

“בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ”

The Incredible Lesson from the First Passuk Regarding Humility which Is Synonymous with “Lev Tov” — A Good Heart

In honor of the upcoming Shabbas Kodesh, parshas Bereishis, it is fitting that we begin with the words of the Divrei Yechezkel, presented in the name of his distinguished father—in—law, Rabbi Aryeh Leibush, the head of the beis—din of Vizhnitz, zy”a. He explains why this Shabbas is universally referred to as “Shabbas Bereishis.” We do not find this designation applied to any of the other Shabbasos of the year, such as “Shabbas Noach” or “Shabbas Lech—Lecha.” Hence, he explains:

“הענין כך הוא, דבימים הנוראים הקדושים כל אדם היה לו אז הרהור תשובה, וקיבל אז על עצמו איזו הנהגה טובה, כל איש לפי ערכו ומדרגתו, לכן נקראת שבת בראשית, שמזכירים להאדם שמה שעבר עבר, ומעתה מתחיל סדר חדש, וישתדל את עצמו שיהיה מעתה טוב.”

Here is the explanation. During the holy Yamim Noraim (the High Holidays), every human being had thoughts of teshuvah, and accepted upon himself some particular good behavior—every person according to his ability and spiritual level. Therefore, it is called Shabbas Bereishis. A person is reminded that what has passed has passed, and from this moment on he is starting a new chapter. Thus, he should encourage himself to be better from now on.

Thus, in the spirit of “**Shabbas Bereishis**,” in honor of the new collection of essays on the parshiyot of the Torah for the upcoming year, we beseech HKB”H, the Giver of the Torah, the One Who favors man with knowledge: May He guide us on the path of “emet,” to scrutinize the pesukim of Torah she’b’chtav via the light of our blessed sages—the Tannaim and Amoraim of Torah she’b’al peh; may we rely on the valuable principles and foundations provided for us by the holy Rishonim and Acharonim, who illuminated the world with the wisdom of their Torah.

The Passuk “Bereishis” Reveals HKB”H’s Humility

We shall begin by examining the passuk with which HKB”H chose to open Torah she’b’chtav (Bereishis 1, 1): **“בראשית ברא”**

— אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ — **In the beginning, Elokim created the heavens and the earth.** Rashi comments in the name of the Midrash: The Torah opens with the name Elokim rather than the name Havaya, because initially Hashem intended to create the world with the attribute of “din”—judgment; however, He saw that the world could not live up to this standard and would not sustain; hence, he united the attribute of “rachamim” — mercy — with the attribute of “din”. This is reflected in the passuk (Bereishis 2, 4): **“ביום עשות ה' אלקים ארץ ושמים”** — which employs both the name Havaya and the name Elokim, with the name Havaya appearing first.

A well—known question regarding this comment appears in many of our holy sources — such as the Shela hakadosh, the Arvei Nachal and others. Is it even possible to imagine or suggest that HKB”H initially intended to create the world with the attribute of “din” and when He foresaw that the world could not survive in this manner, He prioritized the attribute of “rachamim” and combined it with the attribute of “din”? Clearly, HKB”H is omniscient and knew from the outset that a world based on midas hadin could not survive. That being the case, why did He initially consider creating the world based on the attribute of “din”?

After much consideration, I would like to propose a novel and practical solution to this question. The Midrash (B.R. 1, 12) teaches us that HKB”H began the Torah with the passuk: **“בראשית”** in order to reveal the degree of HKB”H’s humility — **“ענוה”**. In direct contrast to the practice of human kings, HKB”H did not begin the Torah with His own name **“אלקים”**:

“שמעון בן עזאי אומר (תהלים יח-לו) וענותך תרבני, בשר ודם מזכיר שמו ואחר כך שבחו, פלן אגוסטולי, פלן פראטאטא [ערוך: מיני שררות הן], אבל הקב”ה אינו כן, אלא משברא צורכי עולמו אחר כך מזכיר שמו, בראשית ברא ואחר כך אלקים.”

Shimon ben Azai cites the opening passuk of the Torah as an indication of HKB”H’s humility. In contrast to human beings who mention their names before their work and accomplishments,

HKB”H mentions His creation first, “בראשית ברא”, and only afterwards His name, “אלקים”.

It is quite apparent that Shimon ben Azai is addressing the Midrash’s question in Tanna D’Bei Eliyahu Rabbah (end of Chapter 31):

“ומה נשתנה הבי”ת מכל הכ”ב אותיות, שבה ברא הקב”ה את עולמו, שנאמר בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ, והלא אין ראוי לומר אלא אלקים ברא בראשית, ומה תלמוד לומר בראשית ברא אלקים.”

Why is the Hebrew letter “beis” different from the other twenty—two letters of the aleph—beis with which HKB”H created His universe? Wouldn’t it have been more appropriate for the Torah to begin בראשית ברא אלקים, beginning with the word “Elokim” and the letter “aleph,” rather than בראשית ברא אלקים with the letter “beis”?

Shimon ben Azai answers that this is to demonstrate HKB”H’s attribute of humility—first He mentioned His creation and then He mentioned His name, the opposite of what a human king would have done. This teaches us that HKB”H began the Torah and created the universe with the letter “beis,” and not with the letter “aleph,” to emphasize the importance of the attribute of humility—which is the foundation of the entire Torah and all of creation.

It is worthwhile adding a tidbit from the Zohar Chadash (Bereishis 10:). The word “בראשית” can be understood as בית “ראשית”—meaning that the letter “beis” or the “bayit,” the home, comes first. This allusion teaches us that a man must first build his house before marrying a woman. Additionally, as we have just illustrated, one’s home should reflect the “beis” of “Bereishis”—the attribute of humility, which HKB”H demonstrated by beginning the Torah with the letter “beis” instead of with the letter “aleph.” For, the Divine Presence will only dwell in a home founded on humility.

This provides us with a very nice explanation concerning that which is written in relation to lesions that afflict Jewish homes (Vayikra 14, 35): “ובא אשר לו הבית והגיד לכהן לאמר כנגע נראה” — **the one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the Kohen, saying: Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house.** For the Gemara (Arachin 16a) teaches us that these afflictions come as a result of arrogance and haughtiness.

As we have learned, HKB”H began the Torah with the letter “beis” of the word “בראשית” to teach us the importance of the attribute of humility. For this very reason, if one fails to behave in a humble manner, HKB”H visits afflictions on his house, his “בית”,

warning him that he has harmed the letter “beis” of “בראשית”—which reflects humility. Therefore, the verse concludes: “ובא אשר לו הבית והגיד לכהן לאמר כנגע נראה לי בבית” — **the one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the Kohen, saying: Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house**—the owner of the house must search his soul to identify and appreciate the harm that he has caused, and then he must proclaim: “כנגע נראה לי בבית” — **something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house.** He must confess that he has damaged the letter “beis” of “בראשית” and, as a result, he has been punished with a house affliction. “וצוה הכהן ופגו את הבית בטרם יבוא הכהן לראות את הנגע, ולא יטמא כל אשר בבית” — **The Kohen shall command; and they shall clear the house before the Kohen comes to look at the affliction, so that everything in the house should not become contaminated.** For, a house full of haughtiness contaminates the other people within it.

HKB”H Also Revealed His Humility with the Tenth Utterance: “נעשה אדם”

Now, we will see just how important the quality of humility is to HKB”H. We learn in the Gemara (R.H. 32a) that it is necessary to recite ten pesukim related to “malchiyos.” The Gemara explains: “הני עשרה מלכויות כנגד מי, רבי יוחנן אמר, כנגד עשרה מאמרות שבהן הנברא העולם—**to whom do these ten pesukim of “malchiyot” correspond? Rabbi Yochanan said: They correspond to the ten utterances with which the world was created.** The Gemara asks: But in the passage describing the creation the word “ויאמר”—introducing the utterances—only appears nine times. The Gemara answers: “בראשית נמי מאמר הוא דכתב (תהלים) — **the word בראשית also constitutes an utterance, as indicated by the passuk (Tehillim 33, 6): “With the word of Hashem the heavens were made.”**”

Concerning the accounting of the ten utterances, we find several different viewpoints among our blessed sages. Here is a passage in the Midrash (B.R. 17a) addressing the subject:

“תנינן בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם, ואלו הן, בראשית, ורוח אלקים מרחפת, ויאמר אלקים יהי אור, ויאמר אלקים יהי רקיע, ויאמר אלקים יקוו המים, ויאמר אלקים תדשא הארץ, ויאמר אלקים יהי מאורות, ויאמר אלקים ישרצו המים, ויאמר אלקים תוצא הארץ, ויאמר אלקים נעשה אדם.”

This Midrash clearly identifies the tenth utterance as (Bereishis 1,26): “ויאמר אלקים נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו» — **And the Lord said, “Let us make man in Our image and Our likeness.”** Now, we saw above that in the first utterance: “בראשית ברא אלקים” — HKB”H revealed His humility by not mentioning His name —

“אלקים” — before that which He created. In similar fashion, He reveals His tremendous humility in the tenth utterance with the words: “נעשה אדם” — **“let us make man”** —uttered in the plural tense. As Rashi explains: “נעשה אדם, ענוותנותו של הקב”ה למדנו מכאן, לפיכך נמלך בהן” — **we learn from here the degree of HKB”H’s humility; since man was created in the image of the malachim, and they would be envious of him; therefore, He consulted with them.**

From all that has been said, we can begin to appreciate how important the quality of humility is in the eyes of Hashem. So much so that He emphasized this trait in both the first and the last utterances with which the world was created. We can find an allusion to this fact in the words of David HaMelech, Yisrael’s sweet psalmist (Tehillim 118, 22): “אבן מאסו הבונים היתה לראש פינה, — **the stone despised by the builders has become the cornerstone; this has emanated from Hashem; it is wondrous in our eyes.** The word אבן is an acronym for the first and last utterances: בראשית נעשה אדם—in which HKB”H revealed His humility; they represent the cornerstone of creation.

Thus, we can interpret these pesukim as follows: “אבן” — **מאסו הבונים**—the kings of the nations of the world built their sovereignties on this principle; due to their haughtiness and arrogance, they despised the quality of humility, which is alluded to in these first two utterances; “היתה לראש פינה” — for the ten utterances constitute the cornerstone upon which HKB”H created the world, and He demonstrated His humility through them; “מאת ה’ — Hashem acted with humility by not beginning the Torah with the mention of His name and by consulting with the malachim regarding the creation of man; “היא נפלאת בעינינו” — it is a wonder that HKB”H, the King of Kings, exhibited His humility simultaneously with His greatness.

The Conclusion of the Torah Also Alludes to the Quality of Humility

Now, take note that HKB”H not only began the Torah with a vital lesson concerning the importance of humility, but He also concluded the Torah with a similar lesson. The Gemara (Menachos 30a) rules according to Rav Ashi that when writing a sefer Torah, the final words “לעיני כל ישראל” must end in the middle of a line. The Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (9) finds a symbolic meaning in this halachah. Ending the Torah in the middle of a line teaches a person that even if he has studied the entire Torah, he should rest assured that he is not nearly done — he has still only completed part of his journey.

How beautifully the conclusion of the Torah connects with its beginning! The words “לעיני כל ישראל” end in the middle of a line to teach us humility and convey the message that there is still much work to be done. Where, however, do we find the strength not to fall prey to arrogance and not to become overly proud of our accomplishments — after all, completing the Torah is a worthy accomplishment? The answer lies in the beginning of the Torah. HKB”H opened the Torah with the words “בראשית ברא אלקים” to emphasize the importance of the attribute of humility. As we are commanded to emulate His attributes and ways (Shabbas 133:): “מה הוא חנון ורחום אף אתה היה חנון ורחום” — **just as He is generous and merciful, so too we must strive to be generous and merciful**—we, too, must act accordingly and exemplify humility.

Let us explain. The passuk states explicitly (Devarim 32, 9): “כי חלק ה’ עמו יעקב חבל נחלתו” — **for Hashem’s share is His people; Yaakov, the portion of His possession;** for every Jew possesses a piece of G—d from above. This is evident from the creation of man where it states (Bereishis 2, 7): “וּפָחַ בְּאַפֵּי נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים” — **and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life.** It is precisely because every Jew possesses a piece of G—d within him that he is able to emulate the qualities of HKB”H.

Only a Person with a Lowly Self Image Is Able to Retain Torah

We can explain why HKB”H chose to teach us a lesson in humility both at the beginning of the Torah and at its conclusion based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Ta’anis 7a): “למה נמשלו דברי תורה למים, דכתיב (ישעיה נה-א) הוי כל צמא לכו למים, לומר לך, מה מים מגיחין מקום גבוה והולכין למקום נמוך, אף דברי תורה אין מתקיימין אלא במי שדעתו שפלה. **Why are words of Torah compared to water? . . . To teach us that just as water flows from higher ground to lower ground, so, too, words of Torah are only retained by someone who possesses a lowly self—image (humility).**

For this reason, the Torah was given specifically on Har Sinai, the lowest of mountains, to emphasize the importance of humility—as we have learned in the Gemara (Sotah 5a):

“אמר רבי יוסף, לעולם ילמד אדם מודעת קונו, שהרי הקב”ה הניח כל הרים — **Rav Yosef said: A person should always learn from the sensibility of his Creator—for behold, when HKB”H gave the Torah, He abandoned all the great mountains and hills and instead rested His Presence on Har Sinai.** Rashi comments that we are being taught to value modesty and humility from the fact that HKB”H passed over greater and

taller mountains, such as Tavor and Carmel, in order to give the Torah on the lowly Har Sinai.

This provides us with a new insight as to why HKB”H specifically chose to give the Torah to Yisrael to the exclusion of all the other nations. For, only Yisrael possess the quality of humility, which is essential for attaining and retaining Torah knowledge. To emphasize this point, we find the following elucidation in the Gemara (Chullin 89a) regarding the passuk (Devarim 7, 7): **“לא מרובכם מכל העמים חשק ה' בכם ויבחר בכם כי אתם המעט: — not because you are more numerous than all the peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all the peoples.**

“אמר להם הקב”ה לישראל, חושקני בכם שאפילו בשעה שאני משפיע לכם גדולה, אתם ממעיטין עצמכם לפני, נתתי גדולה לאברהם, אמר לפני (בראשית יח—כז) ואנכי עפר ואפר, למשה ואהרן, אמר (שמות טז—יז) וגנחו מה, לדוד, אמר (תהלים כב—יז) ואנכי תולעת ולא איש. אבל עובדי כוכבים אינן כן, נתתי גדולה לנמרוד, אמר (בראשית יא—ד) הבה נבנה לנו עיר, לפרעה, אמר (שמות ה—ב) מי ה', לסנחריב, אמר (מלכים ב יח—לה) מי בכל אלהי הארצות וגו', לנבוכדנצר, אמר (ישעיה יד—יד) אעלה על במתי עב, לחירם מלך צור, אמר (יחזקאל כח—ב) מושב אלקים ישבתי בלב ימים.”

“HKB”H said to Yisrael: I desire you as My people, because even at a time when I bestow greatness upon you, you humble yourselves before Me. I granted greatness to Avraham, and he said before Me: “Though I am but earth and ashes.” I granted greatness to Moshe and Aharon, and they said: “For what are we?” I granted greatness to David, and he said: “But I am a worm and not a man.” But with respect to idolaters, it is not so. I granted greatness to Nimrod, and he said: “Come, let us build ourselves a city.” I granted greatness to Pharaoh, and he said: “Who is Hashem?” I granted greatness to Sancheriv, and he said: “Which among all the gods of the lands etc.?” I granted greatness to Nevuchadnetzar, and he said: “I will ascend over the tops of the clouds.” I granted greatness to Chiram, King of Tyre, and he said: “I occupy the seat of G—d in the heart of the seas.”

Based on this understanding, it is obvious why HKB”H chose to give us the Torah specifically through Moshe Rabeinu. After all, the Torah attests to the fact (Bamidbar 12, 3): **“והאיש משה עניו מאד מכל: — now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth!**

Thus, we see that the attribute of humility is the foundation of the entire Torah. HKB”H chose Yisrael from all the other nations due to their enormous humility. Similarly, He gave us the Torah through Moshe Rabeinu and on Har Sinai to emphasize that humility and modesty are the basis for the entire Torah and Yiddishkeit.

Humility Is the Foundation of the Entire Torah while Arrogance Is the Mother of All Sin

Now, let us expand on this notion that HKB”H chose to begin the Torah and conclude the Torah with vital lessons in humility. Let us introduce the words of the esteemed author of the Imrei Yosef, which he presents in the name of the great Rabbi Shmelkeh of Nicholsberg, zy”a. He proves that not only is humility the foundation of the entire Torah, but arrogance is the mother of all sin. We learn in the Gemara (Sotah 5a) that the Shechinah only rests upon the humble and modest: **“שהרי הקב”ה הגיח כל — for he set aside all of the other mountains and hills and rested His Shechinah upon Har Sinai.** Concerning those who are haughty, however, it states (ibid.): **“כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח, אמר הקב”ה, אין אני והוא יכולין לדור — any person who possesses a haughtiness of spirit, HKB”H said: I and he cannot dwell together in the world.**

We have also learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): **“יצרו: של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש המיתו... ואלמלא הקב”ה עוזרו אין יכול לו — A person’s evil inclination threatens to overpower him every day and seeks to kill him . . . and if not for HKB”H’s help, he would be unable to withstand him.** This teaches us that it is not humanly possible to overcome the evil inclination without divine intervention. Therefore, the haughty person, with whom HKB”H refuses to dwell, lacks the divine assistance necessary to withstand the evil inclination; as a consequence, he is susceptible to all transgressions. Similarly, we have learned in the Gemara (Sotah 4b): **“כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח כאילו עובד עבודת: — any person who possesses a haughtiness of spirit is regarded as though he worships idols.** Due to the fact that he lacks HKB”H’s assistance, he succumbs even to the severe transgression of idolatry.

This important concept is discussed in Rabeinu Yonah’s Sha’arei Teshuvah (Sha’ar 1, 27): **“והטעם, מלבד כי הגאווה גורמת חטאים, המדה עצמה חטאת, כמו שנאמר (משלי טז ה) תועבת ה' כל גבה לב, ובעל הגאווה נמסר ביד יצרו, כי אין עזר השם עמו אחרי אשר הוא תועבת השם.”** Besides the fact that arrogance causes sins, the very attribute itself is a sin, as it says (Mishlei 16, 5): **Every haughty heart is the abomination of Hashem.** The arrogant one falls prey to his evil inclination, because Hashem finds him to be an abomination and will not help him.

This explains full well why HKB”H emphasized His great love for the attribute of humility immediately with the giving of the Torah—by giving the Torah through Moshe Rabeinu, the humblest of men, and on Har Sinai, the lowest of mountains.

He was conveying the message that without the attribute of humility, receiving the Torah would serve no purpose; for without HKB”H’s aid—resting His Presence upon one who is humble—one is incapable of observing and abiding by the Torah’s commandments.

This also enlightens us as to why HKB”H began the Torah with the passuk: “בראשית ברא אלקים”—a lesson in humility—and concluded the Torah with the words: “לעיני כל ישראל” — another lesson in humility. Seeing as the Torah is founded on the notion of humility, it is compared to water — which also seeks the lowest place to rest. Therefore, the Torah begins and ends with lessons in humility to provide us with the tool necessary to attain and retain the wisdom of the Torah.

Based on what we have discussed, we can better appreciate why HKB”H chose to exhibit His humility by beginning the Torah with the word “בראשית” rather than with His name “אלקים”. Let us refer to Rashi’s comment: “בראשית, בשביל התורה שנקראת (משלי ח—כב) ראשית דרכו, ובשביל ישראל שנקראו (ירמיה ב—ג) ראשית תבואתו”. Rashi is telling us that this passuk cannot be taken literally; it is linguistically incorrect. Therefore, our Rabbis of blessed memory expound the verse as teaching us that the world was created for the sake of two “reishis”s—for the sake of the Torah and for the sake of Yisrael, both of whom are referred to by this term.

Now, we find another elucidation in the Midrash regarding the term “reishis” (B.R. 1, 4): “בראשית, בזכות משה שנאמר (דברים לג—כא) וירא ראשית לו” — the world was also created for the sake of Moshe, who is also referred to as “reishis,” as we find in the passuk in Devarim (33, 21). Thus, we have the proverbial three—stranded cord, all intimately connected by the quality of humility—the Torah, Yisrael and Moshe Rabeinu. Only a humble person can retain Torah; HKB”H chose Yisrael because of their humility; Moshe Rabeinu is described as the epitome of humility. The term “reishis” encompasses the three of them. Therefore, HKB”H revealed His humility via the word “בראשית”.

The True Test of Humility Is “Lev Tov”

It now behooves us to investigate the true meaning of humility, something that is often misunderstood. It is easy to mistakenly interpret someone shirking from “kavod” or lowering one’s head as signs of humility. In truth, however, humility does not merely apply to external gestures; it must extend to the depths of one’s heart. So, what is the true sign or test of humility? It is essential that we know this in order to determine what we must do to acquire true humility.

To resolve this inquiry let us refer to the Mishnah (Avos 2, 9):

“אמר להם [רבן יוחנן בן זכאי לתלמידיו], צאו וראו איזו היא דרך טובה שידבק בה האדם. רבי אליעזר אומר עין טובה, רבי יהושע אומר חבר טוב, רבי יוסי אומר שכן טוב, רבי שמעון אומר הרואה את הנולד, רבי אלעזר אומר לב טוב. אמר להם [רבן יוחנן בן זכאי], רואה אני את דברי אלעזר בן ערך מדבריכם שבכלל דבריו דבריכם.”

“He said to them (Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai to his students): **Go out and find the best path a person should follow. Rabbi Eliezer says: A good eye. Rabbi Yehoshua says: A good friend. Rabbi Yossi says: A good neighbor. Rabbi Shimon says: One who foresees the outcome of his actions. Rabbi Elazar says: A good heart. Rabban Yochanan said to them: I prefer the words of Elazar ben Arach over your words, for his words incorporate your words.**”

Rabeinu Ovadya of Bartenura provides the following clarification: “The heart activates all of the other faculties. All actions arise from the heart. Although particular functions are attributed to specific limbs, nevertheless the force that sets them into motion comes from the heart.” Notwithstanding, we must still endeavor to comprehend the meaning of “לב טוב” — “a good heart” — which encompasses all of the good midos. Additionally, why didn’t any of the students mention the trait of humility?

We find an amazing explanation in Midrash Shmuel on Pirkei Avos (ibid.) in the name of Rabbi Yehudah Lerma, z”l: “בירוש, לב טוב, כי ממנו נובעות כל דעות האדם ובכלל זו כולם, וכזונת לב טוב היא מדת הסבלנות, שסובל אף יעשה לו רעה, ומתרחק מן הכעס, ובהיות שהענוה כוללת The notion of “**lev tov**” encompasses all of a person’s thoughts and opinions. The objective and personification of a “**good heart**” is tolerance—the ability to tolerate it even when a person does you wrong and to avoid anger. Seeing as humility incorporates all of the good midos, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai concludes that: “His words incorporate your words.”

He teaches us that the quality of “**lev tov**” is synonymous with the quality of humility, which encompasses all of the good midos. The reason Rabbi Elazar ben Arach refers to it as “**lev tov**” is because the way to determine whether or not a person is truly humble is to see if he possesses a “**lev tov**.” In the words of Rabbi Yehudah Lirma: He is a master of tolerance and avoids anger. If, however, he is strict and intolerant of those who do not show him proper respect and he becomes enraged, it is a telltale sign that he is far from being humble. Even if he lowers his head all day long and shuns kavod, these are only superficial displays unrelated to true humility.

This coincides amazingly with an allusion presented by the Bnei Yissaschar (Iyar 3, 1) regarding **“lev tov.”** At the beginning of the Torah, there are thirty—two — ל”ב (“lev”) — words preceding the first time the word “tov” appears in the Torah: **“בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ, והארץ היתה תוהו ובוהו וחושך על פני תהום ורוח אלקים מרחפת על פני המים, ויאמר אלקים יהי אור ויהי אור, וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב.”** This illustrates that ל”ב טו”ב, a good heart, is the embodiment and source of all the positive character—traits, “midos.”

Now, Rabbi Yehudah Lerma taught us that the quality of “lev tov” is essentially synonymous with the quality of humility. That being the case, it makes perfect sense that HKB”H would allude to the attribute of ל”ב טו”ב at the beginning of the Torah. For, as we have learned, the fact that the Torah opens with the letter “beis” and the words **“בראשית ברא אלקים”** instead of with the letter “aleph” and the word **“אלקים”** also alludes to HKB”H’s humility. Thus, these two allusions go hand in hand.

The Sign of Humility and a “Lev Tov” Is Forgoing One’s Kavod

Continuing onward with this line of thought, let us endeavor to explain the enigma of HKB”H initially wishing to create the world with midas hadin and then reconsidering. Upon seeing that a world based on midas hadin could not survive, He gave priority to midas harachamim. Now, in our discussion above, we defined **“lev tov”** as being tolerant and avoiding anger. To meet these criteria a person must be able to yield and forgo his own kavod. We have learned in the Gemara (R.H. 17a):

“אמר רבא כל המעביר על מדותיו, מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו, שנאמר (מיכה ז—Rava said: יח) נושא עון ועובר על פשע, למי נושא עון למי שעובר על פשע: Anyone who relinquishes his rights, the heavenly tribunal relinquishes all his sins for him, as it is stated: “He pardons transgression and overlooks sin.” Rashi comments: **“המעביר על מדותיו, שאינו מדקדק למדוד מדה למצעים אותו, ומניח מדותיו והולך לו... מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו, אין מדת הדין מדקדקת אחריהן, אלא מנחתן והולכת”**—he does not calculate the exact measure of retribution that those who have done him wrong deserve; he forgoes his kavod and yields . . . such a person is judged leniently by the heavenly court; his transgressions are overlooked; midas hadin does not demand exact punishment but is willing to yield.

Thus, it turns out that a sign of humility, which is synonymous with **“lev tov”**—which incorporates all of the good midos—is one’s ability to forgo retribution from those who have wronged him; or as Rashi explained: **“He does not calculate the exact measure of retribution that those who have done him wrong deserve.”**

To illustrate this point, it is worthwhile relating an incident involving Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschütz, zy”a. It is told that he once overheard one of the congregants pouring out his heart in prayer on Yom HaKippurim with great intensity at the conclusion of the silent prayer as he uttered: **“עפר אני בחיי קל וחומר במיתתי” — I am dust in my life, all the more so in my death.** Shortly thereafter, this same person began arguing with the gabbai, who did not afford him the proper kavod that was due him, by calling him up to the Torah.

Dumbfounded by this sequence of events, Rabbi Yonatan asked this man: **“Didn’t you just utter with complete sincerity: ‘I am dust in my life, all the more so in my death?’”** After uttering these words with such intensity, how can you quarrel with the gabbai just moments later about your kavod? The man replied: **“In relation to HKB”H, it is true that I am mere dust even while alive; however, in relation to this gabbai, who is mere flesh and blood, I am not willing to forgo my kavod.”**

How sweet are the words of the Noam Megadim. In parshas Beha’aloscha, he comments on the Torah’s praise of Moshe Rabeinu: **“והאיש משה עניו מאד מכל האדם אשר על פני האדמה” — now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth!** This depiction teaches us not to err by thinking that he was only humble in his relationship with HKB”H, with whom he was privileged to speak face to face. In fact, he was even humble in his dealings with each and every human being.

Now, we can rejoice, for we have gained a better understanding of the ways of the Almighty. Initially, He chose to create the world with midas hadin. Upon seeing that the world could not survive in this manner, He gave precedence to midas harachamim and joined it with midas hadin. This noble act demonstrates for us that HKB”H, so to speak, did not stand on His kavod by persisting with midas hadin. Instead, he gave preference to midas harachamim, so that the world could survive. This teaches us that the world can only survive if man is willing to yield and not stand on his own kavod.

This explains quite beautifully Rava’s statement cited above: **“כל המעביר על מדותיו, מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו”**. A person who does not stand on his kavod illustrates that he has learned from the ways of HKB”H. Therefore, midah k’neged midah, it is fitting that HKB”H not insist on holding him up to the standard of midas hadin; instead, this person’s transgressions are overlooked due to the Almighty’s midas harachamim. If, however, a person refuses to forgo his kavod, he demonstrates that he has not learned from

the ways of HKB”H. Then, midah k’neged midah, it is only fitting that HKB”H not yield His kavod and that He persist in dealing with this person based on midas hadin. After all, that was His original plan at the time of creation.

HKB”H Accepts the Tefilah of a Person Who Does Not Stand on His Kavod

Based on this discussion, we can provide a very nice explanation of the following passage in the Gemara (Ta’anis 25b):

”מעשה ברבי אליעזר שירד לפני התיבה [להתפלל על הגשמים] ואמר עשרים וארבע ברכות ולא נענה, ירד רבי עקיבא אחריו ואמר, אבינו מלכנו אין לנו מלך אלא אתה, אבינו מלכנו למענך רחם עלינו, וירדו גשמים, הווי מרגני רבנן [אחרי רבי אליעזר שלא נענה הקב”ה לתפלתו], יצתה בת קול ואמרה, לא מפני שזה גדול מזה, אלא שזה מעביר על מדותיו, וזה אינו מעביר על מדותיו.”

It happened that Rabbi Eliezer went down before the ark (to pray for rain) and said the appropriate twenty—four berachot, but he was not answered. Rabbi Akiva went down after him and said: “Our Father, our King, we have no King but You! Our Father, our King, for Your sake have compassion on us!” Then rains fell. The Rabbis began murmuring (against Rabbi Eliezer, whose tefilah was not answered by HKB”H). A heavenly voice went out and proclaimed: “It is not because this one (Rabbi Akiva) is greater than the other (Rabbi Eliezer), but because this one is a forgiving person, whereas that one is not a forgiving person.” In other words, Rabbi Akiva’s tefilah was answered, because he did not stand on his own kavod; he was yielding and forgiving in his dealings with others.

It appears that we can explain the matter based on what we have learned elsewhere in the Gemara (Succah 14a):

”למה נמשלה תפלתן של צדיקים כעתר [בראשית כה—כא]: “ויעתר יצחק לה”], לומר לך, מה עתר זה מהפך את התבואה בגורן ממקום למקום, אף תפלתן של צדיקים מהפכת דעתו של הקב”ה ממדת אכזריות למדת רחמנות.”

Why are the prayers of tzaddikim compared to a pitchfork? Just as a pitchfork turns over the grain and tosses it from one place to another, so, too, the prayers of tzaddikim turn over the attributes of HKB”H from the attribute of anger to the attribute of mercy.

Thus, we see that the purpose of tefilah is to transform midas hadin into midas harachamim. Therefore, the tefilah of a person who forgoes his kavod—who demonstrates that he has learned from the ways of HKB”H at the time of creation — causes HKB”H to transform midas hadin into midas harachamim, midah k’neged midah. A person who refuses to abdicate his midas hadin, however, causes HKB”H to act correspondingly; He, too, does not abdicate His midas hadin. As a consequence, this person’s tefilah is incapable of accomplishing the transformation of midas hadin into midas harachamim.

In conclusion, this is the valuable lesson that we must learn from the thoughts and acts of HKB”H at the time of creation. We must embrace the quality of humility, which is synonymous with the quality of “lev tov.” We must work ever so hard to subdue the yetzer of arrogance and avoid seeking revenge; in other words, we must learn not to stand on our kavod. By doing so, we will fulfill Rava’s statement: **כל המעביר על מדותיו, מעבירין לו על כל** “בשעיר”—by forgiving others, our transgressions will be forgiven. As a result, HKB”H will accept our tefilos just as He accept Rabbi Akiva’s tefilah.



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