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The Midrash recounts the sequence of events that led to Adam and Eve's eating from the Tree of Knowledge, as narrated in this week's Torah portion, Bereishit: First the serpent approached Eve, and asked if G-d had forbidden them to eat all the fruit in the Garden of Eden. She replied that they were permitted to eat any fruit, except for those growing on the Tree of Knowledge: "G-d has said, 'You shall not eat of it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die.' " When the serpent heard this reply, he pushed Eve towards the Tree and told her, "Surely you will not die."

The Midrash explains that Eve's mistake was adding on to G-d's command. The prohibition was only against eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, yet Eve added that they weren't allowed to touch it. It was this initial digression that enabled the serpent to lead her astray, and later, for her to cause Adam to sin.

Our Sages tell us that the reason Eve made this mistake was that she didn't hear the command directly from G-d; it was transmitted only second-hand, through Adam. Had she heard it directly from G-d, not only would she not have sinned and led her husband to sin, she would have kept Adam from transgressing.

This is why, at the revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, G-d commanded Moses to give the Torah first to the Jewish women, then to the men. "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob," G-d told him, referring to the Jewish women; "and tell the people of Israel," referring to the Jewish men. In this manner, G-d ensured that the Jewish women would always be on the forefront of Torah observance throughout the generations, and from their perspective, "correct" the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

The special advantage of Jewish women - the ability to extend a protective and positive influence on their husbands - is derived from the way Eve was created, which was different from Adam. Adam was created from the earth, from a base substance, whereas Eve was created from Adam's rib, from the body of a human being.

Our Sages also interpret the verse "And the L-rd G-d built (vayiven) the rib" as relating to the "extra measure of wisdom (bina) that G-d has given women over men." Because women are on a higher spiritual level, they possess this ability to guard them.

This underscores how crucial it is to provide Jewish girls with a Torah-true education, instilling in them pride and a sense of joy in their Judaism. For the Jewish woman is the foundation of the home, and the positive influence she wields is very powerful. (Adapted from Vol. 3 of Likutei Sichot L'Chaim 5751, #641)

"Bereishit" - "In the beginning..." (1:1) QUESTION: Why does the Torah start with the letter bet, the second letter of the Hebrew alef-beit, and not with the first letter, alef? ANSWER: The Torah consists of two parts, the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The Written Torah starts with the word "bereishit," and the Oral Torah starts with the word "mei'ei'matai". Thus, the first letters of the Written and Oral Torah spell the word "bam". This alludes to what our Sages tell us (Yoma 19b) on the words "vedibarta bam" - "and you shall speak of them." A person should use his speech and conversation for the study of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah and not for idle or forbidden talk.

Actually, the Midrash Tanchuma (Bereishit 5) asks this question and answers, "Because alef begins the word "arur" - "cursed," whereas bet begins the word "baruch" - "blessed." But this explanation is difficult to understand. Alef also begins beautiful words, such as "emet"- "truth," or "ahava" - "love," while bet also begins ugly words such as "barad" - "hail" (seventh of the ten plagues of Egypt), and "bli'ya'al" - wickedness. So why does the Midrash offer such an explanation - one that doesn't seem to fully answer the question?

The Midrash may be alluding to the following: The letters of the Hebrew alef-beit also serve as numbers. Each has a number-value - alef equals one, bet, two, and so on. By extension, alef can mean to care about only one person, oneself, and to forget about others. Bet, on the other hand, means coexistence, caring and getting along with another. The Torah starts with a bet to teach us that caring about others is baruch - the source of all blessing, and not with an alef - which implies selfishly caring only about oneself, which is arur, cursed.

The explanation of the Midrash thus shows how the very first letter of the Torah teaches us the importance of ahavat Yisrael, loving one's fellow Jew! (From: VeDibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky)

"G-d rested from all the work which He had created to be done." (2:3) Rashi explains that the words "to be done" teach that the world was created incomplete, as it were, requiring the active participation of mankind to attain perfection. But how can we, insignificant as we are, complete the act of creation? The Torah's own words, "created to be done" assures us that this perfection is within our grasp, and is part of G-d's plan. Each of us has the strengths and talents to improve the world and elevate it into something holy and Divine. (Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.ascent.org.il)

This weeks Parsha is Bereishit, the Sabbath on which we begin, once again, reading the Torah. The Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, o.b.m., publicized an adage concerning Shabbat Bereishit: "The manner in which we conduct ourselves on Shabbat Bereishit determines the nature of our conduct in the entire year to come."

This upcoming Shabbat represents the transition from the holiday atmosphere of the month of Tishrei to the day-to-day life of the months that follow. In fact, the month which we are about to enter, Cheshvan, has no holidays in it. It is a complete change from the previous month which is saturated with holidays. And this is one of the reasons why Cheshvan is sometimes referred to as "Mar-Cheshvan," "mar" meaning "bitter." For it is certainly a bitter change of pace from the month of Tishrei.

This progression to a more ordinary pace of life is represented by the phrase, customarily mentioned at the end of the month of Tishrei, "And Yaakov went on his way." This means that the Jewish people begin to go about their lives within the natural order of things-- but with a difference.

For, the festive month of Tishrei, as a whole, has a spiritual influence on the entire year. Shabbat Bereishit actually conveys that influence into our worldly frame of reference. May we all be successful at putting this potential into reality this year. (Rabbi Shmuel Butman, L'Chaim 5753, #238)

After the fair: It was the custom of most merchants years ago to obtain their goods by periodically attending a great fair where all kinds of merchandise were sold wholesale and in bulk. The merchants would take the large packages home, sort through the contents and then use them as they saw fit. The month of Tishrei is similar to such a wholesale fair, during which we obtain huge portions of holiness and joy in doing mitzvot--enough to last us the whole year. The only condition is that we actually open the bundles and use their contents. These bundles are opened up and used for the first time on Shabbat Bereishit. (Lubavitcher Rebbe, L'Chaim 5753, #238)

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE VERSE, "FOREVER, O G-D, YOUR WORD STANDS FIRM IN THE HEAVENS." (1) (TANYA II:I AND IV:25) IS QUOTED BY THE ALTER REBBE IN THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S NAME ALTHOUGH THAT INTERPRETATION IS FOUND IN MIDRASH TEHILLIM, AS QUOTED IN LIKUTEI TORAH IN THE MAAMAR KI BAYOM HAZEH YECHAPEIR. BUT THE ALTER REBBE HAD A SPECIAL REASON FOR THIS: IT WAS ON THE SECOND DAY OF CREATION WHEN G-D SAID: "LET THERE BE A HEAVEN," (2) AND IT IS THIS UTTERANCE WHICH "STANDS FIRM IN THE HEAVENS." ASSOCIATING THE QUOTATION WITH THE BAAL SHEM TOV WAS TO BE AN ETERNAL MEMORIAL THAT THE BAAL SHEM TOV WAS BORN ON THE SECOND DAY OF THE WEEK, (3) ON THE EIGHTEENTH (CHAI) OF ELUL.

FOOTNOTES: 1. TEHILLIM 1 19:89. 2. BEREISHIT 1:6.3. MONDAY; PARALLELING THE SECOND DAY OF CREATION. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, TISHREI 26)

G-d looked into the Torah and created the world. Man looks into Torah and sustains the world. - Zohar