
פרשת בראשית

פרק א פסוק א

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

מושג

בב"ת נִשְׁהוּא לְשׁוֹן בְּרָכָה, וְלֹא בְּאֵלֶּף נִשְׁהוּא לְשׁוֹן אַרְוּרָה (ירושלמי חגיגה ה"ב – ב"ר)

Translation:

With the letter ב which represents blessing, and not with an א which represents a curse.

Explanation:

The word ברכה, which is translated as blessing, refers to something that is expanded. The letter ב, which has a numerical value of 2, thus best represents blessing. The other letters in the shoresh כ.ר.ב also represent the number 2, כ having a value of 20 and ר of 200. When we make a ברכה on food we are asking Hashem to bring blessing to nature and replace the food we have taken. The universe itself was created through expansion, thus the letter ב – representing ברכה and expansion - accurately describes the act of creation. The letter א, with the numerical value of 1, would have therefore been a curse – ארור – as it would not have allowed for the expansion of nature. Only Hashem, who is one, can be represented with the letter א, as we find in the word אנכי which begins the עשרת הדברות.

Looking in the Pasuk:

ל"ח seem to be bothered by the fact that the Torah did not start with the letter א, but instead Hashem ignored the first letter and began with a ב. However, the letter א was later compensated by having the עשרת הדברות begin with the word אנכי.

NOTES

The *גמרא*, which is the source of our *Musag*, seems to be bothered by the fact that the first letter in the Torah is a ב and not an א, and wonders why the letter א was passed over. The *מדרש רבה*, which also mentions the reason given by the *גמרא*, brings an interesting dialogue that took place between Hashem and the letter א in which the א complains about this slight:

ולמה בבי' שהוא לשון ברכה, ולמה לא באל"ף שהוא לשון ארירה... א"ר אלעזר בר חנינא בשם ר' אחא עשרים וששה דורות היתה האל"ף קורא תגר לפני כסאו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, אמרה לפניו רבש"ע אני ראשון של אותיות ולא בראת עולמך בי, אמר לה הקב"ה העולם ומלואו לא נברא אלא בזכות התורה, שנאמר (משלי ג) ה' בחכמה יסד ארץ וגו', למחר אני בא ליתן תורה בסיני ואיני פותח תחלה אלא בכ שני (שמות כ) אנכי ה' א-להיך, רבי הושעיא אומר למה נקרא שמו אל"ף שהוא מסכים מאלף, שנאמר (תהלים קה) דבר צוה לאלף דור. (בראשית רבה פרשה א:)

According to the Midrash, the letter א was indeed slighted by the fact that it was passed over, however Hashem compensated the letter by having the *עשרת הדברות* begin with an א.

However, the reason why the letter א was pushed aside seems strange. How can we claim that the letter א stands for ארור – a curse – and the letter ב stands for ברכה? Can we not just as easily say that the letter א stands for אשרי, or, as the *מדרש* itself mentions, for the name אלקים? Also, can we not find negative words which begin with the letter ב, such as בזיון or בושה? And finally, if א somehow represents a curse, why begin the *עשרת הדברות* with an א?

To answer, I believe we must first better understand what the word ברכה means. When we ask for a blessing what exactly do we mean? When we bless something what we really hope for is for that thing to expand, grow, and flourish. The three letters in the *Shoresh* ב.ר.כ all represent expansion in that their numerical value is 2, 200 and 20 respectively. For this reason the title of the firstborn child, the first expansion of the family, shares these same 3 letters, בכר, and the first fruits of my field, the first expansion of my produce, are called ביכורים¹.

This explanation holds true for ברכות we make on food as well. A ברכה ראשונה on food asks Hashem to send plenty to the world so that I might replace that which I have taken. We are not really blessing Hashem, but asking Hashem to bless us. We do this by acknowledging that Hashem is the source of blessing – ברוך אתה ה' – and this allows Hashem to open the sources of blessing to us. For this reason, the *גמרא* in (לה: :) tells us that one who takes from the world without making a ברכה is considered as if he stole from the world². A ברכה serves to replace that which was taken, thus removing the charge of stealing from the world.

The *גמרא* in (יב:) teaches that the world as well was created through expansion:

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את העולם היה מרחיב והולך... עד שגער בו הקדוש ברוך הוא והעמידו... והיינו דאמר ריש לקיש: מאי דכתיב (בראשית ל"ה) אני א-ל-ש-די אני הוא שאמרתי לעולם די.

Said Rabbi Yehudah in the name of Rav: When Hashem created the world it was expanding... until Hashem stopped the expansion... which parallels that which Reish Lakish explained the meaning of the Pasuk I am G-d Shaddai, I am the One who told the world "enough" (to stop expanding³).

(It is interesting to note how closely the current view of science matches that of the Talmud.

Science has adopted the Big Bang Theory which claims that the universe had a beginning and was not simply eternal, and that matter expanded to create the universe as it is today⁴. This discovery

1 In addition, the knee which allows one to bend their foot in two is called a ברך.

2 כל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה כאילו גזול להקדוש ברוך הוא וכנסת ישראל

3 In light of the findings of science we might read the *גמרא* not as saying that Hashem stopped the expansion but rather that he slowed or controlled the expansion. This would explain why the *גמרא* says שאמר לעולמו די and not שאמר לעמוד די.

4 The Big Bang Theory very much supports the creationist theory of the origins of our universe.

One of the foremost scientists who pointed to this fact was Dr. Robert Jastrow, Phd., founding director of NASA's [Goddard Institute for Space Studies](#), who authored a number of books on this subject. Below are a selection of his comments: (Note: Dr. Jastrow is not a religious Jew.)

made in the 1920's and attributed mostly to Edwin Hubble was astounding in its time. Too bad they didn't simply read the Gemarah in Chagigah! Furthermore, the 2011 Nobel Prize in Physics went to scientists who claim to have proven that the universe is expanding at an increased rate which could lead to its destruction. They are agreeing - well, not in so many words - that Hashem must control the rate of expansion or the Universe will cease to exist.⁵)

We can now easily understand the need to begin the story of creation with a ב, as it is the first letter of expansion, for it accurately represents the method of creation. Without expansion the universe would not exist. The only singularity in the world is Hashem Himself who is the first cause and exists independent of creation. Thus the letter א, representing one, would be a curse to humankind, as only Hashem exists as an אהד, not dependent on expansion or growth.

This is, perhaps, what the Rabbis meant when they said that the letter א could not begin the creation story as it would represent a curse, whereas the letter ב is used as it represents a blessing. For this reason as well, it is altogether appropriate for the עשרת הדברות to begin with an א, representing the One G-d, אנכי. This idea is found in the מדרש הביאור which teaches:

למה התחיל בבית ולא התחיל באלף? לפי שהאלף לשון אחד ואין אחד אלא הקב"ה.

Questions for Further Thought:

- a. According to the Midrash Rabba mentioned at the beginning of our comments the letter א actually received its name because it waited patiently for 1000 years to be compensated. What can we learn from this?
- b. According to our understanding of blessings, what does it mean when one blesses a friend?

"Now we see how the astronomical evidence supports the Biblical view of the origin of the world. The details differ, but the essential elements in the astronomical and Biblical accounts of Genesis are the same: the chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy."

"Consider the enormity of the problem. Science has proved that the universe exploded into being at a certain moment. It asks: What cause produced this effect? Who or what put the matter or energy into the universe? And science cannot answer these questions, because, according to the astronomers, in the first moments of its existence the Universe was compressed to an extraordinary degree, and consumed by the heat of a fire beyond human imagination. The shock of that instant must have destroyed every particle of evidence that could have yielded a clue to the cause of the great explosion."

"At this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

⁵ The following excerpt is from the Nobel Prize society as regards the work of the scientists who were rewarded the 2011 prize. I found the last line extremely revealing.

"The two research teams found over 50 distant supernovae whose light was weaker than expected — this was a sign that the expansion of the Universe was accelerating. ... For almost a century, the Universe has been known to be expanding as a consequence of the Big Bang about 14 billion years ago. However, the discovery that this expansion is accelerating is astounding. If the expansion will continue to speed up the Universe will end in ice."

"The acceleration is thought to be driven by dark energy, but what that dark energy is remains an enigma — perhaps the greatest in physics today. What is known is that dark energy constitutes about three quarters of the Universe. Therefore the findings of the 2011 Nobel Laureates in Physics have helped to unveil a Universe that to a large extent is unknown to science. And everything is possible again."