

PARASHAT TERUMAH



אחדות וזוגיות Unity and Duality

■ The Letters of the Aleph-Bet

The Torah begins with the letter *bet*:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.

In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth. (B'reshit 1,1)

This first letter is accorded special importance, as we see from its large size in the Torah itself. What is special about the letter *bet* that G-d chose it to begin the Torah and the story of the Creation of the World?

The Medrash (Yalkut Shimoni 1), in the name of Rabbi Akiva, colorfully describes a dialogue between G-d and the letters of the Torah before the world was created:

There are 22 letters, with which G-d gave the entire Torah. When He wished to create the world, they all descended and stood before Him, each asking to be the one with which the world would be created.

The first one to state its case was the letter *tuv*, which said: “Master of the Universe, perhaps You would desire to create the world with me? For it is with me that You are to give the Torah to Israel via Moshe, as is written: תּוֹרָה צִוָּה לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה, *Torah was commanded to us via Moshe* (D'varim 33,4) [beginning with the letter *tuv*].”

Hashem responded: “No, because I am to use you to mark the foreheads of people who are destined to die, as is written, וְהִתִּיבְתָם תּוֹ, *you shall mark a sign (tuv) upon the foreheads of the men* (Yechezkel 9,4).” The letter *tuv* walked quickly out, greatly disappointed.

Let us interrupt the Medrash at this point to note that the question of which letter will start the Torah is not merely a technical one, but one with profound implications. Each letter represents a methodology and comprehensive worldview. The letter *tuv*, for instance, the last letter of the alphabet, represents “purposefulness” (its Hebrew word, *tachlitiyut*, begins with *tuv*), that is, getting straight to the goal and skipping any intermediate stages. Its claim that the word “Torah” begins with *tuv* refers to the ultimate purpose of the world as manifest in the Torah.

G-d answered, however, that *tuv* also marks those who are to die in the prophecy of Ezekiel – alluding to a different “ultimate purpose” of man, namely, death. Hashem wants life, i.e., the long journey via which the goal is attained; not only is the objective important, but also the way in which it is achieved.

The Medrash continues:

Each letter then followed in reverse order – *shin, resh, etc.* – and they were all turned down. Finally came the turn of the second letter, *bet*, which said, “Master of the Universe, perhaps it would be Your will to create the world with me? For Israel recites every day: ברוך ה' לעולם ואמן ואמן, Blessed is G-d forever (Psalms 89,53) [beginning with the letter *bet*].”

Hashem responded: “Yes! ברוך הבא בשם ה', Blessed is he who comes in G-d's Name (Psalms 118,26).” He immediately accepted and created the world with the letter *bet*, as is written, בראשית ברא אלוקים, In the beginning, G-d created... (B'reshit 1,1)

The letter *bet*, the second letter of the alphabet, stands for the duality of man and wife, by which – and only by which – the Divine blessing is revealed. The word *barekh*, “bless,” is spelled with letters that represent “two” in gematriya (numerology): *bet* (2), *resh* (200), and *kaf* (20). It stands for multiplicity and G-d's blessing: “Be fruitful and multiply.”

The Medrash concludes:

When the letter *aleph* saw that G-d agreed to create the world with *bet*, it stood silently on the side, until Hashem called and asked it, “*Aleph*, why are you silent? Have you nothing to say to Me?”

***Aleph* responded, “Master of the Universe, it is because I have no strength to plead before You, for all the letters represent plural – *bet* is two, *gimmel* is three, etc. – while I am only singular.”**

Hashem responded: “*Aleph*, do not fear, for you are the head of all of them, like a king. You are one, and I am One, and the Torah is one, and in the future I will teach it to My nation Israel via you [in the Ten Commandments]: אלוכי ה' אלוקיך, I am Hashem your G-d (Sh'mot 20,2).”

The letter *aleph*, equal to 1 in gematriya, represents “oneness.” In our physical reality, “one” has no continuity – as opposed to a pair, which creates continuity. This is why *aleph* is related to the spiritual world and to G-d's Oneness of existence; in the spiritual reality, duality is forbidden and has no place.

In this picturesque Medrash, Rabbi Akiva presents two key Biblical verses, with specific initial letters: The Torah's first verse, which begins with *bet* and with which the world was created, and the verse that opens the Ten Commandments, which starts with *aleph*. The depth of the Medrash must be understood in conjunction with the following assertion taught in the Talmud:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: All that G-d created in His world, He created male and female. (Bava Batra 74b)

That is to say, our entire physical reality is based on duality: Front and back, right and left, up and down, plus and minus, the two poles, matter and energy, means and goal, etc. Today, given our ever-advancing knowledge of science and nature, we know that this teaching includes all of reality, and that even the smallest particles, the positively-charged protons and negatively-charged electrons, are created in this manner.

On the other hand, the Divine source in the world is One – one Creator and one G-d, in the deepest sense of the world “one.” This unity is unbounded spirituality and straightforward simplicity.

■ Unity and Division

This world, based in **duality**, was created by the **One** G-d. Duality stemming from unity can be seen quite clearly in the Torah portions dealing with the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Two items in the Mishkan are blatantly dual and symmetrical: The *cherubim* and the *menorah*. The two angel-like, golden *cherubim* (Sh'mot 25,18) stand opposite each other atop the golden cover of the Ark of Testimony (the *kaporet*). The menorah (verse 31), with its seven branches – three on each side and one in the middle – is stationed outside the Holy of Holies, near the Showbread Table and Golden Altar.

Given the grave prohibition against idol worship, the Torah commands Moshe to fashion the two winged *cherubim* atop the Holy Ark in a very particular manner:

מְקֻשָּׁה תַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם מִשְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַכַּפֹּרֶת.

*Hammer them out of a solid,
from the two ends of the [Ark's] cover.* (verse 18)

That is to say, the *cherubim* must be sculpted out of the *kaporet*, and not attached to it. This shows that the source of the two *cherubim* is actually one. The menorah was also fashioned symmetrically, with three branches on each side – and this is why its parts must not be attached to the body, but must rather grow out of the menorah itself:

מְקֻשָּׁה תַעֲשֶׂה הַמְנוֹרָה... גְּבִיעֵיהָ כַּפְתָּרֶיהָ וּפְרָחֶיהָ מִמְּנָה יִהְיוּ.

*The menorah must be made out of one solid bloc...
Its cups, buttons and flowers must be from it.* (verse 31)

Both of these teach us a clear lesson: All divisions stem from oneness.

■ Facing Each Other

Our Sages laid down a fundamental principle: “When a man and wife are meritorious, the Divine Presence dwells in their midst” (Sotah 17a). The two letters *aleph* and *shin* appear in each of the Hebrew words for “man” (*ish*) and “woman” (*ishah*) – but “man” also has a *yud*, and “woman” has a *heh*. These two extra letters together spell G-d’s Name, such that if the couple has common spiritual aspirations, it means they have merited the joining of these letters, which is a type of Divine revelation.

To give a broader context to this point, let us return to the Mishkan and consider: When G-d speaks to Moshe and gives him Prophetic guidance for Israel, from where does the Voice emanate? The answer is found here:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת הַקּוֹל מִדְּבַר אֱלֹהֵי מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת,
מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים וַיְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו.

*He heard the Voice speaking to him from over the kaporet
on the Ark of Testimony, between the two cherubim;
and He spoke to him.* (Bamidbar 7,89)

The prophetic voice originated in the slit that divides between the two *cherubim* upon the *kaporet*. This leads us to one of the primary necessary features characterizing the two *cherubim*: they faced each other, as is

written, “*The cherubim would spread their wings above... and their faces were to each other*” (Sh'mot 25,20). It is not sufficient that the two figures were sculpted from the same source. They must be sculpted so that their faces were parallel to and facing each other.

In the *menorah*, too, we can see that symmetry is a central aspect:

אֶל מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יֵאִירוּ שִׁבְעַת הַנֵּירוֹת.

The seven lamps will illuminate towards the face of the menorah. (Bamidbar 8,2)

Again: It is not enough that all the *menorah's* parts were sculpted out of it itself; they must rather be sculpted such that all the flames point towards the middle lamp.

The *cherubim* emanate from the one *kaporet*, and then are re-united in the way they face and look at each other. The branches of the *menorah*, too, split off from the singular middle stem, and then re-unite in the way their wicks face towards the center.

This comprehensive picture depicts the following concept: Everything comes from oneness, and everything returns to oneness. Only when there is coordination and harmony between the two sides – face to face, in unity – only then can the Prophetic Voice emanate from the slight crack where the two meet.

From where does the Prophetic Voice emanate? Can we find other manifestations of this principle in other areas of life? Let us look at the human body.

■ The Extra Dimension

Our bodies are dual and symmetrical. Almost everything that we have on the right side is also found on the left. It might almost be thought that one side was created simply for “spare parts” for the other side. It is true that a part from one side can be used in place of the other, but this was clearly not the main purpose of building a dual body; G-d's creation is perfect and requires no “contingency” planning.

Let us rather posit, with all due caution, that Hashem created His world in general, and man in particular, with duality, *so that the unification of the two parts might reveal a third dimension.*

The following six examples from our bodies will make this point quite clear.

1. Though we can cover some distance by jumping on one foot, it is obvious that stability in running, walking and standing can be achieved only when both legs are used. The benefit we gain from intelligently using both legs is much more than the sum of our gains from using each leg individually. Thus, the dual use of our legs creates a third dimension – that of stability.
2. Each of our hands can act independently – but our ability to clasp an object with no handle hinges on the cooperation between the two of them, with the help of our spine. This is the “extra dimension” that we attain by using both of our hands together.
3. Each of our eyes can see no more or less than its counterpart. But when using both eyes at once, i.e., by focusing both eyes on one place, we can also grasp distance and depth. This is the extra dimension attained by using both eyes in unison.
4. Each of our ears can hear equally well – but it is the use of both at once, our stereophonic hearing, that gives us the ability to “localize,” that is, identify the source of sound and place ourselves in relation to it.
5. One can breathe through one nostril at a time – but only when we use both of them are we able to enjoy the full benefits of an oxygen-full breath.
6. Our “right brain” is responsible for our artistic and emotional sides, including humanistic and intuitive thinking, while our “left brain” is more logical, analytical, and objective. Only tight cooperation among the various parts – intellect, emotions, character and imagination – enables us to attain the additional dimension of deep spirituality and prophecy.

We now more clearly understand why the Prophetic Voice from G-d to Moshe is revealed precisely between the two *cherubim*, from the point at which they are joined.

Let us further elaborate. With the division of the “one” into “two,” the “one” actually loses a central dimension. Via Free Will, we can choose on our own to re-unite, and thus restore the missing extra dimension. This regained dimension is not simply a gift or kindness from G-d, but was chosen by us.

In the Torah's account of the second day of creation (B'reshit 1), the words “*for it was good*,” mentioned on the other days, are omitted – because of the division that occurred that day: the waters were divided by the firmament and split into two parts (verses 6-7). When a man searches for and finds his spouse, helpmate and “other half,” he thus restores the missing dimension, as King Shlomo wrote in his Proverbs:

... מְצָא אִשָּׁה מְצָא טוֹב

One who has found a wife, has found goodness ... (Mishlei 18,22)

We see that by filling out his duality, he finds the very “goodness” that was omitted from the day of creation that was marked by division.

■ *Shamor and Zakhor: The Duality of Sabbath*

This beautiful concept finds expression in the following verse in Psalms:

אַחַת דִּבַּר אֲ-לֵהִים שְׁתֵּימָם זֹו שָׁמַעְתִּי...

G-d spoke one thing, I heard two... (62,12)

G-d's single utterance splits up into two when it reaches our ears, for we are not able to hear the “one” alone. We must hear both the positive commandment “*I am the Lord your G-d*” (Sh'mot 20,2), and its negative counterpart: “*You shall not have any other gods*” (verse 3). This is manifest very clearly in the fourth of the Ten Commandments. In Sh'mot, we read:

זְכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. (20,8)

But in the Ten Commandments in D'varim, the Torah states:

שָׁמוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ...

Guard the Sabbath day to keep it holy... (5,12)

The first expression, *zakhor*, refers to pro-active deeds by which we sanctify the Sabbath, such as prayer, Kiddush on wine, etc. The second one, *shamor*, tells us to refrain from performing acts of forbidden work on the Sabbath. The first tells us what we must do, the second says what we must not do. The Gemara (Rosh HaShanah 27a) tells us that these two opposites were said at one and the same time:

Hashem said *zakhor* and *shamor* in one utterance, though a human mouth cannot do this and a human ear cannot hear it [as one].

G-d spoke them as one, but we heard them as two. Let us explain this more clearly.

The opening words of the Ten Commandments, *I am Hashem your G-d*, express the exclusive, singular reality, that which is totally filled with G-d's presence. There is simply no room for any other godly entity in the world. It would seem, therefore, that the next command – *Do not have any other gods in My presence* – is superfluous!

Not at all. The reason we need both commands is because we are creations of duality, and we must understand things in “stereo.” We cannot completely understand the “positive” without hearing the “negative” contrast as well. We must hear not only that *Hashem is G-d*, but also that *only Hashem is G-d* and that *there is no other like Him*. (D'varim 4,35)

The same is true, Moshe learned, for the holy Sabbath day: We might have sufficed with the positive command to *remember the Sabbath day*, for this tells us that Sabbath is *the* day of special holiness and sanctity among the seven days of the week. There is simply no room for mundane, workday activities on such a sublime day! But no, the Torah saw the need to tell us this straight out: *Preserve the Sabbath day*, and do not work.

In fact, this is what the Sages meant in teaching that the two words were uttered as one: Hashem said *zakhor* in a way that left Moshe totally certain that he had also heard *shamor*. This is why later, when he repeated the Ten Commandments in D'varim, he presented them as he had heard them – with the word *shamor*, expressing the actual renunciation of forbidden work on the Sabbath.

For us, only the combination of active remembrance of the Sabbath together with the refrain from work grants it the supreme spiritual dimension that is so unique and precious to the Sabbath day. The two words *zakhor* and *shamor*, too, are just like the two *cherubim*, from in between the two of which the Divine Voice emanates.

■ The Lulav

The most prominent of the Four Species that we take on the Sukkot holiday, the lulav, is structured most uniquely. On both sides of its “spine” are long, overlapping leaves that merge at the top, at a spot called the *tyomet*. This word comes from the same root as *tamim*, which means completeness and unity. If the *tyomet* is perceptibly divided in two, the lulav is not kosher for use. In addition, if most of the double leaves become separated from each other – i.e., they lose their unity – this also disqualifies the lulav from use. Similarly, if the leaves ascend upwards only on one side of the lulav, again it is not kosher.

In short: the lulav is kosher only to the extent that it is dual on the bottom and unified at the top!

This ties in with yet another verse in Parashat Terumah – one that seems to refer only to the physical aspects of the tall boards of the Mishkan, but which actually expresses sublime depth:

וְיִהְיוּ תֵאֵמָם מְלֻמָּטָה וְיִחָדְדוּ יְהִיוּ תַמִּים עַל רֹאשׁוֹ׃

*They shall be matched evenly from below,
and together they shall be complete at the top...* (Sh'mot 26,24)

The plain meaning is that the boards must be matched so that they will fit together. But on a deeper level, a most remarkable concept is expressed here: On the bottom, the boards are matched – meaning they are two – but when they reach the top, they shall be one unified whole.

Finally, let us see this concept at work in our prayers. In both the Morning and Evening Blessings of Kriat Shma, we mention G-d's creation of light and darkness. We speak of night even during the day, and of day even by night. In both prayers, this duality is followed a bold declaration of G-d's Oneness in Kriat Shma itself:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֶחָד.

Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One! (D'varim 6,4)

When we recite this verse just before the break of dawn, as is preferred, we are privileged to target precisely the moment of unification of day and night. It is precisely this point – the intersection of day and night – at which the Prophetic Voice and revelation of G-d's glory appear (just as they are similarly revealed at the intersection of other opposites, as we have seen). This is why this is the most select moment for us to unify G-d's Name by reciting “*Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One.*”

In sum: We have seen many manifestations of duality stemming from One and of the return to oneness, beginning with the creation of the world by the One G-d, and continuing with the *cherubim*, the *menorah*, the human body, the Ten Commandments, and more.

