired. There is no contradiction. A Torah one has not labored to receive may be placed into one's hands, but it has not yet entered the person.

חז״ל therefore read the פסוק of זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל — "this is the תורה: a person who dies in a tent" — as describing the extremity of Torah labor. Words of Torah endure only in one who "kills himself" over them with great effort exerted. Torah is not obtained through a scheme. It is עבודה, and it requires a קנין.

The נחש offers the opposite. The fruit promises an immediate transformation:

> כִּי יֹדֵעַ אֱלֹקִים כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וִהְיִיתֶם כֵּאלֹקִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע (בראשית ג:ה)

You will be like divine beings, knowing good and evil.

The promise is not merely knowledge. It is knowledge without process, stature without formation, the fiftieth gate without the forty-nine steps. The גר״א describes the temptation as the claim that greatness could be attained without the investigations of time and without the labor of the body. אדם וחוה do not merely desire a fruit; they desire a shortcut to דעת.

The חטא of אדם therefore did not create the original incompleteness of the world. The moon had already been diminished before אדם was formed. The garden had already required לעבדה ולשמרה. Yet אדם was placed into a Creation containing distance, boundary, and work because his purpose was to participate in bringing it toward completion. His failure was in rejecting that process. He attempted to close the distance by taking rather than by receiving, to reach the end without traveling the path, and to possess דעת without becoming its proper כלי (*vessel*).

The Torah records the movement with frightening speed: ותרא, she saw; ותקח, she took; ותאכל, she ate. Proper sight had enabled אדם to recognize the inner nature of each creature and name it. Corrupted sight reduces an object to its appeal and the corrupted person then simply takes it.

The difference is not between curiosity and obedience. It is between a sight that patiently asks what something is and a sight that asks only how it can be consumed.

The נחש is punished through the same medium with which he tempted אדם וחוה at the tree. חז״ל in יומא teach that even if the snake were to eat every delicacy in the world, it would taste in them only the taste of dust. It is a devastating portrait of תאוה (*desire*): endless access, endless desire, with no elevation. One may consume everything and taste only the lowest thing. חז״ל describe bodily desire in the same pattern: satisfying it does not end the hunger; an indulged appetite can only become more ravenous.

אדם came from עפר and will return to עפר. Later, אברהם says ואנכי עפר ואפר — "I am dust and ash." But the dust of אברהם is not the snake's dust. The snake is condemned to taste only lowliness while imagining it is satisfaction. אברהם chooses humility and thereby becomes capable of blessing the world. The same substance can describe degradation or purification, depending upon whether man consumes it or submits his ego before הקב״ה.

The transition from אור to עור — from light to skin — contains the whole tragedy. Man was created to receive and reveal light. After the sin, הקב״ה clothes him in כתנות עור, garments of skin. When desire tries to seize light without עבודה, it does not become greater light. It becomes a covering.

The פרשה also contains the first crisis of transmitting a divine command. הקב״ה tells אדם not to eat from the tree. When חוה repeats the prohibition, she says that they may neither eat it nor touch it. רש״י comments: הוסיפה על הציווי לפיכך באה לידי גרעון — "She added to the command, and therefore came to diminish it." חז״ל describe the נחש exploiting that addition: once touch did not produce death, he argued that eating would not either.

Yet the אנשי כנסת הגדולה command us to do exactly what seems dangerous here:

> ועשו סיג לתורה (אבות א:א)
>
> *Make a protective fence for the Torah.*

Is the first human failure a warning against a סייג, while the first statement of the אנשי כנסת הגדולה requires one?

The distinction is not whether a boundary exists. גן עדן itself depends upon a boundary. The question is whether the transmitter preserves the difference between the divine command and the human fence. A סייג protects Torah when it announces itself as a סייג. It endangers Torah when a human safeguard is presented as though it were the original word of הקב״ה. The רמב״ם rules that a בית דין may prohibit something permitted by the Torah as a fence, provided it makes clear that the underlying Torah law remains unchanged and that this is a decree of חז״ל. To call that סייג a Torah prohibition would be the corruption of בל תוסיף (*the prohibition against adding*).

The first transmission failed not because interpretation is forbidden, but because its category became blurred. That danger will accompany the Torah forever. The more distant the receiver stands from the source, the easier it is for the signal to weaken, for an explanation to be confused with its text, or for a fence to obscure what it protects. The first חטא came about in exactly that way: a stringency well intended, held without the דעת to keep it distinct from the command it was guarding. Failed understanding and deepened understanding are both rooted in the nature of אדם.

The Torah therefore contains its own system of preservation and correction. There is מסורה, careful transmission. There are the thirteen מידות (*interpretive principles*) through which the Torah is expounded. There is a בית דין empowered to deliberate and decide. There are majority, precedent, dissent, and recorded dispute. There is a command of לא תסור (*do not turn aside*), and there is also לא בשמים היא (*it is not in heaven*). The Torah is fixed as רצון הבורא, but its faithful application is entrusted to human דעת. It is a תורת חיים precisely because it does not become inert after revelation.

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The First מצוה

We can now return to the מצוה with which רבי יצחק says the Torah might have begun. Why is החדש הזה לכם the first national מצוה?

Without months there can be no calendar for כלל ישראל, and without the calendar there can be no ordered cycle of מועדים. But the מצוה is more than the establishment of a schedule. It is given לכם — to you. The sanctification of the month requires sight, testimony, examination, calculation, judgment, and proclamation. רש״י hears הקב״ה showing משה the moon and saying כזה ראה וקדש — "when you see it like this, sanctify it." The new month is not simply discovered as an astronomical fact. בית דין must see a claim, understand it, decide, and declare מקודש (*sanctified*).

Here חז״ל state the authority in startling terms. The appointed times are אתם, yours, even if the court erred, even if it acted deliberately, and even if it was misled. This does not make truth arbitrary. It means that הקב״ה placed the sanctification of time within the disciplined דעת of כלל ישראל. By contrast, שבת arrives because הקב״ה sanctified it in Creation. The מועדים arrive through the bracha of מקדש ישראל והזמנים, *who sanctifies* ישראל *and the appointed times*: הקב״ה sanctifies ישראל, and ישראל sanctifies the times.

The moon is the perfect object for that first act. חז״ל notice that the Torah first speaks of "the two great lights" and then of "the great light" and "the small light." The moon protests that two rulers cannot share one crown, and הקב״ה tells it to diminish itself. The moon then asks a startling question: because it spoke correctly, must it become smaller? הקב״ה offers one distinction after another. It will rule by night and by day. ישראל will count its days and years through it. צדיקים will be called by its name. Yet the גמרא says לא קא מיתבא דעתה — its דעת was not settled. Finally, הקב״ה says:

> הביאו כפרה עלי שמיעטתי את הירח (חולין ס׳ ע״ב)

Bring an atonement on My behalf for having diminished the moon.

Now the answer to the question of the fourth day can be stated clearly. Had the moon been created small from the beginning, smallness would appear to be inherent to its identity and final purpose. There would be no lost greatness to recover and no incompleteness demanding renewal. Instead, הקב״ה first creates the moon as one of שני המאורות הגדולים, establishing its greatness as its אמת and its תכלית — its truth and its purpose. By diminishing it afterward, He creates a distance between the light as it is meant to be and as it is presently able to reveal.

That distance is the space of עבודה. Through its diminution, the moon becomes the great image of a receiver whose light is experienced through relationship, disappearance, return, and renewal. If the moon had simply remained full and equal, its light would be a completed gift requiring no development by the receiver. The first greatness would remain given greatness. Through מיעוט and renewal, fullness becomes something toward which Creation can grow. The sequence is therefore not that הקב״ה first chose equality and then changed His plan. The equality is the destination; the diminution creates the journey. The end is established first, and only then is history set into motion.

The language is almost impossible. הקב״ה Himself, כביכול, identifies a wound within the order of Creation. The phrase used by the גמרא also matters: לא קא מיתבא דעתה. The wound of the לבנה is expressed as unsettled דעת. The diminution may serve the larger plan, but it cannot be mistaken for the final, ideal good. A necessary imbalance remains an imbalance, and the justification for that imbalance lies in the possibility of restoration.

This occurred on the fourth day, before the sin of אדם, before אדם himself. That timing completes the answer. The world was not first complete and then accidentally broken by man. Man enters a Creation in which the distance between intended fullness and present revelation has already been opened for him. Creation does not contain חסרון merely because something went wrong. It contains a measured חסרון so that something can become right through עבודה.

The future is therefore described as a healing of light:

> וְהָיָה אוֹר הַלְּבָנָה כְּאוֹר הַחַמָּה... בְּיוֹם חֲבֹשׁ ה׳ אֶת שֶׁבֶר עַמּוֹ וּמַחַץ מַכָּתָו יִרְפָּא (ישעיהו ל:כו)

The light of the moon will be like the light of the sun... on the day Hashem binds the fracture of His people and heals the wound of its blow.

The restoration of the לבנה and the healing of כלל ישראל are part of one movement. The receiver is not meant to remain permanently diminished. But neither can it seize equality before it has developed the capacity to receive and carry the light. The first מצוה therefore entrusts כלל ישראל with the renewal of the very light that Creation left incomplete. Month after month, witnesses search the darkness for its thin reappearance, submit their sight to examination, and bring it before בית דין. In this way, החדש הזה לכם places the process of renewal into our hands.

This is also the תיקון (*repair*) of the first human sight. חוה saw a fruit in its immediate fullness and took it. The witnesses of the new moon see carefully, wait for the proper moment, and submit what they see to דעת and דין. The repair of sight is not to close the eyes. It is to transform ותרא כזה ראה וקדש into ותקח.

One of the most painful stories in the גמרא may be illuminated here. רבי אלעזר בן ערך, whom רבן יוחנן בן זכאי called מעיין המתגבר, an ever-strengthening spring, separated from the other חכמים and was drawn after the pleasures of wine and bathing. When he returned, he had forgotten his learning and misread החדש הזה לכם as החרש היה לבם — *their heart was made deaf*.

The first phrase entrusts renewal to human דעת: this renewal is yours. The corrupted phrase describes a stopped-up heart. The very רבי אלעזר בן ערך who had taught that the best path is a לב טוב, a good heart, experiences the movement from חדש to חרש and from לכם to לבם. In other words, תאוה does not enlarge דעת. It seals the לב through which דעת must enter.

There is a רמז that the Torah begins with the ב of בראשית and ends with the ל of ישראל. Read from the Torah's end back toward its beginning, the two letters form לב. But that לב cannot mean a merely emotional attachment. The opening words of ספר יצירה establish that חכמה itself is revealed through thirty-two paths:

> בשלשים ושתים נתיבות פליאות חכמה (ספר יצירה א:א)

Through thirty-two wondrous paths of wisdom.

The ל״ב נתיבות חכמה — and the number thirty-two is itself spelled לב — tell us that the לב is not the alternative to חכמה. It is the vessel and pathway through which חכמה becomes part of the person. שלמה states the relationship directly:

> כִּי תָבֹוא חָכְמָה בְלִבֶּךָ וְדַעַת לְנַפְשְׁךָ יִנְעָם (משלי ב:י)

When wisdom enters your heart, knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

The מלבי״ם explains that the חכם לב (*the one wise of heart*) is one in whom the laws of חכמה have become fixed within the heart until the impulses of תאוה no longer fight against them. חכמה is not built by replacing שכל and דעת with feeling. It is built when what the שכל enters the לב deeply enough to govern what the person wants.

There is therefore a crucial distinction between being כולו לב (*entirely heart*) and becoming a כלב (*a dog*). To be כולו לב is for the whole person to desire in accordance with חכמה. But when the heart is detached from שכל and דעת, it no longer carries wisdom into life. It becomes pure appetite. Then as חז״ל teach us their entire language is הב הב, "Give, give," the cry of a desire that experiences every satisfaction only as a demand for more.

ישעיהו describes that appetite through the image of the dog, and he places the lack of satiety beside the lack of understanding:

> וְהַכְּלָבִים עַזֵּי נֶפֶשׁ לֹא יָדְעוּ שָׂבְעָה וְהֵמָּה רֹעִים לֹא יָדְעוּ הָבִין כֻּלָּם לְדַרְכָּם פָּנוּ אִישׁ לְבִצְעוֹ מִקָּצֵהוּ (ישעיהו נו:יא)

The dogs are fierce of appetite; they never know satisfaction. They are shepherds who do not know understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each one to his gain, every last one.

The פסוק does not merely say that they are hungry. It says לא ידעו שבעה and then לא ידעו הבין. The inability to be satisfied and the inability to understand are one failure. תאוה becomes endless when בינה no longer supplies a boundary. The תיקון is not a cold mind without desire, nor an excited heart without דעת. It is חכמה entering the לב, then the דעת becoming sweet to the נפש, and desire learning where to stop.

The גר״א reveals that this is the structure of משלי itself. His תלמיד רבי מנחם מענדל משקלוב records that the גר״א divided the ספר according to חכמה, then דעת, then בינה. The section containing פרק כ״ג corresponds to דעת, and therefore, he writes, nearly every פסוק within it contains דבר והיפוכו בסוד עץ הדעת טוב ורע — a path and its opposite within the mystery of the Tree of Knowledge. These פסוקים teach us to recognize דרכי ה׳ together with the distorted paths that resemble them.

The גר״א then makes the connection explicit within the chapter. שלמה warns:

> אַל תֵּרֶא יַיִן כִּי יִתְאַדָּם כִּי יִתֵּן בַּכּוֹס עֵינוֹ יִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּמֵישָׁרִים (משלי כג:לא)

Do not look at wine when it reddens, when it gives its eye in the cup and flows down smoothly.

The גר״א compares that seduction to the temptation of חוה. The wine appears good in taste, desirable to the eyes, and capable of producing a clearer mind. Those are the very movements the Torah records at the tree: טוב העץ למאכל, that it was good for eating; תאוה הוא לעינים, that it was desirable to the eyes; ונחמד העץ להשכיל, that it was pleasant as a source of insight. The promised enlightenment ends instead with אחריתו כנחש ישך, *in the end it bites like a snake* — confused sight, a heart speaking contradictions, and the final cry אוסיף אבקשנו עוד, *I will seek it yet again.*

The rest of the chapter supplies the opposite path without needing to announce that it is a retelling of גן עדן. The words הביאה למוסר לבך ואזנך לאמרי דעת, *bring your heart to* מוסר *and your ear to words of* דעת, direct the desire of the heart toward מוסר. The command אמת קנה ואל תמכר חכמה ומוסר ובינה, *acquire truth and do not sell it*; *wisdom*, מוסר, *and* בינה, demands קנין and יגיעה. Finally, תנה בני לבך לי ועיניך דרכי תצרנה, *give Me your heart, my son, and let your eyes guard My ways*, returns the לב and the עינים to the service of הקב״ה. In this way, משלי reinforces the movement already embedded in בראשית: the failure of דעת through תאוה is repaired not by extinguishing the heart, but by educating it through גבול (*boundary*), through עבודה, and through Torah.

The Torah's full journey therefore forms a heart, but a heart structured by its ל״ב paths of חכמה. The question of רבי יצחק asks whether we may begin with the first command. The answer is that before החדש הזה לכם, the Torah must create the discerning and bounded לב capable of receiving it.

The Sun, the Moon, and the מסורה

This dynamic first מצוה could create a new danger. If human beings testify, interpret, and decide, does Torah become merely the reflection of its receivers? And if ספר בראשית was written because of the accusation of the nations, are the nations somehow the sun from which Torah borrows its light?

That cannot be. כי נר מצוה ותורה אור — for a מצוה is a lamp, and Torah is light. Torah possesses its own light because it is רצון הבורא. The nations' accusation is the occasion for the question of רש״י, not the source of the Torah and not its intended master. To say that בראשית exists only for them would itself diminish the Torah, as though its light depended upon an external challenge. Once again the פסוק says הגיד לעמו — He told it to His people. הקב״ה revealed this to us.

The image of reflected light belongs elsewhere. חז״ל say:

> פני משה כפני חמה פני יהושע כפני לבנה (בבא בתרא ע״ה ע״א)

The face of משה *was like the face of the sun; the face of* יהושע *was like the face of the moon.*

משה receives Torah through a revelation that will never be repeated. יהושע receives from משה. His light is true, but it is transmitted light. From that moment onward, Torah must travel through מסורה.

The opening משנה in אבות is exact:

> משה קבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע ויהושע לזקנים וזקנים לנביאים ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה (אבות א:א)

משה *received Torah from* סיני *and transmitted it to* יהושע; *and* יהושע *to the elders; and the elders to the prophets; and the prophets transmitted it to the* אנשי כנסת הגדולה.

My son מאיר pointed out that the language of the משנה is not entirely uniform. It says משה קיבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע. It then continues more tersely, ויהושע לזקנים וזקנים לנביאים, before returning to the explicit language ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה. Perhaps the unevenness is meaningful. The word מסירה (*a handing over*) may describe a higher prophetic act that is less ordinary learning and teaching than the delivery of Torah as an intact whole. As the chain moves farther from סיני, Torah does not cease to be transmitted, but learning, interpretation, dispute, and the developing understanding of each generation increasingly become the means through which it lives. This is a possible reading of the language of the משנה, not an explanation stated by the משנה itself.

At the same time, distance from the original revelation matters. With the death of משה, a form of certainty closes. מסכת תמורה teaches that thousands of laws were forgotten during the mourning for משה. When the people asked יהושע to retrieve them prophetically, he answered that it is not in heaven — לא בשמים היא. What could be restored was restored by עתניאל בן קנז through his פלפול (*intricate analysis*).

That is not the collapse of Torah. It is the Torah's built-in transition from direct revelation to the commandment of human labor. Prophecy may not be used to replace the process of הלכה. What is forgotten is pursued through the methods הקב״ה placed within Torah. The signal does not survive because every later generation pretends to stand at סיני. It survives because every generation knows where it stands and uses the faithful tools appropriate to it.

This may sharpen a remarkable line in חולין, where רבי אמי rejects an attempted explanation so emphatically that he says:

> האלקים אי אמר לי יהושע בן נון משמיה לא צייתנא ליה (חולין קכ״ד ע״א)

I swear, even if יהושע בן נון *told it to me in his name, I would not accept it from him.*

Why does he name יהושע and not משה? He is not granting permission to dismiss יהושע; that would not be accurate. Nor could an authentic הלכה למשה מסיני be rejected. But perhaps the choice is deliberate. משה is the sun of direct Torah revelation. יהושע is the moon, the first receiver whose task is transmission into the world after משה. A claim reported in the name of a transmitted authority must be tested for whether it can truly belong to the system of הלכה. One cannot argue with the source of Torah; one is obligated to test whether a later reflection has been transmitted and understood correctly.

That reading is a possible explanation for why the גמרא chooses יהושע; it is not the explicit explanation given by the גמרא itself. But it captures the necessary balance. The authority of תורה שבעל פה (*the Oral Torah*) does not mean that every human statement becomes Torah. It means that הקב״ה authorized a disciplined process through which human beings preserve, interpret, dispute, and decide Torah.

The culmination of that process is רבי עקיבא. When משה ascends, he finds הקב״ה tying crowns onto the letters. He is shown רבי עקיבא deriving mountains of הלכות from those crowns, and at first משה cannot follow the discussion. Only when רבי עקיבא identifies the conclusion as הלכה למשה מסיני is the mind of משה settled. The later sage discovers within the Torah what even משה does not recognize in its later form, yet the deepest legitimacy of the discovery is that it returns to משה.

That is reflected light at its holiest. The moon does not invent another sun. תורה שבעל פה does not borrow light from the nations, from current fashions, or from private desire. It receives the Torah's own light and reveals what was always contained within its letters.

And רבי עקיבא does not become רבי עקיבא alone. After twenty-four years of learning, he tells his students about his wife רחל, that שלי ושלכם שלה הוא — "what is mine and what is yours is hers." The master of תורה שבעל פה is built by an אשה who sees what he can become, accepts sacrifice, and makes his Torah possible. אשת חיל עטרת בעלה — "a woman of valor is the crown of her husband." The crown upon the letters and the crown within the home belong to one תורה, in which דעת matures through covenant, fidelity, and shared עבודה.

✦

From גן עדן to גן נעול

This is why ספר בראשית cannot be omitted. The Torah cannot begin with a calendar handed to a ready-made nation, because there is no ready-made nation. The failure of אדם must be understood. אברהם ושרה must begin the repair. A family must learn how to turn promise into קנין, how to create a בית, how to transmit a ברית, and how to accept a boundary. The household of יעקב must become a people. Only then can הקב״ה say לכם.

At this point, שרה is already a תיקון of חוה. The way חוה presents the command becomes entangled with an addition, and אדם listens to a voice that leads him away from the divine boundary. About שרה, by contrast, הקב״ה tells אברהם:

> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקים אֶל אַבְרָהָם אַל יֵרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל הַנַּעַר וְעַל אֲמָתֶךָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקֹלָהּ כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקָּרֵא לְךָ זָרַע (בראשית כא:יב)

Whatever שרה *tells you, listen to her voice, for through* יצחק *your offspring shall be called.*

The voice of שרה protects the correct line of inheritance. She understands that not every biological child is the bearer of the ברית and that promise must be guarded by discernment. Her בינה builds the house from which כלל ישראל will emerge.

The same תיקון appears in רות. In the original failure, חוה sees, takes, and eats what was not given. By contrast, רות survives through the Torah's laws for the vulnerable, and through לקט (*gleanings*) in particular, taking precisely what Torah gives her and no more. Her חסד is joined to restraint. בעז does not seize a private outcome; he brings the matter to the city gate, gathers the elders, clarifies the prior claim, performs a public קנין, and establishes the marriage within law.

The elders bless them with the language of building:

> וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּשַּׁעַר וְהַזְּקֵנִים עֵדִים יִתֵּן ה׳ אֶת הָאִשָּׁה הַבָּאָה אֶל בֵּיתֶךָ כִּרְחֵל וּכְלֵאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ שְׁתֵּיהֶם אֶת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַעֲשֵׂה חַיִל בְּאֶפְרָתָה וּקְרָא שֵׁם בְּבֵית לָחֶם (רות ד:יא)

May Hashem make the woman who is coming into your house like רחל *and* לאה, *both of whom built* בית ישראל.

The פסוק joins ויבן to אשה and to בית. The woman is not merely admitted into a preexisting house. Through her, בית ישראל is built.

רות is called אשת חיל, and from her comes דוד. But the legitimacy of דוד itself depends upon תורה שבעל פה. The written words prohibit a מואבי from entering the congregation. The received interpretation distinguishes מואבי ולא מואבית, a male מואבי and not a female מואבית. Without faithful מסורה, she remains outside, the lineage of דוד is challenged, and the house of מלכות cannot stand. תורה שבעל פה does not weaken the written Torah. It enables the written Torah's deepest future to emerge.

דוד then longs to build a בית for הקב״ה. He is not ultimately the one who constructs the physical בית המקדש; that task belongs to שלמה. But דוד conceives it, prepares for it, and makes it the center of his desire. When דוד proposes to build a house for הקב״ה, the answer comes back that He will build a house for דוד. The human בית and the divine בית answer one another.

דוד expresses his entire longing in one request:

> אַחַת שָׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת ה׳ אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית ה׳ כָּל יְמֵי חַיַּי לַחֲזוֹת בְּנֹעַם ה׳ וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ (תהלים כז:ד)

One thing I have asked of Hashem; that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the pleasantness of Hashem and to visit His sanctuary.

The movement that began with a human being placed in a garden culminates in a human being longing to sit in the house of הקב״ה.

The image in שיר השירים gives us the bridge between them:

> גַּן נָעוּל אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה גַּל נָעוּל מַעְיָן חָתוּם (שיר השירים ד:יב)

A locked garden is my sister, my bride; a locked fountain, a sealed spring.

גן עדן was a garden given from above, with a boundary that אדם was commanded to guard. He failed to internalize the boundary, and the כרובים were stationed outside to guard the way back. גן נעול is the garden whose שמירה has entered the person. שיר השירים רבה applies the image to the fidelity of ישראל in מצרים, and traces that guarded sanctity back to שרה. The external fence of the first garden becomes the inner loyalty of the bride.

But the locked garden is not dead. Its boundary allows it to become a באר מים חיים — "a well of living waters." Then the bride can invite the beloved:

> עוּרִי צָפוֹן וּבוֹאִי תֵימָן הָפִיחִי גַּנִּי יִזְּלוּ בְשָׂמָיו יָבֹא דוֹדִי לְגַנּוֹ וְיֹאכַל פְּרִי מְגָדָיו (שיר השירים ד:טז)

Let my beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruits.

At the beginning of the Torah, man takes fruit before it is given. Here, after boundary, fidelity, and relationship, the fruit is freely offered and properly received. The goal of the סייג was never permanent distance. The goal was to make intimacy possible without seizure.

The next פסוק answers:

> בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה אָרִיתִי מוֹרִי עִם בָּשְׂמִי אָכַלְתִּי יַעְרִי עִם דִּבְשִׁי שָׁתִיתִי יֵינִי עִם חֲלָבִי אִכְלוּ רֵעִים שְׁתוּ וְשִׁכְרוּ דוֹדִים (שיר השירים ה:א)

I have come into My garden, My sister, My bride.

The מדרש reads לגנוני as לגנוני, to My original dwelling. The חטא of אדם drove the שכינה upward, further sins drove it further away, and seven צדיקים beginning with אברהם brought it down again until משה erected the משכן.

That מדרש is the whole Torah in one line of movement. The story begins in the garden, but it cannot end there. אדם וחוה do not yet know how to guard a gift, how to become one through choice, or how to make a dwelling for הקב״ה. Then אברהם ושרה begin to build. רות ובעז build within חסד, boundary, קנין, and מסורה; from them, דוד longs for the בית, and שלמה builds it. What was lost as גן עדן returns as ושכנתי בתוכם, *and I will dwell among them* — a שכינה dwelling within a people.

Now the opening question of רבי יצחק can be heard differently. If Torah were merely instructions, perhaps it could begin with החדש הזה לכם. But לכם itself would then be unintelligible. Who are "you"? What makes a collection of descendants into the people to whom time can be entrusted? What kind of דעת can see the moon, hear testimony, argue, decide, and sanctify? What kind of מסורה can receive light without claiming to be its source? What kind of בית can contain the שכינה?

In that light, ספר בראשית is not background information about that receiver. It is the creation of the receiver. It forms the לבנה before entrusting it with the renewal of light.

The Torah does not begin with בראשית in order to tell the nations that the land is ours. It begins with בראשית to teach us how anything becomes ours. A world, a spouse, a child, a land, Torah itself — none becomes ours through appetite or possession alone. It becomes ours when we recognize the רצון of the Giver, accept the boundary of the gift, labor to become capable of it, and use it to build a בית for something beyond ourselves.

That is why the nations' accusation matters to us. The danger is not only that they will call us thieves. The danger is that we might receive a divine inheritance with the consciousness of a thief. We might imagine that being chosen means bypassing עבודה, that a promise erases קנין, that authority abolishes restraint, or that possessing Torah exempts us from acquiring it.

The Torah answers by showing us every step. Like the host who lets the guests see the thought, preparation, and love that produced the feast, הקב״ה reveals the world's making and our own. Light, water, earth, plant, animal, man, woman, family, covenant, nation, and finally מצוה: each stage prepares the receiver for the next. We are not simply handed the conclusion. We are shown the רצון that formed it.

If we say that בראשית was written for the nations, we have reversed the light. We have made Torah into a לבנה whose purpose is to reflect their accusation. But Torah does not borrow its light from the nations. כי נר מצוה ותורה אור. Torah is the רצון הבורא and possesses its own light. We are the לבנה: the receiver formed through all the stages of ספר בראשית, created within diminished light, tested through failure, renewed through עבודה, and finally entrusted with החדש הזה לכם.

The accusation of the nations is therefore not the reason they need ספר בראשית. It reveals why we need it. We must know that inheritance is not seizure, that election is not entitlement, and that even a gift from הקב״ה must be received through גבול, through קנין, and through responsibility. The words of רש״י identify the audience: כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו. He revealed the power and purpose of His works to His people.

It was never for them. It was always for us.

May we be זוכה not merely to possess Torah but to acquire it; not merely to defend our נחלה but to become worthy receivers of it; not merely to see light but to sanctify its renewal. May our דעת become a לב טוב, may our homes become places of בינה, fidelity, and תורה, and may the long movement from גן עדן to בית ה׳ reach its completion with the שכינה dwelling among כלל ישראל.

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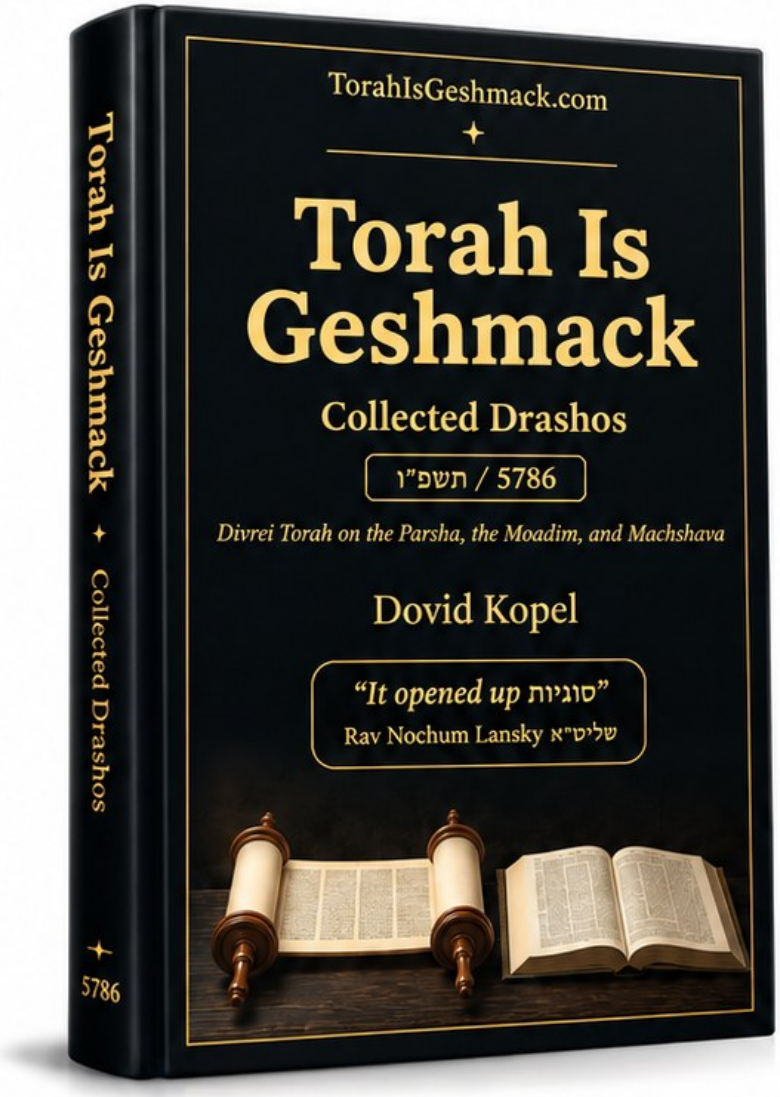
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