

POWERFUL PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz



Parshas Bereishis

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Parshas Bereishis

INTRODUCTION

We will begin today's class with a prayer. We say this prayer before we do certain mitzvot: *"My intention in doing this mitzvah is to unify the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and His presence – in awe and in love; to unify the name yod-hey with vav-hey, in perfect unity – in the name of all Yisrael."*

This is a kabbalistic statement. You see it many places such as before the Pesukei D'zimra that we say every morning. What does this prayer mean?

We start off the Torah with the famous verse, which, loosely translated is: "In the beginning, G-d created the Heavens and the Earth." There are, however, more definitions. "Bereishit" can be translated as "For the purpose of Reishit"; namely, the first People – the Jewish People.

Mystically speaking, the Heavens are known by the letters "yod" and "hey"; and the Earth is known by the letters "vav" and "hey." Together these letters form the Ineffable Name of G-d.

Consequently, when we pray that the "yod-hey" and the "vav-hey" be fused, we are asking that all our activities be done for the sake of unifying those four letters. In other words, what we're trying to do is merge the Heavens and the Earth. Merging those two realms provides us with a tremendous amount of joy, as it says in Psalm 96: "Let the Heavens rejoice" ("Yism'chu Hashmayim") and let the Earth exult ("V'tagel Ha'aretz"). The first letters of Yism'chu Hashmayim are "yod" and "hey"; and the first letters of V'tagel Ha'aretz are "vav" and "hey." In other words, the Heavens and the Earth rejoice when they are brought together.

Moreover, every mitzvah we do is meant to bring out a unity that connects the Heavens and the Earth in our lives, in our hearts and in our minds. For example, the intention one should have in learning Torah is to unify the Heavens and the Earth. By doing so, one unifies G-d's name. In our class today, we will elaborate on this concept.

Toward the end of this week's Torah portion, in chapter 5, the Torah enumerates the ten generations from Adam to Noach, and the chapter begins with the words, "This is the account of the descendants of Adam – on the day that G-d created Man, he made him in the likeness of G-d."

In the Talmud, a debate takes place between Rabbi Akiva and Ben Azzai as to what the most important principle of the Torah is. "Rabbi Akiva says, "Love your neighbour as yourself." And Ben Azzai says there is an even greater principle; and he quotes the aforementioned verse in the fifth chapter of Bereishit. Ben Azzai's opinion requires further investigation.

The Rogachover Rebbe, in his characteristically concise style, says: "The Torah is the Book of the generations of Man. Everything that you read in the Torah in a given week happens forever." This means that everything that's described in the Torah generates all future events of world history, all thought, and all emotions that any person will ever have.

And so, if you want to know anything about life, look in the Torah!

Why is this so?

On a simple level, the Torah is called “the book.” As the verse says, “This is the book of the generations of Man.” Let’s analyze this term used to describe the Torah. What does a book do?

The truth is, once you finish a book the book keeps talking to you. You feel connected to the protagonists long after you finish reading the book. We relate to the characters and the images – they have become real in our minds.

The Torah is the book that’s keeps on speaking to us. And it keeps on telling us something new, especially in Parshat Bereishit, which is the parsha of the beginning of all things. Our Rabbis tell us that everything described in this parsha is the root of all the possible events that can take place in the future – at any time, at any place and for anyone. In terms of human nature and events, everything has already been “predicted.” It is for this reason that Ben Azzai chose that particular verse as the most important, universal, principle in the Torah.

As we delve more deeply into this parsha, let us try to glean wisdom that is practical and permanent.

KAYIN AND SHET

We start off with lots of excitement: the creation of the world in six days; Shabbat; and Adam and Eve. The midrashic literature describes how the angels rejoiced with the bride and groom. But then, the newlyweds sinned and one reads the tragic results of their mistake. Then we read about the birth of the children, Kayin and Hevel. They bring their parents great joy. But then tragedy strikes again when Kayin kills Hevel

We’ve started off the first four chapters of the Torah with action-packed stories, and with ups and downs. There is so much material to talk about. However, when we come to the last chapter – where’s the excitement? All we have is a chronological account of the generations from Adam to Noach. I bet you’re thinking, What an anti-climactic way to end the Torah portion! But I have news for you: You’re going to find out that there’s very exciting stuff going on in the parts you may have thought are so boring.

Let’s start by asking a trivia question: How many male children did Adam and Eve have? The answer is three – Kayin, Hevel and Shet.

We are going to focus on two of them: Kayin and Shet. What we know about these two men is that they had totally opposite personalities.

Let’s first talk about Kayin. There is one word we associate with Kayin: **destruction!** That is what Kayin represents in our world. He brought real desolation to the world. He killed his brother, and we can say that Kayin represents **a state of non-existence**. After G-d punished Kayin by destining him to wander. He never really had a place. He was homeless. And homelessness is a level of not being. If a person has no place, he is not living like a human

being. Kayin therefore represents the idea of destruction –a void in the normal pattern of existence, a state of not living in a normal, civilized fashion.

Regarding Shet, on the other hand, the Torah tell us his name derives from the root meaning “foundation,” as the verse tell us: “from him the world was founded.” From him, Noach will descend. A foundation is clearly not destruction. After the flood, the world will be built up from Noach, a descendent of Shet.

At first glance, we are looking at two opposite personalities: Kayin, the guy who doesn’t have much to contribute to the civilized world; and Shet, who becomes the basis of the civilized world. The two personalities appear to be opposites.

THE TWO CHANOCHS

Now, things become interesting when we begin looking through those “boring” lists of chronology: you will notice that they both had two descendents who had the same name. Kayin had a son called Chanoch; and Shet had a fifth-generation descendent called Chanoch. These two Chanochs were diametrically opposed to their ancestors. Why?

The Talmud tells us that after Kayin left the presence Hashem and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden, he “knew his wife” and she conceived and bore Chanoch. He became a city-builder and named the city after his son Chanoch. The Torah is telling us that Kayin struggled to return to Hashem, and he named the city after his son Chanoch. The word “Chanoch” comes from the root word that means “to dedicate” or “to start,” and the name indicates that Chanoch would become the builder of civilization. Whereas Kayin was the man of desolation and destruction, he brought a child named Chanoch into the world and he named the first city Chanoch –there was no such thing as a city before this time. The first city was built in honor of Chanoch, and so Chanoch represents existence, creation, and being (as opposed to non-being, which his father was).

Shet also has a descendent called Chanoch, but regarding this Chanoch, the Torah states: “And Chanoch walked with G-d; then he was no more, for G-d had taken him.” The commentaries explain this cryptic statement. They say, “Like Elijah, even when he was in the world, he really wasn’t part of the world; and he was taken by G-d - like in a disappearing act, because G-d took him away.” There is something about Chanoch that is not worldly. He doesn’t seem to be involved in anything.

The first Chanoch, the builder of civilization – represents worldliness, stability, continuity – the opposite of his father Kayin, who was the symbol of desolation and destruction.

But Chanoch, the descendent of Shet, was a descendant who sought desolation, unlike his ancestor Shet, who laid the foundations of civilization. And this Chanoch got what he wanted, because G-d removed him from the world.

To recap, the first Chanoch introduced **worldliness**; whereas the second Chanoch introduced **wordlessness**. This is quite unusual. The man who represents destruction has a son who represents the building of civilization; and the man who represents the building of civilization has a descendant who seeks desolation. **These things don’t happen randomly. The reader has to take notice of this.**

The last late Lubavitcher Rebbe gives an interesting answer to this strange situation, and many of the following remarks are based on one of his Sichot (talks).

Kayin the Destroyer vs Chanoch the Builder

We know Kayin killed Hevel, and then he said to Hashem, “My sin is too great to bear.” He realized he had done something terrible and he was trying to do teshuvah. G-d punished him and exiled him. He would never have a restful place. And then the Torah says, “And Kayin left the presence of Hashem.” What does this mean? How does a person leave Hashem’s presence? Where was he going? You can go from Chicago to Toronto, you can go from Charan to Beer’ Sheva. But in Kayin’s time there were no cities. Where, then, was he going from and where was he going?

He was going from G-d. The midrash therefore understands that “he went out happy because his teshuvah was accepted by G-d. When Kayin recognized and accepted his guilt and was punished to wander in the world (In his Laws of Teshuvah, Maimonides tells us that exile is an atonement for sin) the world of Teshuvah was unfolding for Kayin. The Torah then reveals that this wasn’t enough. Commenting on this verse, the Kli Yakar explains that if you really want to do teshuvah for a sin that you did, you have to do a mitzvah that is the opposite of the sin you did – this is the appropriate path for every ba’al teshuvah. It’s not enough for a ba’al teshuvah to refrain from doing bad; he also has to proactively do something good that is the opposite of the bad thing he did.

Since Kayin brought desolation to the world, what did he have to do in order to do proper teshuvah? As we mentioned, Kayin “knew his wife” and she conceived and they had a child, Chanoch, and he became a builder of cities. The correction for death is life.

Remember that, until this time, there was no such thing as labor pains, difficulty in raising children. The midrash tells us that conception, pregnancy and birth all took place in an hour. Children were born fully-grown. But when Adam and Chava ate from the forbidden fruit, the curse of pregnancy and everything that goes with it, and the hardships of raising children became a reality. And Kayin was willing to be the guinea pig in having to go through this process. And so, the birth of Chanoch became the tikkun – the reparation – for the destruction Kayin had brought about. And that is why Kayin’s child became the builder of civilization – he completed the teshuvah process begun by Kayin.

From this episode, we can understand why we open up Parshat Bereishit just after Sukkot. We have just gone through Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, where we’ve done teshuvah and cried out to G-d and understood that our sin was “too great to bear.” But G-d is not satisfied with our tears alone. Even though He accepts our teshuvah, He wants us to rebuild and start again and go to the opposite extreme. And what is that opposite extreme? Sukkot, where we have great joy and love in our service to G-d. And at the end of Sukkot, we read Parshat Bereishit. Now it’s time to change things around, just like Kayin did. And this new beginning manifests itself in Kayin’s son Chanoch, who was the opposite of his father.

Shet the Worldly vs Chanoch the Worldless

On the other hand, Shet and his descendant Chanoch were both tzaddikim. They were both righteous; they did not sin. We are not talking about teshuvah here. But we are talking about

two people who were polar opposites. Shet represents involvement in the world. He is embedded in the realities of this world, as the whole world comes from him. We see, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, that it was necessary for him to bring into the world a descendent who would retreat from reality. Why? **To maintain the balance between heaven and earth.**

There are people who are spaced out and there are people who are embedded in the realities of this world and take the world much too seriously. From Sheit, who was so embedded in reality, we have a descendent, Chanoch, who “walked with G-d,” and **only with G-d.** Chanoch wasn’t around people. Shet walked entirely with mankind, whereas Chanoch retreated from reality. We’ll see that Chanoch’s **worldlessness** was a very necessary tikkun for Shet’s **worldfulness.** When a person is too embedded in reality, it can be the source of a problem. Shet’s excessive involvement in the world was counterbalanced by Chanoch’s detachment from reality. Chanoch sought the way of the ascetics. Even though we know that Chanoch was wrong in going to such an extreme (as Rashi and Chazal tell us, G-d took Chanoch away early, because if he continued living this way, thinking he was a tzaddik, this way of life would eventually lead him to sin and G-d took him away before he could sin), nevertheless, it was all part of the mysterious workings of G-d’s Divine Plan that there be a descendant of Shet who would willingly choose to go to the other extreme in order to maintain the balance that exists between Heaven and Earth. This mechanism requires further explanation:

HEAVENLY JEWS AND EARTHLY JEWS

There are two ways to live in this world: You have the way of the world that existed before the Flood – a world that could not last; and you have the world after the Flood, which would continue to exist forever. In this world we have a concept called “tohu”– emptiness; and we have a concept called “tikkun” – correction, repair, fixing things up. In his Iggeret Hakodesh, the Baal Hatanya tells us something in the name of the Arizal. He says:

There are two types of souls in the Jewish world: the soul of the Talmid Chacham, the person who studies Torah all his life; and the soul of the person who does mitzvoth – good deeds, charity, acts of kindness.

We can call the Talmid Chacham a “heavenly Jew.” His whole goal in life is to be connected to G-d. He loves learning Torah; he loves being connected to G-d. And then you have the “earthly Jews.” It doesn’t mean they are mundane people. They are also holy people. Their main concern is not the sublime acts of Judaism, but rather “on-the-ground” Judaism: acts of kindness, charity, good deeds. Therefore, there are two types of holiness: “heavenly holiness” and “earthly holiness.”

An example of one extreme is the very Ben Azai we quoted earlier in the class. He was one of the four great Rabbis who entered the mystical orchard. He was so extreme in his love for Hashem and Torah that he reached the point where he never got married. The Rabbis nevertheless criticized him – celibacy was not the appropriate way of life to follow. When they asked him why he did not get married, he answered: “What can I do? My soul yearns for Torah.” He loved G-d and he loved Torah so much that he could not preoccupy himself with searching for a wife, taking care of a wife and making a living.

At the other extreme is the person who sinks his hands into the world of “earthly holiness.”

RATZO VASHOV

The Chassidim have a terminology to describe both these types of Jews. They call them **“Ratzo va’Shov.”** When the prophet Ezekiel saw his vision of the holy chariot, it is written: “The fiery angels **ran to and fro** like the appearance of a flash.” Jews are supposed to emulate these angels. “Ratzo” (from the root meaning “to run”) refers to those Jews who run toward G-d; they seek a way to detach themselves from this world and run to G-d: these are the “heavenly” Jews. The concept of “shov” (from the root meaning “return”) refers to those Jews who return to be involved in matters of the world and serve Hashem in the way of this world, by dealing with this world. These are the “earthly” Jews.

The concept of Ratzo va’Shov can be explained on three levels. There are three aspects that make up our Judaism:

1. Torah Study
2. Prayer
3. Mitzvot

Each of these levels can be scrutinized in the light of “Ratzo va’Shov” (running away and coming back).

Torah Study

There’s a “ratzo” aspect of Torah study. A person opens up a Gemarah or a Chumash for a single purpose: “I’hagdil Torah v’yaadir” – to become attached to G-d. As we said many times, the book of Torah is comparable to a diary. A diary contains a person’s most private information. If you can read it, you get a chance to know that person very closely. Similarly, the best way to know G-d is to read His diary – the Torah. Only Jews can read it. The non-Jews think they can read it, but they don’t have the Oral Law, and without it, they cannot delve into the secrets of Torah. Jews are the only ones who are privy to G-d’s diary. With our study of Torah, we become “ratzo” Jews, running away from this world and attaching ourselves to G-d à la Ben Azai (but not as extreme). This type of Jew is not so concerned about learning a piece of Talmud that deals with the intricacies of the signs needed for returning a lost object or the gemarah discussing the blessings to make for different food. This type of person is happy learning and being rewarded for the learning. They are happy to learn about the korbanot – the offerings in the Temple – even though we don’t have a Temple today. Their Torah learning is an end in itself.

In the “shov” aspect of Torah study, the person’s goal is mostly to understand what he has to do. He will read a passage of gemarah or mishnah for the purpose of applying what he has learned to his daily life. He wants to see the applications in reality, he wants instructions for living.

Prayer

The Tur (the predecessor of the Shulchan Aruch) says the following: “This is what the righteous people do: They seclude themselves, they concentrate on their prayers until they reach a level of stripping away their physicality, in which their intellect overpowers their being until they reach a state that is close to the levels of prophecy.” This is what you can do when you pray. You can leave the confines of this world by reaching a true spiritual state that is

stripped of physicality. You can totally attach yourself to G-d in this way. In the olden days, this was a state of prophecy. This is the “ratzo” aspect of prayer.

On the other hand you have the “shov” aspect of prayer. Some examples are the following prayers: “G-d, my mother is sick. Please help her get well”; “G-d, I’m out of a job; please help me find a job”; “G-d, please help my son pass his university entrance exams.” These are practical prayers – basic requests that are clearly a part of prayer. This involves taking the holy light of prayer and bringing it down into this world. In fact, the Talmud tells us that people should pray for certain things: for example, that we should pray for a wife or husband, for success in Torah study, for an easy death, for a proper burial; even for a washroom. These are really down-to-earth prayers. These prayers are not at a level of prophecy; rather, their purpose is to draw the light of G-d down into the world.

Mitzvot

The person who is a “ratzo” has only one purpose in doing a mitzvah; namely, to give pleasure to G-d. In the Chovot Halevavot, we learn that the motivating factor for doing a mitzvah is gratitude – G-d has done so much for us; what is the least we can do for Him? When we recognize that we owe G-d everything and that we don’t want to be takers but givers, then we do a mitzvah. That mitzvah brings an attachment to G-d. (Obviously, we can attach ourselves to G-d in all three levels – Torah, prayer and mitzvot.)

Then we have the “shov” person. The Talmud says that G-d gave mitzvot in order to purify mankind. The mitzvot make the human being a better person. The mitzvot can fix and repair the person’s life, to make him a mensch. That is why there are books written that explain the reasons for the mitzvot. For example, there is a reason for giving charity – by giving charity, a person becomes a charitable person. There is a reason for honouring one’s parents: one learns to feel gratitude for doing this mitzvah. There is a reason why we should not be cruel to animals; namely, so that we learn not to be cruel people. The more mitzvot we do, the better person we became.

Now, if you are a “ratzo” person, who cares about the reasons for doing the mitzvot? You do them because G-d told you to do them. Similarly, if your spouse asks you to do something, and you just do it without asking questions, that act itself connects you to your spouse. We know that the word “mitzvah” comes from the word “tzavta” – which means “to connect to G-d.” But this applies only to the “ratzo” aspect.

But the “shov” person looks at mitzvot as a way to purifying himself. The “vashov” person, whose focus is grounded in reality, seeks to find out what there is in that mitzvah that can change his life and the life of others connected to him.

The “ratzo” seeks only the attachment. The “shov” person seeks the understanding. In short, we see that this concept of “Ratzo vashov” applies to every aspect of Judaism.

THE BALANCING ACT

Chapter 5 begins: “This is the book of the generations of man.” What is the Torah going to talk about primarily in this chapter? It’s going to talk about the descendents of Kayin and the descendents of Shet. This is **the book**. This is the future of all mankind in a nutshell. These generations will define every generation that will ever exist in the history of all time.

Everything that we will ever know is based on the most important primary concept of “ratzo va’shov” that is manifested in Kayin and Shet.

Kayin symbolizes the rebellion against the existence of the world. He wasn’t interested in settling the world. He wasn’t interested in grounding himself in the world. However, he didn’t do it in the most positive ways. He was a non-civilized person, but he didn’t channel his nature to be closer to G-d. That was the problem with Kayin. That’s why, ultimately, he was doomed. Notwithstanding Kayin’s distortion of the concept of “ratzo” – running away from civilization – nevertheless this concept was manifested in Kayin.

And from such a person, you can have a descendant called Ben Azai, who loved G-d so much that he didn’t want to be involved in this world. Ben Azai was not a rasha – by any stretch of the imagination. True, he was a bit mistaken and a bit extreme, but he was also the root of all amazing Jews who can leave this world for extended periods of time in order to get close to G-d in their own way – through tefillah and meditation, etc. It all comes from Kayin. Unfortunately, if you take this characteristic to the extreme, you are doomed, you are not in this world.

There has to be a balance between “shamayim” – the heavenly connection – and the “eretz” – the connection to the earth and worldliness. And that is why Kayin, who was so not connected to this world, had to have a son named Chanoch who would build up civilization.

But too much involvement in this world can lead a person to become totally enveloped and swallowed up by the desires of this world and become too embedded in the realities of this world, and so Shet, the man of this world, had to have a descendant called Chanoch, who would counterbalance this tendency of worldliness. And this Chanoch was the person whose goal was to connect to shamayim. This achieved the necessary balance. Through his descendant Chanoch, Shet was lifted up from being too involved in earthly matters. Although this Chanoch chose an extreme lifestyle, still, it balanced out Shet’s earthly lifestyle.

Notwithstanding the “balancing act,” since Kayin started off so negatively, his descendents could only survive until the flood. But Shet, who genuinely was a tzaddik and involved in the world, but potentially too involved, had a descendent at the other extreme; and then world history balanced out to the point where we can live past the flood.

What do we get out of all this? We have to realize how we should learn Torah, how we should pray and how we should do mitzvot.

THE PROPER WAY FOR A JEW TO LIVE

In the realm of Torah learning:

Even the person whose goal is to learn Torah in order to connect to G-d and he wants to do everything because he loves G-d; nevertheless, at the end of the day, when he finishes studying the page of Chumash or the page of gemarah, he has to walk away and say, What is the halacha? What is the practical application of what I have learned?

You can’t spend the whole day learning folios of Talmud and at the end of the day when someone asks you what you do with all that information, you can’t say, “I don’t know, but it’s very interesting.”

Let's say there's a newlywed couple and he learns in Yeshiva, and one Shabbat the wife says, "The fan is blowing in my face. Can I move the fan on Shabbos?" And he says, "I don't know." Or, she asks, "Can I move the blech on Shabbos?" And he says, "What's a blech?" He doesn't know the halachas, but the Rosh Yeshiva thinks he's a very nice guy because he has a good grasp of the logic in the gemarah. You can learn Torah for hours and that's great. But you have to apply your learning. And even if you learn things that are not applicable, like korbanot (sacrifices), you still have to ask yourself, What's the message of the sacrifices, even in my life today? How do I incorporate the message of the sacrifices into my life? There has to be a balance between "ratzo va'shov."

In the Realm of Prayer

When you pray, you should try to strip yourself of all the physical encumbrances and try to be like a prophet and as close to leaving this world as you can be, but when you finish praying, you still take three steps back and come back into this world. And when you're praying up close to G-d, you still ask him for parnasah and you still pray for health and all the things you need in this world.

The Talmud says that when a person davens, his eyes should be down and his heart should be up. This means to say that when you daven, you're connecting heaven and earth. Your eyes are turned down to earth, to see the needs down here, but your heart has to be in heaven connected to G-d. And at the same time you're connected to G-d, you also worry about the needs down here. There has to be a synthesis of "ratzo va'shov." The same applies to Mitzvot.

In the Realm of Mitzvot

Certainly, we do mitzvot to please G-d, but you'd better be awfully careful to do every single mitzvah G-d tells you to do. **As much as you want to please G-d, don't you dare violate one law!** You have some people who think they can fly to heaven without keeping the Shulchan Aruch – the Jewish Code of Law. For example, a person will say, "I love giving charity – it feels so good and I feel so connected to G-d and so spiritual when I give charity. But tefillin? I don't understand it at all, and I'm not ready to do it until I feel it, until I get close to G-d doing it." There are people out there who will teach you kabbalah but won't teach you how to do mitzvot. If you go to such people, you know you're in trouble, because there's an imbalance – these people are "ratzo" but there is no "vashov" in their lives.

And so, even though you are doing in mitzvot in a way that will connect you to G-d, you have to make sure to do every mitzvah, including the ones that you don't understand or are not so excited about or don't make you feel so connected. Mitzvot have to be done the way they are supposed to be done – at the right time and in the right place. You can't say, "Oh, we had such a spiritual experience davening there" – when you were davening in a place that didn't have a mechitza. You've missed the boat! How can you have a spiritual experience when you've violated the law? You have to keep the law down here, as much as you want to feel spiritually connected to G-d. You can't have just the good feelings without the authentic mitzvot.

On the other hand, it's a rachmanus (pity) on the guy who does all the mitzvot, but doesn't feel anything. He doesn't feel close to G-d when he's doing them. He hasn't learned the Chovot Halevavot. You have to feel sorry for such a guy.

That's why we have the two names of Chanoch. "Chanoch" comes from the Hebrew word "chinuch," which means "education." This is the way we educate our children and this is the way we educate ourselves. The proper education for a good Jew is to be a "ratzo va'shov." On the one hand, you teach the Jew to be part of the world like Shet; but you also have to teach yourself when to take flights out of this world, to get away from it all and connect yourself to G-d. The two components must always weave together heaven and earth. That's what education is all about. If you teach a child or you teach yourself only to observe the mitzvot, but you withhold the feelings and the emotions and the spirituality, the Zohar says that all those mitzvot are "missing the wings" with which to fly up to heaven. It's like a body without a soul.

On the other hand, if all you have is feelings, but you're not doing any mitzvot, you have a soul without a body – that's death. You have to have the combination!

And this is why all these ideas are connected to Bereishit – the beginning. Because that's when the education takes place. The whole story of Creation is G-d's way of describing the physical world. It teaches us that the physical world has sublime, mysterious traces of G-d's presence.

G-d made the world in such a way that, as physical as the world is, you can read the story of G-d in it. Even when you look at the earth, it has shamayim (heaven) imprinted all over it, as King David says. Every physical thing in the world has traces of G-d's presence. That's why we begin this parsha on Simchat Torah.

What do we do on Simchat Torah? We dance. **Dancing is the physical manifestation of the spiritual concept of "ratzo va'shov."** The whole idea of dancing is going away and coming back. You're not going very far. You're just going round and round and coming back to where you started. After doing teshuva, that's where we should be. Now we're getting into doing mitzvot and we have to keep the idea of "ratzo va'shov" in our minds.

There is widespread acceptance of this idea. Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, said: "Any thought that you have that distances you from the correction of the world and the order of civilization and it's just flying in the air by itself and you're glorifying yourself by saying, "Look how many souls I'm saving," – is based on falsehood, because it has no feet." Rav Kook is saying that escaping from the world is not reality. He continues: "Any thoughts you have that aren't involved in lofty thing and are only involved in the order of life down here, even if it has all kinds of spiritual values to it, in the end it will turn ugly – because it's so small, because it doesn't have the other-worldly quality to it." For example, shul politics, religious politics. This is what the Rav was hinting at.

The Israelis said, "Oh, it's wonderful, we're building up a country, we're building up a state." But there's no spirituality to it! Rav Kook prophesied that it would become ugly in its pettiness. Today we see this prophecy being realized. How ugly it is to close down a radio station because it reports the truth. The state started with the most morally principled ideas, but there was nothing to raise it up. Even the most noble, ethical idea – what can be more noble than building the state of Israel? – but if it's too grounded in this world, it will eventually become polluted. He says that the state has been cut off from the real source of life, which is spirituality.

On the other side, Rav Kook talked about drives. He asks what makes the Jewish drive different from that of other nations. He's hinting at the differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

What is Christianity? "Ratzo" or "Shov"? Who is the holiest person in Christianity? The pope. What does the pope do? He doesn't get married. He doesn't get involved in this world. He's completely connected to the spiritual world. And so Christianity is "ratzo" gone to the extreme. But what happens when it goes to the extreme? Such an obsession for physical reality, such degradation, such murder, such suffering. This was the "heavenly" way of the church. Any pope who doesn't raise kids will certainly encourage people to murder people, because he doesn't know what the pain is. He says you'll be a holy man if you murder people in the name of religion, but he wouldn't even know what it means to have a kid. You could be too holy for your own good.

What is Islam? All the faithful Muslims of this world are told that if they are really good in this world, they're going to have a real harem when they go to heaven. Even up in heaven it's the physical party. It's all "vashov." It's "vashov" gone to the extreme.

In Christianity, they say that the earth should be completely heaven; while Islam says that even heaven should be completely earth. From here you have the greatest wickedness of history.

What, then, is the drive of the Jew? Rav Kook asks.

He says: "The fourth desire is to save everything, to not even let a pebble go. To think that nothing should get lost. To save the body together with the soul – the external quality of creation, as well as the internal quality of creation. To save the evil itself, like the good; and moreover, to change evil into good." At the end of the article, he adds, "... to maintain everything on a good foundation." That is what a Jew is all about. "...that expresses itself in the depths of Torah, in the foundation of faith, and in a way of going in life, with all the physical and spiritual battles, and all his hopes. " A Jew's hope is to always be in both realms, to perfect both parts of the world, in line with "ratzo va'shov."

Later on, Rav Kook quotes the verse, "Yis'm'chu Hashamayim v'tagel ha'aretz" – "Let the Heavens and the earth rejoice."

Now you understand what it means when we pray: "It is my intention to unify the name of the Holy One Blessed be He, and his Presence, in awe and love, to unify the yod-hey with the vav-hey.

You have to unify the "yod hey" – the heaven – the world of "ratzo" with the world of "vav hey" – the earth (aretz) – the world of "Vashov" in all three aspects – torah, prayer and mitzvot. When we pray, on the one hand we want to rise to be a prophet and attach ourselves to G-d – the yod hey; but at the same time, we want to be the better person for it down here – the vav hey. We have to unify the mitzvah both ways. We bring heaven down here and we bring man up there. That's the purpose of creation. That's our job. When we accomplish that, as King David says, "the heaven and the earth will rejoice." That is the first verse in the Torah – G-d created the Heaven and the Earth – he wants them to be joined together.

What do you call a person is able to do that? A Tzaddik. Let's take the word tzaddik. This word is made up of two words. Combine the kof and the tzadi and you get the word "ketz" – end. And end is an extreme. What do you call an extremist in Hebrew? A kitzoni. A tzaddik sees that there are extremes. But he says, "dai" – "enough" – the other two letters of this word – dalet and yod. The tzaddik knows when to say, "Ketz-Dai" – "It's enough. I won't go to extremes." Or, we can reverse the letters dalet and yod to get the word "yad" – "hand": In other words, the tzaddik has a "hand" on both extremes, and holds them together. That's a tzaddik. A tzaddik is not a person who learns Torah all day long, yet runs away from people. If he runs away from the world, he isn't a tzaddik.

The person who is busy doing tremendous acts of chessed all day long, but never once opens up a chumash and never thinks about G-d isn't a tzaddik either. He's a "shov" person.

No one is perfect. But a person who struggles and tries to keep a balance between "ratzo vashov", even though he makes some mistakes, he can be a tzaddik.

The Torah calls only one person in the Torah a tzaddik. And that was Yosef. [Noach was also called a tzaddik, but only in his generation.] For all times, Yosef is the prototype of a tzaddik. He was a pure tzaddik. His mother gave him the name "yosef," which means "to gather together." For example, he dreamed about the brothers "gathering the sheaves."

Did anyone ever do a greater act of "Let the heavens and the earth rejoice" than Yosef? He lived in the place that was most steeped in earthliness – Egypt – for almost his whole life. Egypt was a hotbed of immorality. You can't get more "down to earth" than Egypt. And yet, he was able to bring his father Yaakov, whose face, we know, is etched into the Throne of Glory of the highest realm of Heaven, into Egypt. Yosef is able to bring Shamayim down to Aretz. Yosef is able to live in the most disgusting place, the most immoral place on earth, the most "aretz" place – and still do all his mitzvot; and not even be tempted by the most beautiful woman in the world. He was the role model of the tzaddik.

Look at these five words: Biya – intimacy; Sheina – sleep; lina – lying down; shtiya – drinking; achila – eating. . The holy Rizhiner Rebbe noticed that in each of these words the "yod" precedes the "hey." These are yod-hey words. The "yod-hey" combination, as we said earlier, denotes Heaven. But what are all these words describing? Earth – the most earthly things you can imagine.

On the other hand, said the Rizhiner Rebbe, look at the words "mitzvah," avoda" ("service") and "Torah." These are all "vav-hey" words, and the vav-hey combination denotes "Earth." Yet these words symbolize the most sublime, heavenly actions. What's going on? It seems to be all wrong, doesn't it?

Yet the holy Rizhiner Rebbe said that all these words teach us the deeper meaning of bringing together the yod-hey and the vav-hey. It's not just a question of bringing the earth up to heaven and the heaven down to earth. Rather, every time we do our physical business down in this world, it should be filled with yod- hey. Every time I eat, I fill that action with yod-hey! That's how unified the yod-hey and the vav-hey are. And every time we do holy things, we must draw them down to life here, to connect Heaven and Earth. Only then, will we see the actualization of "Yism'chu Hashamayim v'tagel ha'aretz" – when the two worlds can be combined. And we will see this especially when the Beit Hamikdash and the Mashiach will come.

The Baal Shem Tov once explained to his students why Jews eat **farfel** (barley) on Friday night. He said that our week is filled with anxiety and tension and sometimes we talk lashon hara and do things we shouldn't do. But once Friday night comes, we can look back on the week and say, "It's **farfallen!** – "Forget about it! It's water under the bridge." It's Shabbos now, and whatever happened during the week is no longer important.

We can say the same about this new beginning of Torah. Bereishit Bara Elokim – it's a new beginning. Let's start a good year and bring a unification between Heaven and Earth. if we can bring this unification, we will bring the **Geula Sheleima**. You'll notice that "geula" is a vav-hey word and "sheleima is a yod-hey word, where we can synthesize earth and heaven. As we do our mitzvot and our prayers and our Torah study, may we all merit to unify all those things as bereishit suggests to us, and, G-d Willing, may the Moshiach and the Beit Hamikdash come speedily in our day, Amen.

Parshas Bereishis

1. Bereishis 1; 1: In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth.
2. Heaven is mystically made up of the letters: Yud and Hei; Earth is Vav and Hei.
3. Prayers: For my intention is to unify the name of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and His presence, in awe and in love, to unify the name Yud – Hei with Vav – Hei in perfect unity, in the name of all of Israel.
4. Psalms 96; 11: The heavens will rejoice and the earth will rejoice.
5. Bereishis 5; 1: This is the book of the descendents of Adam...
6. Jerusalem Talmud, 9; 4: Ben Azai says that this verse is even a greater principle in the torah.
7. Rogochover Rebbe: Everything that happened in the Torah happens forever.
8. Bereishis 4; 16-17: Cain left the presence of Hashem and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Chanoch. He became a city builder, and named the city after his son Chanoch.
9. Bereishis 5; 24: And Chanoch walked with G-d, then he was no more, for G-d had taken him.
10. Baal Hatanya in Iggeres Hakodesh (ch.5) in the name of the Arizal: There are two kinds of souls that exist in Israel: the souls of Torah scholars – who occupy themselves with Torah all their lives; and the souls of those who perform the commandments – who occupy themselves with charity and the performance of kindness.
11. Ezekiel 1; 14: And the fiery angels were running and returning ... The concept of “**Ratzo V’Shov**”
12. Tur Shulchan Aruch Ch. 98 describes prayer as the ability to reach levels that are close to prophecy.
13. Talmud Brachos 8a: “Regarding this let every devout man pray to You: at the time, a finding,” refers to a wife, Torah, an easy death, a proper burial, and a washroom facility.