

פרשת בראשית

'Well, if you don't know where to start, start at the beginning.'

That tried and true advice works most of the time.

But, not this week.

In Parshas B'reishis, when we *begin* the Torah, there is really no beginning.

Is there any more to be said?

Rashi teaches us that the traditional translation of the first verse of the Torah is incorrect.

The Torah writes:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים... לִיקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

The traditional translation is:

In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and earth.

But Rashi tells us that an examination of *L'shon HaKodesh* belies such a rendition.

He writes:

...כפשוטו כך פרשהו בראשית בריאת שמים וארץ והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך ויאמר א...ל'קים יהי אור. ולא בא המקרא להורות סדר הבריאה לומר שאלו קדמו, שאם בא להורות כך, היה לו לכתוב בראשונה ברא את השמים וגו', שאין לך ראשית במקרא שאינו דבוק לתיבה של אחריו, כמו (ירמיהו כו/א¹) בראשית ממלכות יהויקים,

¹ The entire verse reads:

בְּרֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכּוֹת יְהוֹיָקִים בֶּן יֵאֲשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה הָיָה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה מֵאֵת ה' לֵאמֹר:

In the beginning *of* the reign of Yehoyokim ben Yoshia, Kind of Judea, this Word came from G-d saying:

בראשית י/י²) ראשית ממלכתו, (דברים יח/ד³) ראשית דגנך, אף כאן אתה אומר
בראשית ברא א...ל'קים וגו', כמו בראשית ברא...

The *p'shat* is to explain it as 'At the beginning of the creation of Heavens and earth, the earth was formless and desolate and dark...and Hashem said, "Let there be light".

The Torah is not coming to teach us the order of creation⁴ to say which objects preceded which. Were it to teach so, 'In the beginning – בראשונה – 'He created the heavens, etc.'

Every ראשית in Tanach is [not an independent measure like the word 'beginning' but] attached to the next word 'in 'In the beginning of the reign of Yehoyokim' or 'בראשית'-in the beginning of *his* reign'. Or, 'ראשית-the first of your grain'.

Here, too, you say, 'בראשית-in the beginning of G-d creating'. This is as if the word ברא – literally translated as 'He created' would be written בראו meaning 'creating'.

Thus, it would seem that there is no 'beginning' to begin with, at least according to Rashi⁵.

² The entire verse reads:

וְתֵהִי רֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכְתּוֹ בְּבֶלְ וְאַרְרַךְ וְאַכַּד וְכַלְנֵה וּבְאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר:
The beginning of his rule was Babylonia and *Erech* and *A'kad* and Kalneh in the Land of *Shin'ar*.

³ The entire verse reads:

רֵאשִׁית דְּגַנְךָ תִּירֶשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהַרְךָ וְרֵאשִׁית גֶּזַע צֹאנְךָ תִּתֵּן לוֹ:
The first of your grain, your wine and in your oil and the first of the shearing of your sheep, give to him [to the Kohen].

⁴ See Seforno and others who argue and say that the agenda of this first chapter of Sefer B'reishis includes teaching the order of creation.

⁵ Seforno disagrees with Rashi's rendition of *B'reishis*, but not with the philosophical underpinnings of the latter's commentary.

Seforno writes:

בראשית. בתחלת הזמן, והוא רגע ראשון בלתי מתחלק, שלא היה זמן קודם לו:

However, an analysis of a particular Halachah regarding the way in which a Sefer Torah is to be written may require us to rethink our assumption.

We learn of a *minhag* that was adopted to add *kovod* to the Sefer Torah. That custom took six specific words, the combined first letters of each forming the words ‘In the Name of G-d’, written in different places in the Torah, and place them at the top of the column in which they appear.

We read the words of *Ramo* in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah Siman 273 (s’if 6):

הגה: יש סופרים מדקדקים לכתוב אותיות בי"ה שמ"ו בראש העמודים:

Ramo – there are scribes who are particular to write the letters *Beis, Yud, Heh, Shin, Mem, Vov* at the top of the column.

That is, there are six words, each beginning with the letters above, in the order presented, that are to be written at the top of the particular column in which they appear.

In the commentary of the *Shach* here (s’if koton 5) we learn what those six words are.

He writes:

B’reishis – in the beginning of time. That was the very first moment and that could not be divided [into smaller parts because it was infinitesimally small]. There was no time before that moment.

That is, Seforno holds that *B’reishis* does mean ‘the beginning’. But the ‘beginning’ to which the word *B’reishis* refers is not ‘Creation’ as a whole but to a certain aspect of creation – time.

Aderes Eliyahu also attributes this [or a very similar explanation] to the Vilna Gaon – i.e. ‘B’reishis’ refers to the creation of time.

Consistently, in the *Siddur HaGra* we read his interpretation of the words:

ברוך עושה מעשה בראשית

Blessed be He who did the act of Creation
in *Boruch She’omar*, as referring to the creation of time.

Virtually all commentators see ‘time’ as a created entity, not something that ‘always existed’. The question here is not if time was created but if the word *B’reishis* is referring to the creation of time or not.

בי"ה שמו. והם ב' דבראשית, יו"ד יודוך אחיך, ה' הבאים אחריהם בפרשת בשלח קודם השירה, ש' שמר לך...מ' מה טובו, ו' ואעידה בם, כן הוא בהגהת סמ"ק סימן קנ"ה ובהגהת מיימוני...

Beis, Yud, Heh, Shin, Mem, Vov – the *Beis* is for the word *B'reishis* (B'reishis Perek 1/Posuk 1). The *Yud* is for the word *Yoducho a'che'cho* (ibid. Perek 49/Posuk 8). The *Heh* is for the word *Habo'im acharei'chem* (Sh'mos Perek 14/Posuk 28) in Parshas B'shalach – before the *Shira* of *Oz Yoshir*. The *Shin* is for the word *Sh'mor lecha* (ibid. Perek 34/Posuk 11). The *Mem* is for the word *Mah Tovu* (B'midbar Perek 24/Posuk 4). The *Vov* is for the word *V'o'idobom* (D'vorim Perek 31/Posuk 28).

This is what is written in the glosses to Sefer Mitzvos Koton Siman 155 and in the commentary to Mishneh Torah –*HaGahos Maimonee*.

In fact, when you come across these words in your Chumash, it is likely that there will be an asterisk and the note at the bottom of the page will read, for example by the letter *Yud*:

יודוך בראש עמוד בי"ה שמ"ו סימן

'Yo'du'cho' is written at the top of the column. The *siman* for this is the letters *Beis, Yud, Heh, Shin, Mem, Vov*.

And so we find repeated, respectively, for the other four letters: *Heh, Shin, Mem, Vov*.

There is one exception, however. We find no such asterisk and note for the letter *Beis* of *B'reishis*. That letter appears at the top of the column – but the special reason for its placement is not noted.

It is likely that the reader is thinking, 'Of course. It is the first letter of the Torah – where else would it be? There is no need to make mention of that which is obvious. Only for the other 5 special letters is there a reason for a note because there is no practical reason for them to be *davka* at the top of a column. For the *Beis* of *B'reishis* there is no other choice.'

That initial reaction seems reasonable at first. But on further contemplation, maybe it is not as simple as it seems.

If, it is obvious that the *Beis* of *B'reishis* is to be at the top of the column, why would there be a special Halachah designating it as so? The other letters require a special Halachah so that the *Sofer* will carefully measure his writing to assure that they will be in their appropriate place. There is nothing to measure for *B'reishis*. 'Just start at the beginning', we will tell our Scribe.

But since there is a Halachah that tells us of the *Beis* of *B'reishis*, as well as of the other letters, it must be that there was a reason to think that it wasn't necessary for that *Beis* to be at the top of the very first column. Or, perhaps there may have been a reason to think that that *Beis* should *not* be at the top of the column.

And the reason for such a hypothesis is just what Rashi taught. *B'reishis* should not be understood as 'The Beginning' of existence.

And, as a symbol of the fact that *B'reishis* is not 'the beginning', it may have been reasonable to suggest that the opening letter of the Torah, that *Beis* of *B'reishis* should *davka* not be at the top of the column, as if it is the beginning. Let it be written in the middle of the column, with the lines above it remaining blank, to know that all doesn't start from there.

Did we not learn in the Mishnah in Masseches Chagiga (11 b):

אין דורשין...במעשה בראשית בשנים...אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו. כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים רתוי לו כאילו לא בא לעולם: מה למעלה, מה למטה, מה לפניו, ומה לאחור. וכל שלא חס על כבוד קונו - רתוי לו שלא בא לעולם.

One may not interpret *Ma'aseh B'reishis* before a disciple⁶ unless the disciple was wise and understood things on his own. One who looks with concentration on four things – it would have been merciful for him that he should have never entered this world: What is above, what is below, what is before and what is after.

One who is not concerned for the honor of his Master Hashem – it would have been merciful⁷ for him that he should have never entered this world.

⁶ Rashi writes:

With two – one [the disciple] and him [the Rebbe].

⁷ Rashi:

בשנים - אחד והוא.

The Gemara continues with an explanation of our Mishnah. Part of the explanation will be based on a verse in Sefer D'vorim. We read there in Parshas Voeschanan (Perek 4/Posuk 32):

כִּי שָׁאַל נָא לַיָּמִים רִאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ לְפָנֶיךָ לְמַן הָיָזָם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לְקִיָּם אָדָם עַל הָאָרֶץ וְלִמְקַצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד קִצָּה הַשָּׁמַיִם הִנְהִיָּה כְדַבֵּר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה אוֹ הַנִּשְׁמַע כְּמָהוּ:

Ask now for the first days that were before you, from the day that G-d created Man on the earth, from one end of the heavens and to the other end of the heavens: 'Was there an event as great as this? Or has anything been heard like this⁸?

The Gemara writes:

ולא במעשה בראשית בשנים מנא הני מילי? דתנו רבנן: כי שאל נא לימים ראשנים - יחיד שואל, ואין שנים שואלין. יכול ישאל אדם שנברא העולם - תלמוד לומר למן היום אשר ברא א...ל'קים אדם על הארץ. יכול לא ישאל אדם מששת ימי בראשית - תלמוד לומר לימים ראשנים אשר היו לפניך. יכול ישאל אדם מה למעלה ומה למטה, מה לפניו ומה לאחור - תלמוד לומר ולמקצה השמים ועד קצה השמים - מלמקצה השמים ועד קצה השמים אתה שואל, ואין אתה שואל מה למעלה מה למטה, מה לפניו ומה לאחור.

Not Ma'aseh B'reishis with two – from where are these words known? The Braisa taught: "Ask now for the first days" - an individual⁹ can ask, but two cannot ask. I might think that an individual would be allowed to ask regarding that which occurred before the world was created? The words, 'from the

רתוי הוא לו - טוב ויפה היה לו אם לא בא לעולם, ואומר אני שהוא לשון רחמנות, כלומר מרוחם הוא אם לא בא לעולם

It would have been merciful for him – It would never come into the world. I say that the word רתוי is an expression of merciful. This phrase means to say that "he would have been a recipient of mercy if he didn't enter the world.

⁸ 'This' refers to *Mattan Torah* and the revelation of the Shechinah to Israel there.

⁹ This *drasha* is based on the singular form of שאל.

I do not know the basis of seeing the word שאל as a source that one can only teach *Ma'aseh B'reishis* to one student only since the preceding and subsequent verses are all in the singular and thus the singular form of שאל would not seem to call special attention to itself justifying a special *limmud*.

day that G-d created Man on the land' teach us [that that question cannot be asked].

I might think that a person is not allowed to ask regarding that which occurred after the Six days of creation. The verse teaches, 'The first days that were before you'. I might that a person is allowed to ask 'what is above', 'what is below', 'what is in before', 'what is in after'? The verse teaches from the end of the heavens to the end of the heavens – that you can ask but you cannot ask 'what is above?', 'what is below?', 'what is after'?

And, in fact, this *drasha* is also found in the Yerushalmi Masseches Chagiga attached to the same Mishnah, and its author there is Rabi Yona in the name of Rabi Levi. And, there, the *drasha* is followed by a support from the very shape of the letter *Beis*. We read:

אתיא דרבי יודה בר פזי כהדא דבר קפרא ומה דתני רבי חייה כהדא דרבי בא רבי יונה בשם רבי לוי בבי"ת נברא העולם מה בי"ת סתום מכל צדדיו ופתוח מצד אחד כך אין לך רשות לדרוש מה למעלן ומה למטן מה לפנים ומה לאחור אלא מיום שנברא העולם ולבא:

A statement of Rabi Yuda bar Pazi is like a statement of Bar Kappara and the B'raisa that Rabi Chiya teaches is like what Rabi Bo said and Rabi Yona in the name of Rabi Levi: The world was created with the letter *Beis*. Just like the letter *Beis* is closed from all sides and open on only one side so you are not allowed to interpret that which is above, that which is below, that which is before and that which is after.

[You are allowed to interpret] only from the day of Creation and afterwards.

Thus, *B'reishis* is not the beginning and there was a serious rationale to demonstrate that fact by writing the first word of the Torah in a place other than where we would have expected.

Therefore, the Halachah has to teach us that the *Beis* of *B'reishis* belongs at the beginning.

But, we may wonder – what is incorrect with that supposition that has been rejected? Why, in fact, do we write *B'reishis* in the place reserved for the beginning when it isn't the beginning?

Besides eliminating what cannot be taught, does the *Beis*¹⁰, and the word *B'reishis* teach us something positive that we can learn?

Seemingly perplexing, the *Targum Yerushalmi*¹¹ renders the first phrase of the Torah very non-literally. We read:

¹⁰ In fact, there are many 'positive' that the Torah teaches us by using the letter *Beis* as its opening consonant.

Ba'al HaTurim here gives us a [non-exhaustive list]:

יש במדרש (בראשית רבא א/י) שלכך פתח בבי"ת ולא באל"ף, לפי שבי"ת הוא לשון ברכה ואל"ף לשון ארירה. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא אפתח בריאתי בבי"ת, בלשון ברכה, ולואי שיוכל להתקיים (ירושלמי חגיגה ב/א). דבר אחר על שם שני עולמות שברא, העולם הזה והעולם הבא (בראשית רבא שם). דבר אחר על שם שתי תורות, תורה שבכתב ותורה שבעל פה (מדרש מי השילוח). ללמדך שבזכות התורה (בראשית רבא א/ד) ולומדיה (תנחומא פרשת נח ג) נברא העולם:

There is in the Midrash that 'therefore Hashem began the Torah with the letter *Beis* and not with the letter *Alef* because *Beis* is an expression of *Bracha*-Blessing and *Alef* is an expression of ארירה-curse. Hashem said, 'I will begin My Creation with the letter *Beis*, an expression of blessing. Would it be that the world will be able to exist.

Another explanation is that *Beis* [meaning '2'] is for the two worlds that Hashem created – this world and the world to come.

Another explanation is that the letter *Beis* refers to the two Torahs – the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. This teaches that in the merit of Torah and those who learn Torah the world was created.

See the wonderful commentary of Rav Koppel Reinitz Shlita in the Feldheim edition of the Ba'al HaTurim for elaboration and elucidation.

Many more *drashos* and explanations are to be found in the encyclopedic *Torah Shleima* to this first verse in the Torah.

¹¹ *Targum Yerushalmi* is an ancient Aramaic translation that we have only in fragments and is found in many editions of *Mikraos Gedolos*.

In a number of volumes of *Torah Shleima* that are scholarly essays regarding the nature, authorship and authority of the Targum.

בראשית בְּחֹכְמָא בְּרָא ה'

B'reishis – in the beginning Hashem created with wisdom.

From where does this translation/explanation come? What is its source?

However, this rendition, as strange as it may appear at first, is firmly based upon many sources. Some of those sources pre-date the *Targum Yerushalmi* and some come much later and reflect that which the *Targum* taught.

In the Midrash עקיבא דרבי אותיות we read:

...דבר אחר [בראשית] ב"ת בי בינה. בכל בית בינה בו. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא
ב"ת בראתי את העולם...

Another explanation: **B'**reishis – the letter *Beis* refers to **בינה**-understanding.

In every letter *Beis* there is *bina*-understanding
letter *beis* [referring to *bina*] I created the world.

We read in Masseches Sanhedrin (38 a) regarding the interpretation of the verse in Mishlei (Perek 9/Posuk 1):

חַכְמוֹת בְּנִתָּה בֵּיתָה חֲצֵבָה עֲמוּדֶיהָ שִׁבְעָה:

With wisdom Hashem built His house; He quarried its seven pillars¹².

The Gemara there interprets the initial phrase of the verse:

חכמות בנתה ביתה - זו מידתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, שברא את כל העולם כולו
בחכמה.

With wisdom He built His house – this is the attribute of HaKodosh Boruch Hu Who created the entire world with wisdom.

In Masseches Chagiga (12 a) we read:

אמר רב זוטרא בר טוביא אמר רב: בעשרה דברים נברא העולם: בחכמה, ובתבונה,
ובדעת... בחכמה ובתבונה - דכתיב (משלי ג/ט) ה' בחכמה יסד ארץ כונן שמים
בתבונה. בדעת דכתיב (שם שם כ¹³) בדעתו תהומות נבקעו:

¹² This translation is according to Rashi.

¹³ The entire verse reads:

Mar Zutra bar Tuvia said in the name of Rav: The world was created with ten things: with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge...

With wisdom and understanding as it is written, "Hashem gave the land a foundation with wisdom; He prepared the heavens with understanding. With knowledge as it is written, "With His knowledge the depths were split".

Margalit HaYam points to the Targum to Yeshaya (Perek 28/29) as an additional support. The verse there reads:

גַּם זֹאת מֵעַם ה' צִבְאוֹת יֵצְאָה הַפְּלִיא עֲצָה הַגְּדִיל תּוֹשִׁיָּהּ:

This, too, came out from Hashem of Hosts, He gave wondrous counsel and caused inspiration to enlarge:

The Targum of that verse¹⁴ renders the end of the verse as:

אִסְגִּי עוֹבְדֵי בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּסִגֵּי חוֹכְמַתִּיהָ:

He made abundant works of *B'reishis* with His abundant wisdom:

Thus, embedded within the letter *Beis* and within the entire word of *B'reishis* is the Divine wisdom that was chosen to be the beginning point of the Torah, written in the very place where we would expect to find it:

בְּרֵאשִׁית הָעֵמוּד

At the top of the column.

What are we to learn from this message that HaKodosh Boruch chose to teach us His wisdom at the very beginning of His Torah?

We read in Koheles (Perek 8/Posuk 1):

מִי כְהִתְחַכֵּם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דְּבַר חֲכָמַת אָדָם תִּאִיר פָּנָיו וְעַז פָּנָיו יִשְׁנָא:

Who is like the wise man and who knows the explanation of the matter? The wisdom of a person enlightens his face and the power of his face will change?

בְּדַעְתּוֹ תְּהוֹמוֹת נִבְקְעוּ וּשְׁתַּקִּים יִרְעֶפוּ טָל:

With His knowledge the depths were split and the skies showered dew:

¹⁴ That is the Targum that is attributed to Rabi Yonoson ben Uziel, not the Talmud Yerushalmi.

Rashi writes:

מי כהחכם - מי בעולם חשוב כאדם חכם:

Who is like the wise man – Who in the world is considered to be like a wise man?

ומי יודע פשר דבר - כמו שמצינו בדניאל מתוך חכמתו שהיה חכם ביראת שמים נתגלו לו רזי פשרין, מי כמשה עושה פשרים בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים:

Who knows the explanation of the matter – As we saw regarding Doniel that because of his wisdom, that he was wise with *yir'as shomayim* – the fear of heaven – that the hidden explanations were revealed to him. Who is like Moshe Rabbenu who is able to make *compromise*¹⁵ between Israel and their Father in Heaven.

¹⁵ Rashi presents us with two explanation of the word פשר. The first is 'explanation'. The second is פשרה, a term not found in Tanach but in Chazal, that means 'compromise'. 'Compromise' occurs when one *explains* the actions and intentions of the one person to another so that an argument or misunderstanding is averted or solved.

Moshe Rabbenu intervened on behalf of Israel to save us from Divine punishment. For example see Sh'mos Perek 32/Posuk 31. There Moshe comes to the defense of Israel following the sin of the *Eigel HaZahav*. At first glance, this 'defense' seems accusatory. We read:

וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי חָטָא חָטָא הָעָם הַזֶּה חָטָא גְדֹלָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי זָהָב:
Moshe returned to Hashem and he said, 'Please, this people has sinned a great sin and they made for themselves gods of gold.'

Rashi solves our perplexity:

אלהי זהב - אתה הוא שגרמת להם, שהשפעת להם זהב וכל חפצם, מה יעשו שלא יחטאו. משל למלך שהיה מאכיל ומשקה את בנו ומקשטו ותולה לו כיס בצוארו ומעמידו בפתח בית זונות, מה יעשה הבן שלא יחטא:

Gods of gold – You, G-d, caused the sin. You gave them an abundance of gold and all of their desires. What could they do so that they wouldn't sin? The parable is that of the king who fed and gave drink to his son and dressed him in finery and place a purse around his neck and stood him before a house of ill-repute. What is the son to do so that he will not sin?

ועוז פניו ישונא - משאר הבריות (שמות לד/16) כי יראו מגשת אליו כי קרן עור פניו:

The power of his face will change – to be different than other people. As it says, ‘They were afraid to approach him because the skin of his face radiated.’

One lesson that we learn from this new insight into *B’reishis* is that G-d’s wisdom is the source for our wisdom and the effect that His wisdom has upon us.

But there is more to understand. Rashi wrote that Doniel was

חכם ביראת שמים

Wise with *yir’as shomayim* – the fear of heaven:

We read in Sefer Tehillim (Perek 111/Posuk 10):

ראשית חכמה יראת ה' שכל טוב לכל עשיהם תהלתו עמדת לעד:

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d; those who do them [His Mitzvos¹⁷]; His praise is forever.

Radak explains:

ראשית חכמה יראת ה', וצוה להם ראשית חכמה יראת ה'. ואנה צוה להם זה? כשאמר (דברים י/כ¹⁸): את ה' א...ל'קיר תירא אותו תעבוד ובו תדבק וגו'. תחילה אמר תירא, ויראת ה' היא שמירת התורה והמצות, והחכמה היא חכמת החקירה

¹⁶ The entire verse reads:

וַיֵּרָא אֶהָרָן וְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְהָיָה קֶרֶן עוֹר פָּנָיו וַיִּירָאוּ מִגִּשְׁתֵּי אֱלֹהִים:
Aharon and all of B’nei Yisroel saw Moshe and behold, the skin of his face radiated; they were afraid to approach him.

¹⁷ Malbim

¹⁸ The entire verse reads:

אֶת ה' אָ...ל'קיר תירא אתו תעבד ובו תדבק ובשמו תשבוע:
You should fear Hashem your G-d; you should serve Him and to Him you should cleave and you swear in His Name.

Radak deals with ‘cleaving to G-d’ and ‘swearing in His Name’ in the continuation of his commentary which we did not bring.

האמיתית, לדעת כל מעשה בראשית, והיא עבודת הא... ל יתברך, כי בה יכיר האדם את בוראו. לפיכך אמר אחר כן ואותו תעבוד. ...

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d – He commands them that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d. Where did G-d command Israel about this? When the Torah writes: You shall fear G-d and you shall serve Him and to Him you should cleave etc.’ First, the verse says, ‘You shall fear’. Fear of G-d is the observance of Torah and Mitzvos. ‘Wisdom’ is the wisdom of philosophical inquiry to know all about Creation and that is service to G-d Yisborach¹⁹. Through such investigation a person will recognize his Creator and thus it says afterwards, ‘you shall serve Him.

והקדים באותו פסוק יראת ה' לעבודה, וכן בזה הפסוק צוה להקדים יראת ה' לחכמה, ואמר ראשית חכמה יראת ה'. אמר: מי שהכין את לבבו להתעסק בחכמה תחילה יתעסק ביראת ה' ויעשה ממנה שורש ועיקר, ועל דרכיה יתנהג בחכמה שילמד

That verse first says ‘fear of G-d’ and then His service and in this verse [in Tehillim] he commands to first have fear of G-d before wisdom as it says, ‘The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d.’ The verse tells us that one who prepares his heart to be involved in wisdom should first be involved with the fear of G-d and make it his source and fundamental principle. And by the ways of fear of G-d he should relate to the wisdom that he will learn.

¹⁹ Rambam writes in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah (Perek 2/Halacha 2):

...בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהן חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול...ויודע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה עומדת בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות...ולפי הדברים האלו אני מבאר כללים גדולים ממעשה רבון העולמים כדי שיהיו פתח למבין לאהוב את השם, כמו שאמרו חכמים בענין אהבה שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם.

When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and His creations and he sees in them His inexplicable and infinite wisdom, he immediately loves and praises and has a great desire to know the Great G-d. And he knows that he is a small, lowly, unenlightened creature with little and shallow knowledge before Him Who is perfect in His knowledge. And in this way I [Rambam] explain important principles of the work of the Master of the Worlds so that there should be an opening to understand and to love Hashem. This is as our *chachamim* said regarding love of G-d: From love of G-d you will recognize the One Who spoke and the world came into being.

על דרך שאמרו רז"ל (אבות ג/ט): כל שיראת חטאו קודמת לחכמתו חכמתו מתקיימת, וכל שחכמתו קודמת ליראת חטאו אין חכמתו מתקיימת. ואם ילמד אדם חכמת החקירה תחילה, אולי יבהל ברוחו, ויעז מצחו להכחיש האותות והמופתים הגדולים הנמצאים בכתבי הקודש. לפיכך צריך להקדים לימוד התורה שהיא יראת ה', וישים בלבו להאמין כל הכתוב בה: חידוש העולם ושינוי הטבע באותות ובמופתים. וכאשר יתבונן האדם בתורה, ימצא בה דרכי החכמה, כמו שכתוב (שם ד, ו): כי היא חכמתכם ובינתכם לעיני העמים וגו'...

This is what Chazal referred to when they wrote in the Mishnah, 'Anyone whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom – his wisdom will remain. One whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin – his wisdom will not remain.'

If a person studies the wisdom of philosophical inquiry first, perhaps his spirit will become confused and he will be brazen to deny the signs and great wonders that are in the Holy Writings. Therefore, one has to first learn Torah which is the fear of G-d and will set his heart to believe all that is written in it: Creation of the world from nothingness and the changes in nature through signs and wonders. When a person will contemplate regarding the Torah he will find in it the paths of wisdom as is written, "Because it is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, etc."

We find this theme, expressed elaborately by Radak, to be found in a Posuk in Koheles. We read there (Perek 7/Posuk 8):

טוֹב אַחֲרַיִת דְּבַר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ טוֹב אֶרְךָ רוּחַ מִגְּבַה רוּחַ:

The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience is better than conceit.

In discussing the implications of this verse in the Yerushalmi of Masseches Chagiga (ibid.) we see a number of examples when the end result could not have been foreseen from the beginning. And, the upshot of those discussions is that only when something comes to its conclusion can we make a true evaluation. And, of course, we know that such a principle is true. However, the Gemara there does not discuss the veracity of the principle but whether or not this verse is expressing that principle. And to that the Gemara tells us that Rabi Akiva would have disputed the above interpretations. We read there the words of one *Tanna* to his colleague:

עקיבה רבך לא הוה דרש כן אלא טוב אחרית דבר מראשיתו בזמן שהוא טוב מראשיתו:

Akiva, your Rebbe, would not have interpreted this verse that way. Rather, [he would have interpreted:] 'The end of a matter is better than its beginning because it comes from a beginning that is good'.

To understand this interpretation, we turn to another verse in Koheles (Perek 2/Posuk 13) that writes:

וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי שֵׁשׁ יִתְרוֹן לַחֲכָמָה מִן הַסְּכָלוֹת כִּי־תָרוֹן הָאֹר מִן הַחֹשֶׁךְ;

I saw that there is superiority to wisdom from ignorance, just like the superiority of light from darkness.

A literal and true translation of this verse tells us that wisdom is much better than ignorance, just as light is better than darkness.

However, *Alshich HaKodosh* understands the words of Shlomo HaMelech differently. First the Alshich defines ignorance in the context of the verses in that section of Koheles and then he explains the message of the verse itself.

In that section of Koheles we read that Shlomo Hamelech considered the superiorities of the pleasures of *Olom HaZeh* and then rejected them as being a solution for mankind.

Alshich thus writes in our verse:

וכן מה שאחזתי בסכלות, הם טובות העולם הזה, היה לראות פחיתותם עד היכן יגיע מה שלא יוכר לבלתי עוסק בחכמה ואוחז בסכלות.

That which I Shlomo grasped 'ignorance' – which refers to the good things of this world – I did it to see their low value so that it would be known what happens when there is no grasping of wisdom, only this type of ignorance.

Alshich continues:

כי הנה 'ראיתי אני', כלומר אני בעל החכמה, שיש יתרון לחכמה. ובמה הכרתי יתרון החכמה, הלא הוא מן הסכלות, כי מתוך פחיתות הסכלות הכרתי יתרון החכמה, כאשר יוכר יתרון האור מתוך החשך:

Because, behold / saw, that means that I Shlomo, the one who possesses wisdom saw the superiority of wisdom. How did I recognize the superiority of wisdom? Was it not from the ignorance? Because through [seeing] the lowliness of ignorance I recognized the superiority of wisdom – just like the superiority of light is recognized through the darkness.

That is, one who has never experienced darkness cannot appreciate light. If light is present all of the time one cannot fathom the gift that it offers. When one experiences the opposite of light, darkness, then when the light resumes its significance can be comprehended and appreciated. Thus the value of light is learned מן החושך – *from* the darkness.

Thus, this verse in Koheles means that the ‘beginning’ is most significant as a means of understanding the ‘end’. That is, we do not disregard the ‘beginning’ and say that it has no value. Rather the ‘beginning’ has a value – in this case to demonstrate the value of that which follows.

Perhaps this is the point that is made regarding the interpretation of the other verse in Koheles that is attributed to Rabi Akiva. The ‘beginning’ is not to be disregarded as was stated by the other opinions. Rather, the ‘beginning’ is to be regarded because it influences the ‘end’ – in this case in a positive manner. Thus, we return to that verse that was brought earlier:

טוֹב אַחֲרַיִת דְּבַר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ טוֹב אֶרֶךְ רוּחַ מִגְּבַה רוּחַ:

The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience is better than conceit.

The end of a matter is good when it is מראשיתו, derived *from* its beginning²⁰.

And these instances of ראשית are found in בראשית, the starting point of the Torah.

²⁰ But, importantly, it should be noted that Alshich does not explain this Posuk in this way. The reason would seem to be that he understands that ‘patience’ is better than conceit, but the superiority of patience is not derived from conceit.

Nonetheless, what we have presented here does seem to be a valid explanation of Rabi Akiva.

There are two foci of Creation: the Creator and the goal of creation. The Creator is Hashem and the goal is Man.

How is Man to succeed? How are we to succeed? Wisdom is the gift that was given to us in order to succeed, accomplish and achieve. However, history has shown us, general history and the history of *Am Yisroel* that such success is not a given whatsoever.

The opposite is true, it seems. Tales of failure seem to far exceed those of success.

In every generation, those who are alive are the *אחרית דבר*, the end point of that time, the goal that exists at that moment.

When we begin our new year we can have our own *ב...ראשית*, in the *Reishis*, the starting point of the Creator – His Wisdom.

If we use the Wisdom of Torah, predicated on our *Yiras Shamayim*, then we can anticipate achievement and accomplishment that are everlasting, not momentary, the true success of reaching our potential that will be a boon for each and every one, for *Klal Yisroel* and the entire world.

Choref Bori

Shabbat Shalom

Chodesh Tov

Rabbi Pollock