

"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"



Issue 215

Wonders

בס"ד

Weekly Magazine of the Shiurim and Farbrengens
of HaRav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

Shabbat Bereishit 5787 🌸 October 9-10, 2026

שבת בראשית 🌸 כח-כט תשרי תשפ"ז



“ In this first installment of our new series, let us consider permutations stemming from the Torah's first word, “In the beginning” (בראשית). Permutations of the letters of Hebrew words reveal new connections, associations, and correspondences, which in turn, reveal the Torah's concealed depths. ”

3 Wonders of the Hebrew Language: Bereishit, Healing, Hovering Sparks, and Adam

9 Story: Rebbe Kalonymus Kalman Shapira of Piaseczna: Holy Fire

13 Righteous Non-Jews: Jacques Ellul

The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

"...It would be proper
to publish your classes
in book form.
With blessings for success..."

ברכה
לרבות
לחיות

נפול איפוד דלמות
בזק האיעורין
גאולא.

Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens
of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

Wonders is distributed weekly in Israel and North America.

For feedback and/or to receive copies for distribution in your area,
write to **mgenuth@inner.org**

Dedication opportunities available.

To see more of Harav Ginsburgh's teachings in English, and to sign up for
our weekly email newsletter with updates on live classes and events, go to:

www.inner.org

Books and music are available for sale at www.inner.org/webstore



Join our daily Whatsapp
group. Send a message
to **+972-50-6528650**



Subscribe to our Youtube channel for
hundreds of hours of in-depth study
www.youtube.com/innerorg



Click here to support Wonders
(3500 copies freely distributed
every week)



Scan this code to access
all Wonders past issues

Wonders Staff

Editor: R' Moshe Genuth • Associate Editor: Shelli Karzen

Contributing Editor: R. Avraham Arie Trugman • Typesetting: Yoel Broderick

WONDERS OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

BEREISHIT, HEALING, HOVERING SPARKS, AND ADAM

We are pleased to announce a new series of articles for this year, 5787, called Wonders of the Hebrew Language. Each week we will be highlighting several words, phrases or verses from the weekly parashah and studying them to reveal their inner dimensions and meaning using a host of time-honored linguistic Torah methods. The Hebrew letters are considered the building blocks of Creation, and these articles will God-willing open new perspectives for comprehending new depths in our holy Torah written with these letters.

PERMUTATIONS

One of the methods we use to study Torah is permutations of letters in a word. Permutations have been studied in language and in mathematics. The mathematical aspect begins with the question of how many permutations can be made from a word that has n number of letters? The answer is presented in the earliest Kabbalistic text, *Sefer Yetzirah*—the Book of Formation. There it says,

2 stones build 2 houses, 3 stones build 6 houses, 4 stones build 24 houses, 5 stones build 120 houses, 6 stones build 720 houses, 7 stones build 5400 houses. From here on out, calculate that which the mouth cannot utter and which the ear cannot hear.¹

In Modern mathematics, the function used to calculate these numbers is known

as “ n factorial” and is written as $n!$. Thus, $2! = 2$, $3! = 6$, etc. Modern mathematics also differentiates between permutations and combinations. A permutation is an arrangement of the letters where order matters, while in combination, order does not matter. For example, we might ask how many possible pairs of two different letters of the Hebrew aleph-bet are there? Since there are 22 letters in Hebrew, the answer will be 462 (22 times 21). This is the number of permutations. However, if we want to know how many combinations there are, we need to divide this number by 2, because with combinations order does not matter so $אב$ is the same as $בא$. Thus, there are 231 combination-pairs of 2 letters in Hebrew. The Kabbalists do indeed consider both results, revealing a sensitivity to order.

Of all the Kabbalists in history, Rabbi Abraham Abulafia is probably the one to

1. 4:12.

use permutations the most in his path of spiritual enlightenment. The *Zohar* also invests in the study of permutations, specifically, regarding the three letters that appear in God's essential Name, *Havayah* (יהוה): *yud*, *vav*, and *hei*. Many of the deepest Kabbalistic intentions are based on permutations, with one of the most well-known being the 12 permutations of God's essential Name, *Havayah*, as they correspond to the 12 months of the year. HaRav Ginsburgh has studied the topic of permutations deeply, both mathematically and from a Torah perspective, and we have written about it in the past.

In this first installment of our new series, let us consider permutations stemming from the Torah's first word, "In the beginning" (בראשית). Permutations of the letters of Hebrew words reveal new connections, associations, and correspondences, which in turn, reveal the Torah's concealed depths.

PERMUTATIONS OF THE TORAH'S FIRST WORD

The *Tikkunei Zohar*, a classic Kabbalistic work, is fond of permutations, particularly, the permutations of the Torah's opening word, *bereishit*, (בראשית). Literally meaning "in the beginning," this word's permutations reveal profound secrets dealing with the very mechanics of Creation. The following are but a few of these.

First, the word *bereishit* naturally divides into two words with three letters each, which mean "He created six" (ברא שית).² This composite meaning hidden in

the Torah's first word foreshadows that Creation would unfold in six days.

The first permutation we will look at is, "Have awe of Shabbat" (ירא שבת).³ The liturgical poem *Lecha Dodi* that we sing on Friday nights, mentions that Shabbat was "last in deed but first in thought." These two combinations, "He created six," and "Have awe of Shabbat" reveal how the six active days of Creation, and the seventh day of rest, the Shabbat, are already included in the first word. Another allusion to this same idea is that the first verse contains seven words.

Another permutation of the first word means "A covenant of fire" (ברית אש).⁴ Currently, science theorizes that at the beginning of the universe all the basic forces of creation were unified by what is referred to as a plasma-like state at an exceptional heat. Only as this substance began to cool could the building blocks of particles, atoms, molecules, and elements be formed. Thus, it is no surprise that the very first thing that God created in the Torah was light, an initial manifestation of the "covenant of fire."

Permuting the word *bereishit* in another way, we arrive at "the head of the house" (ראש בית).⁵ This alludes to the created universe being, as it were, God's "house," the place where He can fulfill His desire to dwell in the lower worlds and to relate to and to bestow His love and goodness on His creatures.

Hebrew Letters, p.103; 913: *The Secret Wisdom of Genesis*, p. 117.

3. *Ibid.*, Introduction, 7, and 24.

4. *Ibid.*, 3, 22, 24.

5. *Ibid.*, 3, 55; *The Hebrew Letters*, pp. 38-39.

2. *Tikkunei Zohar*, 11, 18, 25, 46, and more; *The*

Another permutation that appears in the Tikkunei Zohar means, “happy is the daughter” (אֲשֵׁרֵי בֵּת).⁶ Who is this happy daughter? Kabbalah teaches that all of Creation is feminine in relation to God; so, the daughter is metaphorically Creation itself, but that is not all. The Hebrew word for daughter (בֵּת) is cognate to the Hebrew word for house (בֵּית) and in the Talmud, a wife is referred to as her husband’s “house” or, more accurately, his “home.”⁷ Thus, this permutation hints that all of Creation is, as it were, the daughter or wife of God and the receptive feminine energy creates a dwelling place—a home—for her Beloved in the lower worlds. In Kabbalah, our most exalted relationship with God transpires when He is intimately conceived of as our Beloved.

Yet another permutation of *bereishit* creates the formulation meaning “a song that desires” or “a song of desire” (שִׁיר תַּאֲבָה).⁸ This permutation can also be understood using the Midrashic statement that, “God had a passion to make for Himself a dwelling place in the lower worlds.”⁹ But, where we usually associate the act of Creation with God’s speech, according to this permutation, it is the product of a Divine song. Thus, this permutation alludes to one of the most profound reasons that God created the world.

CREATION AND HEALING

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This

is how the first verse of the Torah is usually translated into English and other languages. Yet the word for “created,” בָּרָא, has an alternative meaning of “to heal” (לְהַבְרִיא).¹⁰ Thus, the verse can be read “In the beginning God began to heal the heavens and the earth.”

This explanation is based on the Kabbalistic teaching that this world was preceded by another world, which broke apart due to the “shattering of the vessels,” when the powerful lights of Creation could not be properly held by the initial vessels. The Arizal called this previous world the World of Chaos (*Olam HaTohu*). Thus, the Torah’s account of Creation actually begins after the shattering and describes a new phase of Creation meant to heal and rectify the shattering of the vessels that preceded it. Because of this, the Arizal referred to our reality, whose Creation the Torah describes as the World of Rectification (*Olam HaTikun*) as it is meant to rectify the shattered vessels of the previous world.

SECRETS OF THE WORD “HOVERING”

According to the Arizal 288 “shards” containing sparks of light fell into the lower worlds due to the “shattering of the vessels,” as discussed above. One of the sources for this number is in the word meaning “hovering” (מְרַחֵף), appearing in the Torah’s second verse, “And the earth was void and formless and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water” (וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וָרוּחַ). The initial and final letters of the word “hovering” spell

6. *Ibid.*, 58 and 69.

7. *Yoma* 2a.

8. *Tikkunei Zohar*, 10. *Sod HaShem Liyerei'av*, ch. 21.

9. *Tanchuma*, *Naso* 16.

10. *Yaiyn Yitzchak*, *Bereishit*, 12.

“died” (נָפַח), while the value of the three inner letters (פּוֹחַ) is 288. Thus, the Arizal read this word as alluding to 288 sparks of holiness that figuratively “died” in the “shattering of the vessels.”¹¹ Significantly the word “hovering” is the 18th word in the Torah. The number 18 is always associated with life, for the value of the word for “alive” (חַי) equals 18. In fact, 288 itself is a multiple of 18, specifically the product of 16 and 18, indicating that even though the vessels shattered and “died,” the light attached to the vessels is still alive and constantly awaiting to be restored and elevated back to its origin. This is a deep allusion to the concept of the Resurrection of the Dead that will take place in the final stages of the final and consummate Redemption.

THE INNER MEANING OF THE NAME “ADAM”

To understand the name Adam (אָדָם), the name of both the first human and humanity itself, let us first explore the meaning of the first letter of this name, an *alef*, the first Hebrew letter. The letter *alef* is sometimes referred to as the “paradox of God and man.”¹² Paradoxically, the letter *alef* represents both unity and oneness, and at the same time, the plurality in Creation. This can be seen numerically: the value of the *alef* is 1, yet the name of the letter, as a word, “*alef*” (אֵלֶף) can also be read as “*elef*” (אֵלֶף) meaning 1000. Thus, *alef*

refers to both oneness and multiplicity. The *alef*’s form also expresses paradox, as it is constructed from a diagonal line, resembling the letter *vav*, with a *yud* above the line and a *yud* below it. The *yud* that is above the line represents the supernal, the *yud* below the line represents the mundane. The line both separates and unites the two *yuds* simultaneously (א). Yet this duality is within the context of the overall unity inherent in the letter *alef*.¹³

In the *Zohar*, the letter *alef* symbolizes the “image of God” in which man is created.¹⁴ More of God’s names begin with the letter *alef* than with any other letter, and, significantly, the Torah’s name for the first human, *Adam*, also begins with an *alef*.

The same paradoxical nature found in the letter *alef* extends into the full name “Adam.” Adam consists of two syllables: *A* and *dam* (אָדָם). The first syllable, the *alef* represents the Divine image, while the second, *dam*, means “blood,” symbolizing man’s physical or animal nature. This duality parallels the duality of the human soul and the body. The paradox of God and man within man is reflected in the ongoing dynamic tension between the soul and the body. The soul is rooted in the supernal realm, in the infinite and eternal nature of God, while the body is the most complex entity in the mundane realm, belonging to the finite and temporal world. Man is a composite of these two opposing entities. As human beings, and even more so as Jews, our challenge is to learn how to unite soul and body in a positive and productive

11. As explained elsewhere, “death” in the spiritual sense means the loss of one’s previous state. Thus, these sparks of holiness that “died,” fell from their original state and descended between the husks of impurity. *Chasdei David HaNe’emanim*, vol. 8.

12. *The Hebrew Letters*, the letter *alef*.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Zohar* 3:104b.

manner to serve the ultimate goodness of God.

ACRONYMS OF THE NAME ADAM

Being that Adam was the first human, just as his soul is a source for the souls of all his progeny, his name too should be seen as an encapsulation of all human history. Based on this premise, the Arizal taught that the three letters of Adam's name (אָדָם) are the initials of the three archetypal individuals that span all of history and the rectification of mankind: Adam (אָדָם), David (דָּוִד), and Mashiach (מָשִׁיחַ).¹⁵

The three letters of Adam can also be understood as the initials of three words that represent the spiritual development and purpose of Divine service. The *alef* stands for faith (אֱמוּנָה), the *dalet* stands for "knowledge" or "consciousness" (דַּעַת) and the *mem* stands for "action" (מַעֲשֶׂה). To develop spiritually, an individual must take faith (which by its nature is super-conscious), integrate it into his or her consciousness, and then be able to apply the conscious faith through deed and action in the real world.

ACTION AS RECTIFICATION: TIKKUN OLAM

The Torah concludes the first account of Creation with the verse, "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it for on it He rested from His work, which God created for action."¹⁶ The Torah though is not specific about what actions

Creation was created for. A bit of thought will reveal that this seems to be counter-intuitive: if Creation is now complete, what is there left to do?

The answer is that in Scripture, the verb "to make" refers to fix or "to rectify" something.¹⁷ Though God is the Creator, He made humanity His partner in the ongoing rectification of the world.¹⁸ The word "to make" thus implies an ongoing creative process, not one definitively finished at a single, isolated point in time. God in fact purposefully left the work of perfecting and bringing Creation to its full potential in the hands of humanity, which is meant, through free choice, to become partners with God in the rectification of the world.

ABRAHAM: IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

"These are the chronicles of the heaven and earth *when they were created*, on the day that *Havayah Elokim* made earth and heaven."¹⁹ The Sages point out that the Hebrew word for "when they were created" (בְּהִבְרָאם) contains the same letters as the Hebrew word meaning "with [or through] Abraham" (בְּאַבְרָהָם).²⁰ The implication being that heaven and earth were created for the sake of, or through the aspect of loving-kindness (*chesed*), which Abraham embodied.²¹

17. See for example *Rashi* on Genesis 1:7: "Made the firmament: He [God] put it in proper condition in its place."

18. From a class given on the 15th of Nissan 5770 in Kfar Chabad.

19. Genesis 2:4; For an in-depth exploration of this verse and its many profound meanings see *Sha'ashuim Yom Yom, Bereishit*.

20. *Bereishit Rabbah* 12:9.

21. *Zohar* 1:47b.

15. *Sefer HaGilgulim*, 62; *Torah Or* 46d, *The Hebrew Letters*, p. 7.

16. Genesis 2:3.

The value of “Abraham” (אַבְרָהָם) is 248, equal to the concept of, “in the image of God” (בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים), the essential aspect of every human being, by which we are meant to reflect Godliness.²² Abraham is thus the exemplar of what the archetypal “image of God” is like, and it is through and for this Godliness that the earth and the heavens were created.

Scripture describes Abraham as “he who loves God.” Kabbalah goes further to identify Abraham as the archetypal embodiment of loving-kindness. Through his actions centered on loving-kindness, Abraham became a “chariot” or vehicle through which all of God’s love for Creation entered the world. In other words, Abraham became the foundational conduit through which all that is related to love flowed into and through Creation. Chasidic teachings explain that Abraham attained this state by constantly sensing God as the Creator. Not just that God created reality at some point in the past, but that God is constantly recreating reality. That is how he himself became a conduit for God’s love, which is the creative energy at the root of all Creation.

This ties back to the earlier idea that creation is akin to health and healing. When we are able to sense the recreation of reality at any given moment, we connect with the healing energy that appears at the very inception of Creation—i.e., we connect to God’s love for Creation. Thus, Creation, God’s love for Creation, and

Abraham who serves as a conduit for them are all intrinsically connected to health and healing.

Now, in a Torah scroll, the letter *hei* in the word “when they were created” (בְּהִבְרָאֻם) is written in a smaller size than the other letters.²³ One explanation for this change in typeface is that this is the letter *hei* that God added to Abram when he was circumcised, renaming him: Abraham.²⁴ Apart from the difference in meaning between Abram and Abraham, the Sages state that the letter *hei* is the letter with which God created our present reality (while the letter *yud* will be used to create the World to Come).²⁵ Before he was circumcised, Abraham was a theoretical thinker whose impact on reality was limited; in some sense, he was beyond reality (in Jewish thought his original state is identified with the concealed wisdom of the super-conscious, also referred to as “the ineffable mind”). Once he received a commandment from God to circumcise, the power of the commandment grounded his efforts to publicize God’s oneness, augmenting and cementing his impact on reality. Indeed, the word “when they were created,” is the seventh time the verb “create” (בָּרָא) is mentioned in the Torah. These seven instances correspond to the *sefirot* from loving-kindness to kingdom. With this Abraham became the conduit through which God’s Presence on earth could be recognized.

23. *The Hebrew Letters*, p. 88.

24. Genesis 17:5.

25. *Menachot* 12b. *The Hebrew Letters*, p. 83.

22. Genesis 1:27.

STORY

REBBE KALONYMUS KALMAN SHAPIRA OF PIASECZNA: HOLY FIRE

Rebbe Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of Piaseczna, was born on the 14th of Tammuz, 5649 (1889), to Rabbi Elimelech Shapira and the Rebbetzin Chanah Brachah, descendants of the Maggid of Kozhnitz and Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk. Orphaned from his father in childhood, he was raised in the home of his grandfather, the Rebbe of Grodzisk. At the age of sixteen he married Rachel Chayah Miriam, daughter of Rabbi Yerucham Moshe Hopstein of Kozhnitz, from whom he received the foundations of Chasidic teachings. After his father-in-law's passing, he was crowned Rebbe of Piaseczna, and in time became the rabbi of the town as well. In his books, he forged an educational path that wove together Chasidic enthusiasm with personal responsibility, love, and attentiveness to the soul. In his court as well, he emphasized the service of the heart, the cultivation of spiritual character, and a living connection to prayer and to life. During the Holocaust, he was deported to the Warsaw Ghetto where he continued to teach Torah and strengthen his chasidim. Amid conditions of starvation and terror, he committed his discourses to writing. The discourses were published after the war in the book Eish Kodesh (Holy Fire). He ascended to Heaven in a storm on the 4th of Cheshvan, 5704 (1943), at the Trawniki concentration camp.

Reb Yisrael Kahn, one of the Rebbe's *chasidim*, related the following:

It was the festival of Shavu'ot in the Warsaw Ghetto. Broken and shattered Jews were hiding in cellars and beneath the ruins of buildings, when word suddenly spread of a certain cellar where the Rebbe was holding his *tish*, a gathering in honor of the festival. The Jews gathered. After several melodies the Rebbe spoke with deep devotion about the giving of the Torah, which is renewed each year—and this year as well—as though the world outside was not collapsing; the Rebbe was occupied with preparations for the revelation of new Torah.

Toward morning, the Rebbe began to speak about the immersion in the *mikveh* on Shavu'ot, the immersion that prepares us to receive the new Torah. To the astonishment of the *chasidim*, the Rebbe turned toward the exit from the cellar with the clear intention of reaching the *mikveh* and immersing. The *mikveh* was locked and at no small distance, and walking in the street was a mortal danger:

the Nazis did not permit Jews to walk together by day, and at night movement was forbidden altogether. The *chasidim* pleaded with the Rebbe not to go, but the Rebbe was resolute. There was no standing in his way, and the Rebbe, ablaze with holy fire, went out without fear. The *chasidim*, who witnessed his great trust and burning faith, went with him.

Swiftly and in silence they reached the *mikveh*. The Rebbe opened the door, entered quickly, immersed, and emerged. One more *chasid* managed to plunge into the water when suddenly the sound of an approaching motorcycle was heard. It was clear that death was drawing near, and that within seconds they might be receiving the Torah in Heaven. The Rebbe managed to step out and lock the door. A German officer dismounted from the motorcycle and raised his weapon with shouts. Everyone pressed close to the Rebbe. The officer understood who was leading the group and ran with his weapon toward the Rebbe but the further he advanced, the more his confidence failed him. In the end he lowered his weapon and merely shouted: "What are Jews doing here in the middle of the night?" The group dispersed quickly.

The Germans put the Jews to forced labor in factories, working them until their strength was exhausted and then transferring them to be murdered. The Rebbe was taken to work in a shoe factory in the service of the German army. His light penetrated even into the hearts of the non-Jews, and the non-Jewish factory manager perceived that he was "a good Jew" and resolved to protect him and his group. When the Nazis came to take a group to be killed, the manager said it was a pity to take them since they worked well, and for several months the group continued to work and to serve God in the Rebbe's company.

One day the manager was absent, and the Germans came and took the Rebbe's group to a death camp near Lublin. The following day the manager arrived to check on his "good Jew" and discovered that the Rebbe and his group had been taken. He resolved to take a risk and try to bring the Rebbe back to the factory, and using transit documents of a worker in the service of the Reich, he made his way to the camp. There he saw a group of Jews who were already on their way to be murdered. He recognized them as "his" group and asked them: "Where is the good Jew?" The *chasidim* were stunned to see that the Rebbe was not among them. "He was here just a moment ago," they said with wonder. As they stood bewildered, the order came, and the group walked toward death, the Rebbe absent from their midst.

When Reb Yisrael finished the story, he said: "Let each person think what he wishes." One of the listeners could not restrain himself and asked: "And what do you think happened?" Reb Yisrael was silent — and then tears burst from his eyes. In a trembling voice he said: "Whoever knew the Rebbe knows that the wicked could not touch his holy body. He surely ascended to Heaven in a storm."

What is the meaning of the *tzaddik's* singular devotion to the immersion in the *mikveh* on the night of Shavu'ot, and is there a connection between it and the wondrous manner of his passing from this world?

In the Midrashim and in Chasidut, the seven weeks of the *Omer* count are compared to a woman's counting of seven clean days before her immersion and return to her husband. The special immersion of the festival is the purification of the bride—the people of Israel—in preparation for the wedding day with the Holy blessed One.

But in truth, there are not only seven here, but also three—three months (even if not complete ones). The *Omer* is counted beginning in Nissan, the first month, when we left Egypt, through Iyar, and ends in the month of Sivan, the third month, when the Torah was given. One of the Midrashim explains this through a striking parallel to a halachic principle concerning marriage:

There are very specific circumstances in which Jewish law requires a woman to wait three months before she may marry, to ensure that any children born to her are indeed her new husband's, conceived in holy matrimony, "according to the laws of Moshe and Israel." This is known as the period of distinction (הבחנה). Three months are required for a pregnancy to be clearly seen, and after three months of waiting, it can be known with certainty that no prior pregnancy preceded the marriage. Every woman who was previously married (a widow, a divorcee) needs to wait these three months before getting married again.

But there are three cases when even if a woman was not previously married, she

needs to uphold the period of distinction. These are a woman who has converted to Judaism must wait three months to ensure that any child born after the conversion was conceived after the conversion; a woman who was held captive, having been entirely at the mercy of her captors, is subject to concern that she may have been violated, and must therefore wait three months from the day of her release; and a freed maidservant, who during her servitude was of such diminished personal standing that she may have surrendered herself, must likewise wait.

Even though the Jewish people were never "married" to another deity and had never taken upon themselves a different "Torah," and so they cannot be compared to a woman who was previously married, the Midrash teaches that the people of Israel who left Egypt were subject to all three special situations. They were like a convert who has come to convert, like a captive who was released, and like a freed maidservant. The Jewish people were set apart from the nations and became a distinct people through a process of conversion. They emerged from captivity in Egypt, where they had been under the dominion of foreign masters. And they were freed from a house of bondage at the Exodus. Therefore, they too had to wait three months after leaving Egypt to enter the great wedding with the Almighty at the Giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai.

A NEW WEDDING

This analogy, of course, requires an inner, spiritual explanation because the Giving of the Torah was not a physical marriage that required that the paternity

of the children be established. God—the supernal Groom—knows precisely the condition of His bride—the Jewish people. It is clear, then, that the months of waiting describe an inner transformation that *we*, the bride, undergo in the period between the Exodus from Egypt in Nissan to the Giving of the Torah in Sivan. In fact, we experience this transformation and relive it individually and communally every year.

From this perspective, the preparation for receiving the Torah is in essence the person's certainty that he has been cleansed of all the foreign and negative influences to which he was previously exposed. This cleansing is the threefold process of conversion-release-liberation, which manifests in the following way. Severing oneself from the foreign culture in which one had lived through desire and natural belonging constitutes a conversion. Freeing oneself from the impulses, desires, and addictions in whose

grip one feels like a captive represents the release from captivity. Ceasing to be swept along by every fashionable trend or passing wind is liberation from a servile mentality in which a person is abandoned to every passing fad for lack of self-respect. Only at the completion of these three months does one arrive at the certainty that the process of conversion-release-liberation has truly succeeded, and that new spiritual fruits may be born from the new wedding.

The author of the *Eish Kodesh* devoted his entire life to redeeming Jews from the foreign culture that had spread before the war and from the despair that had seeped into their hearts during it. He himself was entirely free from every possible foreign influence even upon his holy body. And so, when the wicked came to kill him, he had already united himself with his Creator, to whom he had always yearned as a bride to her groom.

RIGHTEOUS NON-JEWS

JACQUES ELLUL

Continuing (but not yet completing) the discussion on the necessary reformation of the Jewish spirit in our generation, HaRav Ginsburgh discussed the merits of a rectified anarchy based on individual responsibility to serve God and observe the commandments. In this short discourse, he reviews some of the ideas proposed by the French philosopher Jacques Ellul, fitting thoughts for parashat Bereishit, the first of two universal Torah portions that address the nations of the world.

AN ELEVATION OF THE SOUL OF JACQUES ELLUL

Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) was an important French philosopher, sociologist, and resistance-fighter during World War 2. His philosophy was that the ultimate form of government is anarchy. What is special and sets him apart in this respect is that he believed that anarchy should include both an anarchist king and an anarchist Torah, the topic we have been exploring recently.¹

On his mother's side he descends from the Conversos, the forced converts of Spain, so it is possible that he is even of Jewish descent. His family name, Ellul, is a Maltese name, from the island of Malta, south of Italy, but it of course also resonates with the month of Elul.

Let's continue examining the thought of Jacques Ellul: in his personal life, he conducted himself as a Christian. His story—everyone has their own story²—was

that at age 17 he had a mystical experience, a feeling of Divine presence. From then on, he became a believer, and so he arrived at what he arrived at in his philosophy. At *Yad VaShem* he is among the Righteous Among the Nations. On that merit alone it is already worth doing an elevation of soul for him. Again, he is a devout Christian, but he risked his life and the lives of his entire family to hide Jews during the Holocaust. True *mesirut nefesh*. Saving Jews was the application of his thought, his anarchism.

SOURCES FOR ANARCHY IN SCRIPTURE

Since he was a Christian, he studied Tanach, and he based his philosophy on four points he gleaned from it.

The first point he took from the opening of the Ten Commandments, the beginning of the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, which states: "I am *Havayah* your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."³ These are the words that forged the mindset of the generation

1. See *Wonders* for Sukkot 5787 for the complete discussion.

2. See *Wonders* for Rosh HaShanah 5787, p. 12. regarding every individual's "true story."

3. Exodus 20:2.

of the wilderness, the third period in the history of the Jewish people.⁴ It is meant to detach them from the mindset they had in Egypt, which was the second era of Jewish history. How will the mindset change? Ellul argues that what is usually described as the “second commandment,” “You shall have no other gods before Me,”⁵ is the necessary change.

Some commentaries count these as two separate commandments in the Decalogue (we call it by this name because there are various opinions as to how many commandments actually appear in the words spoken at Sinai and usually referred to as the Ten Commandments). But according to the cantillation marks of the text, it is all one, a single utterance, as is explained at length elsewhere.⁶ That is, the purpose of “I am *Havayah* your God” is “you shall have no other gods before Me.” He says that “other gods” actually refers to the state government. Ellul argues that subjugation to the state is the source of all idolatry, all the “other gods” that exist in the world.⁷ This is a very nice idea—that “other gods” means faith in the state, attachment to the state. It could also refer to faith in military power, following the warning that one should not think that it is “my strength and the might of my hand

that has brought me this success.”⁸ The general principle is that a faith that makes human life dependent on physical causes (on economics, and so on⁹) is a false god. Subjugation to the state, in his eyes, is idolatry. This is his first source.

The second source is what we have already discussed a bit at length—the era of the Judges. He says that the leadership of the Judges is an ideal condition, where there is no king. We have not mentioned this before, but among the Judges, who expressed this best? In a story stated explicitly in Tanach—they wanted to crown Gideon king, and he refused: “I do not want to be king; God is the King.”¹⁰ Not that his refusal to be crowned led to anything good; in the end, Gideon was also a failure.¹¹ Still, this is how Gidon understood it from the outset: no king

8 Deuteronomy 8:17.

9. The Sages say that Jews living outside the Land of Israel are likened to idolaters “in purity” (*Avodah Zarah* 8a). According to Chasidic teachings (see *Likkutei Torah* from the Alter Rebbe, *Yom Kippur* 68b; see similarly *Shabbat Shuvah* 64d) this cryptic and often misunderstood statement is likening a soft form of idolatry with those who put their faith and trust in physical causes, for instance for the source of their livelihood. Indeed, this is natural outside the Land of Israel, where even Jews receive their abundance through the seventy ministering angels. Therefore, there (and for anyone who may conduct themselves in the same manner even in the Land of Israel, “the yoke of the government and the yoke of making a living”—both opposites of “the yoke of Torah” (*Avot* 3:5)—are considered identical.

10 Judges 8:22–23. Gideon says this after he merited a new name that instilled in him a second nature of sorts: Yeruba’al, which means “strife with Ba’al” (Judges 6:32), indicating an unwillingness to accept any form of mastery and subjugating rule over himself and others (out of an ideal desire for anarchy).

11 Judges 8:24–27, and there, ch. 9.

4. See *Wonders* for Yom Kippur 5787.

5. Exodus 20:3.

6 See *Shiurim BeSod Hashem Liyerei’av*, vol. 5, ch. 20. See also the farbrengen of 15 Shevat 5775. And elsewhere.

7 Compare with *Zohar* 3:108a: “This yoke does not rest upon one who is himself subjugated to another. Therefore, slaves are exempt from the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, etc.”

is needed—God is the King. With his words, Gideon effected the beginning of a rectification for the kings of Edom, each of whom (according to Kabbalah) wanted to be the sole sovereign, stating, “I shall reign.”¹² This is the second story that, according to Ellul, clearly proves that the ideal is anarchism.

The third Biblical story that he learns from is the cautionary words spoken by Samuel when the people came to demand a king. Samuel cautions the people: you will have a king, and it will be bad. You will have a government, and it will be bad for you. Ellul argues that there is no greater declaration of the evil of monarchy than “the law of the king” that Samuel states and warns the people about.

The fourth source Ellul brings is perhaps his strongest support for anarchy from the bible. He says that all the prophets of Israel prophesied against the kings that ruled Israel and Judea. The prophets recognized the kings as the root of the corruption of the Jewish people,¹³ in every generation.

12 Based on 1 Kings 1:5. See *Ma'amarei Admur HaZaken* 5562, vol. 2, p. 432; *Ketuvim*, vol. 1, p. 195, and elsewhere.

13 And see also Isaiah 1:23; Micah 3.

No true prophet was ever “loyal” to a king blindly—they were all against the wicked kings, and critical even of the righteous kings.¹⁴ Even when a prophet stood at the right hand of a righteous king, he did not curry favor with him or flatter him. Instead, the true prophet criticizes the king regarding every mistake he made: he found in him the weak points that needed rectification.¹⁵ In fact, the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet is that the latter type was all flattery for the king.¹⁶

These are his four proofs for “anarchism from the Torah” as an ideal. Something nice worth pondering. As we said before, this is the first nature of the Jew—this is how God created him, upright. The “many machinations” that corrupt humanity begin from the monarchy, from the state, from the government.

14 See for example 1 Kings 21:17–24 (Eliyahu and Achav); 2 Chronicles 16:7–10 (Chanani and Asa); Ibid. 19:2 (Yehu ben Chanani and Yehoshafat).

15 See, for example, 2 Kings 20:16–19. *Berachot* 10a.

16 See 1 Kings 22:5–28 (Tzidkiyahu ben Kena'anah and the prophets of Achav); Jeremiah 28 (Chananyah ben Azur).

BIG IDEAS. SHORT FORM.

The Torah ideas that change the way you see yourself —
and the world around you.

TORAH

SCIENCE

PSYCHOLOGY

KABBALAH

CHASSIDUT

HEBREW

JEWISH
IDENTITY



The Jewish Heart

with Rav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

NEW ENGLISH CONTENT EVERY WEEK

Follow Rav Ginsburgh's new social channels



@RavYitzchakGinsburgh



@RavYitzchakGinsburgh

— SCAN TO FOLLOW —