

In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth (1:1)

The Midrash relates what Rabbi Yehudah ben Pazi and Bar Kappara expounded regarding the Creation: "Why was the world created with a bais – Bereishis, in the beginning? Because it is an expression of brachah, blessing. And why not with an aleph? Because it is an expression of cursing, arirah." The commentators point out that Chazal's statement is not necessarily consistent with other pesukim in Tanach in which the letter bais is not always used as blessing.

Indeed, we find in Yeshayah 24:1, "Behold, Hashem empties (bokeik) the land and lays it waste (bolkah)." Also, in Yechezkel 16:40, "They will tear/pierce you (u'bitkuch) with their swords." Furthermore, we find the letter aleph heading up the Aseres HaDibros, Ten Commandments – Anochi Hashem Elokecha. Nonetheless, although aware of these pesukim which seem to contradict their words, Chazal chose to disregard them and not make them an issue concerning this particular Midrash. Apparently, a deeper meaning is the basis of Chazal's delineating the bais of blessing from the aleph of curse.

Horav Meir Tzvi Bergman, Shlita, gives the following explanation. He cites Chazal in the Talmud Nedarim 40a, "If the young tell you to build and the elders tell you to raze, listen to the elders and do not listen to the young. This is because the building of the young is razing, and the razing of the elders is building. An example of this is Rechavam ben Shlomo Ha'melech." This is a reference to Rechavam's ignoring the advice of the elders, his father's advisors, and instead listening to the young, inexperienced advisors with whom he had grown up. This ultimately led to his downfall and the razing of the Bais HaMikdash.

We find a similar statement in the Talmud Kedushin 33a, which notes that Rabbi Yochanan would rise out of respect for the aged, even gentiles. He commented, "How many crises have they weathered!" Rav Bergman explains that the older generation has an advantage over the young, whereby they know how to build upon the foundations of the past. Any structure which they build, be it physical or intellectual, is based upon their rich storehouse of experience – both personal, and that which they have observed among the nations. They include the traditions they have received, which have been tested and proven over time. Thus, even when they determine that a structure must be razed, it is built upon a strong foundation of experience and wisdom acquired through painful and diligent observation, practice and training. Indeed, this is why their destruction will

prove to be constructive. It will have a productive and beneficial impact on the future of any endeavor. They understand when something has to be razed and how it should be taken down.

By nature, the young refuse to learn from the past, often maintaining a rebellious stance against what is old, tried and true. They seek initiative, want to devise their own methods and invent new theories. For them, it is an insult to learn from others. Their building is based upon undermining and tearing down the structures of the past. Previous methods and axioms are an anathema to them – regardless of how much practical sense they make. The mere fact that it is not “theirs” is sufficient reason for something to be discarded and, often, reviled. Thus, their concept of building essentially means dismantling the original structure.

The construction of the Bais HaMikdash is a mitzvah of the Torah. Yet, it cannot be carried out under the guidance of the young, because it must be founded upon deep foundations of tradition going back to the Avos, Patriarchs. The Rambam Hilchos Bais HaBechirah 2:2 notes that it is a hallowed tradition that the place where David and Shlomo built the Mizbayach, Altar, was the exact spot where Avraham Avinu built an Altar and bound Yitzchak upon it; where Noach built an Altar when he emerged from the Ark; where Kayin and Hevel offered their sacrifices; and where Adam HaRishon offered a sacrifice to Hashem when he was created. Indeed, it was from the earth of that very same spot that Adam was fashioned. Chazal say that “Adam was created from the place in which he would find atonement.”

The bottom line is that an edifice as sacrosanct as the Bais HaMikdash must be built on a mighty foundation. The building wrought by the young on new – and often – shaky foundations, consists more of destruction than construction. Rav Bergman goes so far as to say that even if the young offered us a chance to build the Bais HaMikdash, and even if we could definitely not be able to build it without their assistance, we should outright, without hesitation, reject their offer. At any rate, although we might not be able to build the edifice, we would at least have the foundations for that building firmly in hand, because we connect to the past. We will start, and Hashem will help us to complete it. If we were to comply with the wishes and advice of the young, we would ultimately destroy its foundations, thereby allowing nothing to rest on it and catalyzing its premature ruin. Far from considering the assistance of the young an opportunity that should not be lost, in reality it would mean the bitter end to every future opportunity. Far from reaping benefit, we would be stuck in a vicious maelstrom and lose everything.

With the above in mind, we can revert to the Midrash which distinguishes between the bais of blessing and the aleph of curse. The Torah of Klal Yisrael cannot begin with an aleph, because this means commencing the Torah from “the beginning.” This is an indication that here lies curse – not blessing; it is not building, but destruction. The Written Torah which one can read from the original

must be precluded and overshadowed by the Oral Torah, which one must study from his elders. Shlomo Ha'melech says in Mishlei (1:8), Shma beni mussar avicha, v'al titosh toras imecha, "Hear, my son, your father's mussar/discipline, and do not forsake your mother's Torah (teaching)." In pointing the individual in the correct direction to further his wisdom, the Torah says (Devarim 32:7), She'al avicha v'yageidcha, z'keinecha v'yomru lach, "Ask your father and he will recount it to you, your elders and they will tell you." Torah must be studied through the process of mesorah, transmission, from one generation to the next. Herein lies the blessing; herein lies construction.

The Aseres HaDibros are a free-standing introduction, indicating the beginning, Hashem's introduction to Klal Yisrael. Thus, it can very well begin with an aleph, because its first words are Anochi, "I am Hashem, I am the beginning, the wellspring and source of all that is." The Torah of Hashem's children, however, must begin with bais, because a child comes after his father; he is second in the tradition, and Torah can only be learned through the medium of the external chain of tradition.