

בעמק המלך
Depths of Majesty



ESSAYS

ON THE PARSHA BY

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ADAPTED FOR PRINT BY ZEV BHATIA

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Foreword

It has been just over two years now since the first of these *shiurim* was sent out to a list of family members. *Baruch Hashem*, the *tzibbur* has taken up interest in the *shiurim*, and since the inception of the project the number of family members, *chaveirim* and *talmidim* who receive the *shiur* each week has grown and continues to grow exponentially. *B'chasdei Hashem*, many hundreds of *shiurim* have been recorded. Among the topics that they cover are Chumash-Rashi, Chumash-Ramban, Sifrei Nevi'im u'Kesuvim, and a vast spectrum of *hashkafa* topics. This *sefer* represents an early milestone in bringing them to light, and we look forward, *b'ezras Hashem*, to continuing and expanding this project.

Over the course of Opa's* illustrious career in the *yeshivos* of Philadelphia, Ner Israel in Baltimore, and Kishinev in Ukraine, Opa wrote twenty-four *seforim* and books, including the ArtScroll *Iyov*, *Divrei Hayamim*, and *Yechezkel*. He also delivered thousands of *shiurim* relevant to all vital areas of life. This *sefer* on the *parshiyos*, which you hold in your hand, represents an early milestone in bringing this treasure trove of *machshava* to light and making these ideas accessible in written form. We look forward, *b'ezras Hashem*, to continuing and expanding this project. The next book in this series, a *sefer* on *Koheles*, culled from two years' worth of *va'adim* covering the entire *megillah*, is already in line for publication, *b'ezras Hashem*.**

* The decision as to which title to use in reference to Opa has taken a lot of thought. The term "grandfather" conjures in my mind the image of a curved pipe, chewing tobacco, and an old tweed coat. The difference between that picture and the *malchus* we experienced on every visit to Yeshiva Lane is so ridiculously vast that I am simply precluded from using it. Never having referred to my grandfather as *zeyde*, that term feels very forced. The only term which seems to work is to refer to Opa in the same way that I have called Opa all my life. Yes, the feeling that is given off by this is more familial than professional, but in welcoming you into the world of Opa's *machshava*, I want to reassure you that as a *talmid*, whether a newbie or a veteran, you are also subject to the timeless words of Chazal: עליו מעלה תורה מעלה עליו
הכתוב כאילו ילדו

** As we work through the recordings, adapting them for print, we send out each chapter in a weekly email to a list of subscribers who have signed up to Opa's website, www.rabbieisemann.com. We welcome you to visit the site and sign up for the weekly email, or to peruse the *seforim* and audio *shiurim* available on the site.

Foreword

I must thank Hashem for the tremendous *zechus* that He has granted me and my family to grow through this experience, and especially for allowing the *shiurim* to now reach the medium of a *sefer*. It is our sincere hope that everyone who learns through this *sefer* will be able to achieve the same level of growth or higher than that which we have seen through the lead-up to its publication.

There is a question that I have been grappling with for a long while. The *shiurim* written up in this *sefer* have, *baruch Hashem*, received much adoration from the family and *talmidim* of Opa. But what about the Yid who is unaffiliated with Opa's *torah*? Will this *sefer* be a draw to such a person? Or will he thumb through it and put it back down, knowing that there is no way that he can possibly see everything that is out there on the *parsha*?

I would like to present here the sales pitch that I would make to that precious Yid to encourage him to go through this *sefer*. I would tell him the following:

“Working through the *shiurim* presented here has changed my life and set it on an infinitely higher plateau than the one it occupied beforehand. If you work through these *shiurim* as I did, they will have the same impact on your life.”

I hope that my interlocutor would become intrigued at this point. He might ask, “In what way did you experience the change that you speak of?” My response would be like this:

“Week after week, and *shiur* after *shiur*, the lessons that Opa implanted in these *shiurim* on the *parsha* have seeped into my bones. My understanding of *yichud Hashem* has deepened tremendously. I now appreciate the uniqueness of the Yid in an entirely new way. My understanding of the *middos* discussed herein, such as *chesed* or *shesikah*; the way in which the *yachid* fits into the *tzibbur*, our role in the world vs. that which the *umos ha'olam* play; a vast array of the fundamentals of *Yiddishkeit* are explained between these two covers. In all these areas, my understanding and insight has deepened in a way that I could not have fathomed before. *Yiddishkeit* has taken on vibrant and dazzling hues that I had not experienced before. The *Torah* contained herein took the colors of that *Yiddishkeit* and simultaneously brightened and deepened them, bringing both my *Yiddishkeit* and myself to life.”

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So, knowing the sales pitch, you now have an inkling of what the *sefer* you are holding has to offer. The effect that it will have on your life is guaranteed to be different from that which it had on mine. But that is only to the extent that the Ribono Shel Olam, Master of all painters, the אין צייר כאלקינו, used a very different palette to paint the lives of each one of his Yidden. Your life is very different from mine. It is painted with the precise shades and patterns that make your life unique, and so there is no way that my experience could possibly be used to predict the exact effect that this *sefer* will have on you.

But there is something that can be predicted, and that is that this *sefer* will take your individual colors and vivify them, allowing them to take on the hues of this majestic depth. All you need to do is one thing. Just open your heart and your mind to the messages woven throughout each *shiur*. Your mind is a muscle. Flex it through the words of Rashi, the Ramban, and the Maharal. Work it through every nuance of Rav Tzadok, and don't allow it to miss even one Sfas Emes.

Above all else, don't take anything for granted. Try to listen to the audio *shiurim* this *sefer* is based on. You will hear Opa plead with you time and again, "Think this over. Check this *vort* out with someone you trust." Think about it, and if it doesn't pass muster, write back! There's nothing like good old *rischa d'oraysa* to take both yourself and myself up to the next level.

I hope that you too will be intrigued by this request. Perhaps you will take the time to go through one of the *shiurim*, and then go through it again. You might taste the words, turn over the thoughts, and see how they can fit into your life. Enchanted, you might then go through another one the next week, and then again and again, until you too find the colors of your life shaded with "depths of majesty."

* * *

This *sefer* would be terribly lacking if it did not speak about my grandmother, Rebbetzin Paula Eisemann ה"ע. Opa's *Torah* and Oma's *chesed* formed two halves of one glorious whole. The love and respect that Oma showed to Opa was something quite incredible. Every single morning, Oma would prepare a stunning fruit platter for Opa's breakfast in a labor of pure love. Her every wish was for Opa to be able to sit and learn and be *marbitz Torah* in the greatest way possible. It was that *mesiras nefesh* for Torah which enabled Opa to become the tremendous *gadol baTorah* that he is.

Oma was a very regal person, someone who carried herself with the greatest nobility. She felt keenly for the downtrodden and poor, and she

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was forever busy doing *chesed* with people. Among those acts of *chesed* was one to which I owe my very existence.

As a kindergarten teacher, Oma watched over her pupils with the greatest of care. There was one particular little girl in the class who caught her attention. Realizing this child's need, Oma took little Nastasia into her home, ultimately raising my mother as though she were her own child. The ripples of that tremendous act of *chesed*, of raising another person's child as though she were her own, have only increased in amplitude since.

It is thanks to that *mesiras nefesh* that my siblings and I are who we are today, and thus it is ultimately that *chesed* which is responsible for this *sefer*. Oma's life resounded with *chesed* and *mesiras nefesh* for *Torah* and *avodas Hashem*, and it gives me much comfort to know that the *yesodos* of *Yiddishkeit* that are presented and clarified in this *sefer* are all fundamental building blocks which she, together with Opa, used to build their lives together. It is my hope that this *sefer* will be a source of *aliyah* for her *neshama*. Her name and her nature are both aptly reflected in the name of the *sefer*, as *עמק* equals the *gematria* of *פּעסאַ*, and *המלך* brings to mind the stately and regal demeanor with which she always conducted herself.

If the name of this *sefer* reflects Oma, all the more so does it represent Opa. Let us close with a *medrash* (Bamidbar Rabbah 15:14) that speaks of the *עמק המלך*, and you will see clearly what we mean:

וכל מי שהוא ירא מן הקדוש ברוך הוא סופו ליעשות מלך ממי אתה למד מאברהם ע"י שנתירא מן הקדוש ברוך הוא נעשה מלך שנא' (בראשית כב) כי עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלקים אתה ומנין שנעשה מלך שנא' (שם / בראשית / יד) אל עמק שוה הוא עמק המלך מהו שוה עמק המלך שהשוו הכל ונטלו עצה וקצצו ארזים ועשו כסא והושיבוהו מלך עליהם ולא תאמר אברהם בלבד אלא אפילו משה שנתירא מן הקדוש ברוך הוא נעשה מלך לכך כתיב ירא את ה' בני ומלך.

Anyone who fears Hakadosh Baruch Hu is destined to be crowned as a king. This is learned from Avraham Avinu, about whom Hashem testified, "for now I know that you are someone who fears Hashem." After Avraham vanquished the armies of Chedorlaomer, Amrafel, and their allies, the *pasuk* states that the king of Sedom went out to meet him in the "Shaveh Valley, subsequently known as the Vale of the King." How do the two names of this valley relate to each other? In that they tell the story of the coronation of Avraham. It was there that the nations convened and came to a unanimous agreement (*שוה* = unison). They chopped cedars, built a throne, and sat Avraham upon it, thus coronating him as their king. And make no mistake, this was not due to the miraculous military prowess that Avraham

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displayed, because the same thing happened to Moshe Rabbeinu as well! He was afraid of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and was made king, despite the fact that, far from being robed in the glory of victory, he was the humblest of men! This is clear proof of the above statement (that all who fear Hashem are made king), as is reflected in the *pasuk* that says, “Fear Hashem, my son, and attain royalty.” (Bamidbar Rabbah 15:14 with *Matnos Kehuna*)

The result of fearing Hashem is that one is imbued with royalty. This *medrash* speaks of the kind of royalty we associate with a ruler. Its context is the *mitzvah* in which Moshe was commanded to make *chatzotzros* for himself, just as all kings have their presence announced by trumpeters. That is not something which modern day *yiras Shamayim* is likely to result in. But there are other ways in which royalty can be felt.

The Gemara (Berachos 6b) says that כל מי שיש בו יראת שמים דבריו נשמעים. If you ever have a vital message to give over to an audience that is apathetic or worse, you would be wise to sit down with a *mussar sefer* for an hour or so. Increasing your level of *yiras Shamayim* will allow your words to penetrate the hearts of those listening, and you are likely to have far better results. This is a manifestation of royalty. The Tur quotes from the Medrash in the beginning of *Hilchos Keriyas Shema* (*siman* 61): א”ר ברכיה מלך: בשר ודם משגר פרוטגמא שלו למדינה מה הם עושין כל בני המדינה עומדין על רגליהם ופורעים את ראשיהם וקוראין אותו באימה ביראה ברדת ובזיע.

People listen up to the words of the king. They carry much portent and arouse emotions of awe and fear in those who read them. It is this form of royalty that these *shiurim* are imbued with.

מאן מלכי רבנו, Opa’s words here have that strength of *malchus*. The *yiras Shamayim* in them is palpable and they are therefore effective in bringing out the emotions of רתת, יראה, אימה, and זיעה in those who learn them. Given over in the King’s English, they simultaneously penetrate to the depths of the *sugya*, and in the process they allow the reader or listener to access new heights within himself. Thus, the title בעמק המלך aptly describes Opa as well as Oma, something that is so fitting for two people who shared their identity in such a beautiful fulfillment of the Torah’s ideal of marriage.

PARSHAS BEREISHIS

Does God Have Needs?

On each day of Sukkos, we beg Hakadosh Baruch Hu for help: הושע נא—save us! למען אמיתך—for the sake of Your truth! Over and over, approximately 765 times throughout *yom tov*, we beg Hashem—הושע נא! We need You! Every single set of those *tefillos* is founded upon one imploration alone: הושע נא למענך אלקינו, הושע נא למענך בוראנו, הושע נא למענך גואלנו, הושע נא למענך דורשנו, הושע נא—please, our God, our Creator, our Redeemer, the One who seeks us out—save us for *Your* sake!

What is the meaning of this? What need is there on Hashem's part that impels Him to save us? The *Yesod Malchus* commentary to the *hoshanos* offers the following explanation: "Save us for Your sake so that Your name will be publicized throughout the world." Klal Yisroel will be the ones to introduce Hashem to His creations; it is we who know Hashem best, and if we were to perish, there would be no one to carry Hashem's torch in the world. Knowledge of Hashem's creation of the universe and His governance over it would molder away in some forgotten corner, in grave danger of failing entirely.

This explanation may somewhat quench our thirst for understanding, but it must also whet our appetites and urge us to learn more. After all, Hashem is omnipotent. What possible needs could the One who is omnipotent have?

In truth, however, there are many sources in Chazal for such a concept. We begin with the words of the Maharal in *Chidushei Aggados* to Maseches Avodah Zarah (11a). The Gemara relates the following incident:

אונקלוס בר קלוגימוס איגייר, שדר קיסר גונדא דרומאי אבתריה, משכינהו בקראי איגור.
הדר שדר גונדא דרומאי אחרינא אבתריה אמר להו לא תימרו ליה ולא מידי. כי הוּו שקלו
ואזלו אמר להו אימא לכו מילתא בעלמא, ניפיורא נקט נורא קמיה פיפיורא, פיפיורא לדוכסא,
דוכסא להגמונא, הגמונא לקומא, קומא מי נקט נורא מקמי אינשי? אמרי ליה לא! אמר להו
הקב"ה נקט נורא קמי ישראל דכתיב ו'ה' הולך לפניהם יומם [לנחותם הדרך ולילה בעמוד
אש להאיר להם וכו'.]

Onkelos, nephew to the Roman emperor, had converted to Judaism. His uncle wanted him arrested, and sent a battalion of imperial troops to apprehend him. The attempt failed. Onkelos engaged them with a discussion

of *pesukim*, so thoroughly convincing them with his arguments that rather than dragging him back in chains, they became converts themselves!

Undaunted, the Emperor sent another battalion with strict instructions not to speak even one word to their captive. This time, Onkelos did not speak to them about scripture. Instead, he posed the following riddle to them.

Imperial protocol dictates the following demonstrations of rank...The lowest-ranking *nephiora* carries a torch for the more senior *pephiora*; the *pephiora* himself must in turn carry a torch for the even higher-ranking *duksa*. The *duksa* must carry a torch for the *hegmona*, who outranks him, and the *hegmona* carries a torch for the king alone. Does the king himself carry a torch for anyone?

The soldiers answered “No!” in unison. The king is the highest-ranking individual, and as such, there is no one for whom he need bear a torch. Onkelos responded that while that may be the case in *their* world, our situation is completely different. After all, when Klal Yisroel was in the desert and needed light, Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself bore a torch for them. A pillar of fire traveled before the Jewish people* at all times. Upon hearing of the importance conferred upon the Jewish people by Hashem, the second wave of troops converted as well.

History continued with the Emperor sending yet another battalion, this one strictly adjured not even to respond to Onkelos’s riddles. However, when Onkelos was led out of his house, he laid his hand on the *mezuzah* and asked them, “What is this?” Being unfamiliar with the *mezuzah*, the soldiers could not answer. Instead, they responded, “You tell us.” With their ears at attention, Onkelos explained to them that although protocols of human aristocracy demand that the king sit in the inner chamber while his royal guard waits just outside the room, in the case of Hashem it is the opposite. We sit in the inner chambers while Hashem “waits on the outside,” guarding over us all the while. They were as impressed as the others, and promptly converted. Not wanting to lose any more of his soldiers, the Emperor gave up and left Onkelos alone.

* The light was purposefully provided in a manner designed to evoke this sentiment. If all that were necessary were streetlights for dark desert roads, then Hashem could easily have given us night vision or lit the sky itself up. Instead He chose, so to speak, to carry a torch for us.

Does God Have Needs?

We can spend our time sympathizing with the emperor and his frustrations, but better yet would be to learn the words of the Maharal. In *Chiddushei Aggados* to this Gemara, he explains to us as follows:

ושני דברים אמר להם האחד שהוא צריך אל ישראל וא"א שיהיה זולת ישראל. וכל אשר צריך לאחר נתלה בו, משמש אליו שהרי צריך אליו, ולפיכך הש"י היה משמש אל ישראל.

Onkelos told the soldiers two things. Firstly, in a manner of speaking, Hashem “needs” us.* And since He “needs” us and “depends” upon us, He “serves” us, as is customary for anyone who depends upon someone else...

Fine. We have seen it in writing. But what in Heaven can this mean? We are as distant as ever from understanding this concept!

* והשני שהוא מבחוץ ועבדיו מבפנים, וזה מפני כי ישראל נכנסו תחתיו כמו הבן שהוא נכנס [תחת] רשות האב לגמרי, והאב כולל עליו ונחשב האב מבחוץ והבן מפנים, ודבר זה מדריגה בפני עצמה כאשר תבין אלו שני מדריגות, שהש"י היה משמש לפני ישראל והיה הולך לפנייהם בעמוד ענן להאיר להם, שמורה זה על מעלות ישראל שהם עלולים מן הש"י וכן מה שהוא יתברך כולל עליהם והם נכנסים תחת שמירתו והבן זה מאוד

The second fact Onkelos told them, that Hashem remains outside while His servants reside within, means the following: Klal Yisroel is under the jurisdiction of the Ribono Shel Olam in the same way that a child is completely under the jurisdiction of his father. The father, in this sense, encompasses the child in such a way that he remains on the outside, acting as a sentinel to the child who resides within. This reveals an entirely new aspect of rulership. In his first argument, Onkelos presents Hashem as the “beneficiary” of our loyalty; He therefore accords us a measure of royalty by “bearing a torch” for us. The same definitions of royalty that apply for Roman aristocracy—that the ruler occupies center stage, and the citizen exists to provide for his needs—apply here, but Hashem in His infinite kindness graciously allows us to occupy the seat of royalty. Here in Onkelos’s second argument, however, royalty undergoes a dramatic redefinition! It is not the king who occupies center stage, but the citizen! The king’s entire existence is justified by his provision of security for his subjects! Thus, although Hashem’s existence and rulership is entirely independent of any other entity or force, He still abides by the principle of מלכותא דרקייע כעין מלכותא דארעא. His comportment toward His subjects follows the rules that govern mortal kings, and just as the mortal king’s role is to serve his nation and protect it, so too does Hashem take on that role! This must have been a far cry from the behavior that the legions witnessed from the Caesar who had sent them! The difference was so striking that they too converted.

HASHEM'S YEARNING

Let us turn to an earlier source than even the Maharal. We program our GPS to take us next to the Ramban on Parshas Tetzaveh (29:46). The *pasuk* there tells us:

וידעו כי אני ה' אלקיהם אשר הוצאתי אתם מארץ מצרים לשכני בתוכם, אני ה' אלקיהם.

Rashi explains the ל in the word לשכני to be conditional: "They shall know that I am Hashem their God, who took them out of Egypt in order that they build the *mishkan* for Me to dwell amongst them."

The Ramban, however, rejects this translation, seeing as we never find the meaning of "in order that" to be a function of the letter ל. Instead, he proposes the following:

ויתכן שיאמר וידעו בשכני בתוכם כי אני ה' אלקיהם אשר הוצאתי אותם מארץ מצרים, כי ידעו כבודי ויאמינו שאני הוצאתי אותם מארץ מצרים. והוא כדרך ויהי דוד לכל דרכיו משכיל, כי בוחר אתה לבן ישי, על אשר מריתם את פי למי מריבה והדומים להם. אבל רבי אברהם אמר כי לא הוצאתי אותם מארץ מצרים רק בעבור כי אשכון בתוכם, וזהו תעבדון את האלקים על ההר הזה ויפה פירש. ואם כן יש בענין סוד גדול, כי כפי פשט הדבר השכינה בישראל צורך הדיוט ולא צורך גבוה, אבל הוא כענין שאמר הכתוב ישראל אשר בך אתפאר, ואמר יהושע ומה תעשה לשמך הגדול, ופסוקים רבים באו כן, אוה למושב לו, פה אשב כי אויתיה, וכתוב והארץ אזכור.

The intent of the words לשכני בתוכם is to convey the fact that "it is as a result of resting My Shechina amongst them that the Jewish people will believe that I brought them out of Egypt." But he then goes on to quote Ibn Ezra's explanation, according to which the ל connotes the word למען. Hashem only took us out for the sake of being able to rest His Shechina amongst us.

The Ramban affixes his approbation to the Ibn Ezra's explanation and elaborates on it, telling us that this reveals to us a *סוד גדול** that directly contradicts our elementary understanding of reality.

We understand the notion of Hashem's resting His Presence amongst Klal Yisroel to be for our benefit. Achieving contact with the Divine is a tremendous gift; it is the greatest of all pleasures that exist in this world.

* Although *סוד גדול* usually connotes a Kabbalistic interpretation, in which case we should not be learning it, it does not look as though there are any particularly off-limits *sisrei Torah*, save the last *pasuk* the Ramban quotes, והארץ אזכור.

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However, it extends well beyond the mere fulfillment of a human need. The need is that of Hashem Himself! This is the meaning of the *pasuk* in which Hashem refers to us as “Yisroel, in whom I take pride” (Yeshaya 49:3), as well as Yehoshua’s *tefillah* after the routing of Klal Yisroel during the first battle for Ay: “Should the Canaanim rally together and destroy us, what will become of Your great name?” (Yehoshua 7:9)

Hashem needs us, and He desires us. This is evidenced by the *pesukim* in Tehillim (132) where Hashem expresses that, as a direct result of this desire, He craves a resting place in Tzion and will dwell there eternally. It is an incredible thing—Hashem needs us!

The list of sources continues. The Medrash expounds upon the *pasuk* שוקיו עמודי שש, “His thighs are pillars of marble” (Shir Hashirim 5:15). Pillars of marble are wonderful, and that is just what His thighs are.

The Medrash explains the underlying meaning of this cryptic passage: שוקיו עמודי שש, שוקיו זה העולם, שנשתוקק הקב”ה לבראותו. The word for thigh, שוק, is a derivative of the word תשוקה, longing. Remarkably, Chazal are telling us that Hashem longed, as it were, to create the world.

This is really well beyond anything that we have any business thinking of. The motivation of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in creating the world is not something we have any chance of comprehending. But we do have the words of Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 10:1) to guide us:

שוקיו עמודי שש, שוקיו זה העולם שנשתוקק הקב”ה לבראותו כמה דתימא ועלי תשוקתו.
ומנין שכן הוא אומר? שנאמר ויכלו השמים והארץ, אין ויכולו אלא לשון תאוה. שנאמר
נכספה וגם כלתה נפשי.

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu created heaven and earth, He figuratively said: “Now I have My heaven and earth. This is what I needed!” That is the connotation of the word ויכולו. There was in fact something that made Hashem desire us and crave this world!

Why did Hashem create the world? Hashem is omnipotent, so it seems impossible to conceive of a void or need that spurred Him toward creation. Nevertheless, the Medrash is saying otherwise. Hashem did have just such a “need”! Let’s think back now to the opening *pasuk* of the Torah (Bereishis 1:1):

בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ

Rashi explains the *pasuk* as follows:

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אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשני, כמו שדרשוהו רבותינו, בשביל התורה שנקראת ראשית דרכו, ובשביל ישראל שנקראו ראשית תבואתו. ואם באת לפרשו כפשוטו כך פרשהו, בראשית בריאת שמים וארץ, והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך, ויאמר אלקים יהי אור.

On its surface level, the *pasuk* tells us only that in the beginning Hashem created heaven and earth. Rashi, however, demonstrates to us that this is not the correct way to understand the *pasuk*. The grammatical form of the word בראשית implies that it must modify a noun. But no noun follows the word. Rather, it is followed immediately by the word ברא, which is a verb. Thus, the sentence has no grammatical meaning, and it must be interpreted at the level of *drash*. At that homiletical level, we read the word בראשית with the ב standing in for the word בשביל. It was for the sake of ראשית that Hashem created heaven and earth. What is ראשית? We find ראשית referring to the Torah as well as to Yisroel.*

Again, we must ask ourselves: What does all this mean? Had Hashem not created the world, there would be nobody to miss it. As such, the only one who could possibly have needed this world is Hashem. Hashem does in some way need us, as improbable as that sounds!

However that may be, this first *pasuk* shoulders us with tremendous responsibility: we are the purpose of the entire creation! Today, when we know so much more about what exists in creation, that responsibility is amplified exponentially! Discoveries in the field of astronomy and other sciences tell us so much about the grandeur of this universe, and all of it was created by Hashem for only one purpose: Klal Yisroel and His Torah, which are called ראשית.

THE SUBJECT OF HASHEM'S YEARNING

Having verified that Hashem does in fact “need us” in some way, we must finally arrive at an explanation. In what way exactly does Hashem need us, and what does this demand of us? Here we need some direction. Let us look to the Ramban in Parshas Ha’azinu for help. The Ramban writes there concerning the *pasuk* אמרתי אפאיהם אשביתה מאנוש זכרם (Devarim 32:26). We will skip to the middle of his piece for the information we need.

The Ramban endeavors to explain Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s statement that there had come a time in history at which He wanted to destroy us.

* Among other things, see Ramban and Medrash Rabbah, as well as the *shmuess* in this *sefer* on Parshas Ki Seitzei-Ki Savo, where this is discussed.

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That was it—we had gone too far. But ultimately He did not do so. Why not? Let us hear the Ramban out:

והנה תהיה כוונת הבריאה באדם בטלה לגמרי, שלא ישאר בהם יודע את בוראו רק מכעיס לפניו, ועל כן ראוי מדין הרצון שהיה בבריאת העולם, שיהיה רצון מלפניו להקים לו לעם כל הימים, כי הם הקרובים אליו והיודעים אותו מכל העמים. וזה טעם כי ידין ה' עמו ועל עבדיו יתנחם, שיזכור ה' ברחמים כי הם עמו מאז, ויזכור כי הם עבדיו שעמדו לו בגלותם כעבדים לסבול הצרות והשעבוד, וכענין שנאמר ויאמר אך עמי המה בנים לא ישקרו.

Were Hashem to destroy us, His purpose in creating the world would be utterly null and void. In such an eventuality, there would be no one left who would be aware of their Creator, only those whose behavior would incite Hashem's anger. Therefore, in order to accomplish the purpose of the world's creation, it is proper that Hashem should maintain Klal Yisroel as His nation forever, for despite whatever sins they may have committed, they are the ones who are closest to Him and have the greatest knowledge of Him. This is the reason that “when Hashem will avenge ‘His people,’ He will relent regarding ‘His servants’”—because He will remember that they have been His people from antiquity, and that they are His servants, who remained loyal to Him throughout their exile, willing to shoulder all of the suffering and bondage to others that this exile entailed. They have proven themselves to be Hashem's people, and children who will not disappoint.

As we have stated repeatedly, Hashem is absolutely omnipotent. There is, however, one thing He lacks on His own: the loyalty of servants.* This is something that is impossible by its very definition without Klal Yisroel. Hashem can create anything and everything, but if He had fashioned us with natural, inborn loyalty, that loyalty would mean nothing! Loyalty is meaningful only if it is tried and tested and still holds strong. That is the sort of loyalty that is the subject of Hashem's intense desire, the subject of His *ויכולו* and *נכספה וגם כלתה נפשי*, and the reason He will never destroy us.

* It is perhaps difficult in today's day and age to appreciate the meaning of a servant's loyalty. In a post-slavery world, we do not experience servitude, and therefore have difficulty in comprehending what this means. By way of explanation, the Maharal in the beginning of *Pirkei Avos* (*Derech Chaim*, Machon Yerushalayim, 191, note 454) explains that an *eved* is someone who maintains no purpose in life other than serving his master. That is exactly what our goal in life is: to become people who maintain no purpose in life other than serving the Ribono Shel Olam. [ZB]

Klal Yisroel's loyalty has been tested time and again. We have endured exile and sorrow, and we have had so many chances to be disloyal, yet we never let go of Hashem. Without us, He can never have that loyalty.

It was in order to dwell amongst us that Hashem took us out of Egypt. He needs us to withstand the temptation of following our very human tendencies to be fickle and egotistical, thinking only of our own needs. He needs us to choose instead *not* to be fickle, *not* to be egotistical, and to rise above our small-minded nature.

This need that we have identified explains a peculiar feature of Shiras Ha'azinu. The *shirah* begins by referring to us as children of Hashem—הלא ועל עבדיו: הוא אביך קניך—and concludes with us in the modality of servants: יתנוחם. It is this loyalty that is the reason for the switch in terminology and imagery. Loyalty is not an especially admirable trait in a child; it is expected as part and parcel of his relationship with his parents. The loyalty of a servant is an entirely different matter. A servant's entire relationship with his master is born of the master's need for someone to, say, mow his lawn! Having some extra money, he retains for himself a servant. Sometimes he is a benign master, and at other times, he is seemingly unkind. However, if the servant remains loyal throughout his tribulations—if he stays steadfast in times when he could be disloyal—his loyalty becomes meaningful indeed.

Let us bring this home to ourselves in a more practical way. How is our loyalty to Hashem meaningful? Because by maintaining our loyalty to Hashem, we display our understanding of two things: (a) that our Master is *entirely* good, and (b) that we, the servants, know there are limits to our comprehension.

Someone approached me in *shul* today with a question about a Rashi in Parshas Noach. When Hashem “descends” to see the Tower of Bavel, the *pasuk* says as follows (Bereishis 11:5): וירד אלקים לראות את העיר ואת המגדל אשר: בנו בני האדם. In his commentary to the *pasuk*, Rashi tells us that Hashem is referring here to the offspring of Adam Harishon who are following in his path. Just as Adam had been ungrateful in blaming Hashem for causing his sin by giving Chava to him, so too was the generation of the Haflagah ungrateful in their actions.

The question posed to me was this: How is it that this “legacy” of ingratitude survived the twenty generations between Adam and Avraham? Just because Adam was ungrateful, does that mean he bequeathed that trait to all of humanity?

My answer was that it would seem that this understanding of what Rashi is saying is incorrect. When Rashi says that the words בני האדם refer

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to people similar to Adam, he does not mean to compare them to Adam Harishon, the individual. The proof of that is the prefix ה. A proper noun such as a name can never take the definite article. You can't say "the Jack." Rather, Rashi is telling us that this state of being ungrateful is endemic to the human experience. Thus, just as Adam was human and fell prey to this weakness, many generations later his children were just as human and succumbed to the same terrible *middah*.

However, let's suppose one were to rise above his very human weaknesses and say, "I will not be small! I will bend my nature in whatever way is required in order to remain loyal to Hakadosh Baruch Hu!" That would be the greatest gift that man could ever give his Maker.

Let us return now to the *hoshanos*. הושענא למענך אלקינו הושענא—Ribono Shel Olam, You must rescue us. It is imperative that You rescue us; we are deteriorating in so many different ways! Rescue us for Your own sake. How is it for Your sake? Because You know, Ribono Shel Olam, that You need us. By rescuing us, we will be able to accomplish the mission that You gave us.

By way of conclusion, let us repeat for ourselves one more time the words of the Maharal:

שהוא צריך אל ישראל וא"א שיהיה זולת ישראל. וכל אשר צריך לאחר נתלה בו, משמש אליו שהרי צריך אליו, ולפיכך הש"י היה משמש אל ישראל