



Your Turn

Lesson on Parashah 1: B'resheet
by Zahar Oriyan (Kevin Phipps)

We have just finished with the cleansing of Yom Kippur. Now we seek to start out a new year with a renewed life before G-d. As we start over once again, some of us may be asking, “Now what?” I think it is appropriate that as we begin the new year, we go back to the beginning (B'resheet), which entails G-d's beginning of the universe that He created. It is as if G-d purposely finished Torah with Isra'el about to enter the Promised Land after receiving the law and all its blessings and cursings, as a way of preparing us to start over with Creation. We know if we continue reading after D'varim (Deut.) into Y'hoshua that Yisra'el leaves the wilderness and fights their way into the Promised Land where they build G-d's Kingdom in Eretz Yisra'el, along with Yerushalayim and The Temple. From there, we can read the rest of Jewish history including the exile in Babylon, the first and second destructions of the temple, oppression and anti-Semitism culminating in the holocaust, as well as victories and positive influences of Jewish men and women throughout history up to today. However, as far as Torah is concerned, we never leave the wilderness. Just as we are prepared to go and knock down some walls, kill some giants, take over the Promised Land, and build the temple, we are sent back to the beginning, to a universe of “tohu” and “bohu” (waste and emptiness). In other words, and cosmic wilderness.

“Everything is wearisome, more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, the ear is not satisfied with hearing. What has been is what will be, what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.” - Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 1:8-9

What was accomplished at Creation? “Tohu” became “hevel”. In other words, nothingness became a vapor that will one day return to nothingness. Why did G-d do this? I certainly cannot even begin to explain the mind of G-d, but an integral part of G-d's design for humanity is companionship and community.

“YHVH, Elohim, said, “It isn't good that the person should be alone. I will make for him a companion suitable for helping him.” - B'resheet (Genesis) 2:18

“Two are better than one, in that their cooperative efforts yield this advantage: if one of them falls, the other will help his partner up – woe to him who is alone when he falls and has no one to help him up. Again, if two people sleep together, they keep each other warm; but how can one person be warm by himself? Moreover, an attacker may defeat someone who is alone, but two can resist him; and a three-stranded cord is not easily broken.” - Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 4:9-12

Later in Sh'mot (Exo.), we read these words from G-d: “Then I will live with the people of Isra'el and be their Elohim: they will know that I am YHVH their Elohim, who brought them out of the land of Egypt in order to live with them. I am YHVH their Elohim.” - Sh'mot (Exodus) 29:45-46

It seems that Creation was a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Even humanity in its physical state is part of the vapor, which is Creation. What G-d was actually creating is something intangible. On the

first day of Creation G-d said, "Let there be light", and there was light. However the sun, moon and stars are not created until the fourth day. The light G-d spoke of is spiritual light (the light of His presence), not physical light. It is this light, His light, that He wishes to share with us, His people, male and female, created in His image. As we go back to the beginning, the first thing we encounter is G-d Himself. This is because without Him we can do nothing and are nothing. However, with Him, the opposite is true. All things are possible, and we are His treasure, chosen from all the people of the Earth. Throughout Scripture, G-d is always the Creator. However He does something that only a G-d of grace and compassion would do. He gives control of the Earth to Mankind. G-d said to them,

"Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth." - B'reisheet (Genesis) 1:28

"YHVH, Elohim, took the person and put him in the garden of 'Eden to cultivate and care for it."
- B'resheet (Genesis) 2:15

The words for "cultivate" and "care" are "abad" and "shamar", which can also be translated, "serve" and "protect". Apparently even the police have borrowed a few things from Judaism! How do we rule the world and serve it at the same time? We do it in the same way G-d is our King, yet He created a land with everything we need for survival and prosperity for our benefit. As we rule the world, we manage it, cultivate it, organize it, form new things from it, all the while protecting it and keeping it an instrument of G-d's glory and honor.

We have been created to serve both G-d and our fellow man, but we have been created to serve the Earth G-d has created for us as well. As we do, we join G-d in the work He is doing in the world for His glory. G-d told Adam exactly what He wanted him to do in the garden. As he did that, G-d blessed him with more work (which was still a good thing), responsibility, and reward, but a division was created between G-d and Adam when he ate of the forbidden fruit, which was his own work, rather than G-d's.

As Yisra'el prepared to leave the wilderness and enter the Promised Land, they were given the opportunity to join G-d in the work of building His Kingdom on Earth. Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) is to this day G-d's holy city, which Yisra'el joined with G-d in establishing. Like Yisra'el in the wilderness at the end of D'varim (Deut.), we too are in a wilderness as we start the Torah reading cycle over in B'reisheet. This wilderness, though it may seem otherwise, is one of hope and possibility. Like I said, with G-d anything is possible. Giants fall, walls come down, seas divide, people are changed, enemies are defeated, and the sun has even been known to stand still. G-d created us and He created the bull. Now it is up to us as G-d's people to take the bull by the horns... Take it and ourselves, once again down the paths of Torah, not just to get to the Promised Land, but to draw closer to G-d and receive more of His light in our life. It is this light which will outlast the vapor of this Creation.

"Fear Elohim, and keep his mitzvoth (commands) ; this is what being human is all about." - Kohelet 12:13

We are clay in the hands of a Master Potter, however, unlike mere clay, we have the opportunity to join G-d through our prayers and actions to form us into the vessel He desires us to be. The world around us is a messed up world, but Yerushalayim was a pagan city before Isra'el made it into the city of G-d. Since the fall of mankind, the Earth was cursed and started down the road of disorder and destruction. It is up to G-d's people to intervene and keep the world from reaching it's goal, at least a long as we can. Disorder must be organized. That which is dirty must be cleansed. That which is sinful must be redeemed. That which is lost must be found. Hate is fallen human nature, love takes work. If G-d's people don't work at it, who will? Many people complain about their circumstances and those of the world around them, but few work to do anything about them. Certainly we cannot do these things alone. However a community of G-d's people, living by His ways, with Him living in their midst, can. Essentially, G-d created the world, created man, put

him in the world with the capacity to learn, make mistakes, learn more from those mistakes, and then said, “Your turn.”

Messianic Application:

Those of you at home may be noticing something very important missing from this d’rash (message). I know, as I have been worshipping with the Jewish people here, I have been missing Him too. I have been given the possibility to share my d’rashot with the Jewish community here. I am excited about this, but in order for me to do this...I have to leave Yeshua and the New Covenant out of my messages. Although, for you and for me, I will “complete” the lesson at the end.

“Then Yeshua told his talmidim (disciples), “If anyone wants to come after me, let him say “No” to himself, take up his execution stake, and keep following me.” - Mattityahu (Matthew) 16:24

Yeshua did not come to go about His work of proclaiming the Kingdom by Himself. He called others to join Him in that work. We see His talmidim and others who followed Him doing some of the same miraculous things He did. The goal of any servant leader is to train others to do his work. That is exactly what Yeshua did. This was partially because He knew He would not be here very long, but also because He wanted to share His Messiahship with His people. He is our King, but we are more than His loyal subjects. We are co-heirs with Him of His Kingdom. He could just say, “Let there be a Kingdom” and there would be a Kingdom, but He calls us to join Him in building His Kingdom, brick by brick, stone by stone, and street by street. His Kingdom is going to be populated not just because of His grace, but our love and the truth that we shared with people in this lifetime.

After His ascension into heaven, Yeshua sent His Spirit to fill us, guide us, teach us, and empower us to continue His work in the world. What an awesome privilege and responsibility it is to be the servants of God, working with Him, taking part in His plan for the universe. How much pride would you have if you were a White House aid to the President of the United States? Now think of the reality that each one of us is as a Kingdom Ambassador to the God of the Universe.

“Next I saw heaven opened, and there before me was a white horse. Sitting on it was the one called Faithful and True, and it is in righteousness that he passes judgment and goes to battle. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and on his head were many royal crowns. And he had a name written which no one knew but himself. He was wearing a robe that has been soaked in blood, and the name by which he is called is , “**THE WORD OF GOD.**” **The armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and pure were following him on white horses.**” - Revelation 19:11-14

The same God who created the world, could just as easily end the world with a few spoken words. Instead He chooses to rid the world of evil and build His Kingdom with His people following in His footsteps. He doesn't need us, but in His grace and love He chooses to share His power and light with us, so we can know Him and be like Him. We are made in His image unlike anything else He created. Living Torah teaches us how to live that image.

What an awesome God we serve!

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