

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

The first Rashi in the Torah is famous: "Amar Rabbi Yitzchak, 'The text of the Torah should have commenced with Sefer Shemos 12, in which the commandment regarding the month of Nissan is written. Instead, the Torah begins with Creation. This is to indicate that Hashem created the world. Thus, it was His prerogative to give Eretz Yisrael to whichever nation He chose. He gave the Holy Land to the Jewish People as an inheritance.'" This statement is questionable, since many basic teachings and lessons can be derived from Sefer Bereishis, such as: Maaseh avos siman l'banim, "The actions of the fathers (Patriarchs) are a sign, portent, for their children"; and "the words of the servants of the Patriarchs are more precious than the instruction of the children." These are just a few of the lessons which would be lost with the omission of Sefer Bereishis, as we shall elucidate.

Horav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zl, points out that, indeed, many of the fundamentals of the Torah – such as Techiyas Ha'meisim, Resurrection of the dead – have rules which are only in the Talmud. If so, the stories of the Avos could have their place in the Oral Law. They did not have to be written in the Torah Sheh'Biksav, Written Law. The rule for inclusion in the Written Law is that it belongs to the Taryag, 613 mitzvos, or that it presents a lesson which is important for the gentile nations to know. Since the Oral Law was supposed to remain oral and, thus, not accessible to the average gentile, they would have to read it in the Torah Sheh'Biksav. As a result of this, Rabbi Yitzchak, quoted by Rashi, explains that there was actually no reason to begin the Torah with its narration concerning the creation of the world, except for the fact that the gentile nations need to learn from this saga. They should become acutely aware of the development of the Jewish nation and its title to Eretz Yisrael. Bereishis is for them. Perhaps, it is also for us, since, regrettably, many self-loathing Jews still do not accept that Eretz Yisrael really belongs to us. If we would truly believe that it is ours, so would everybody else.

There is another reason that Rashi begins his commentary to the Torah with a statement from Rabbi Yitzchak. Rashi's full name was Rabbi Shlomo ben Rabbi Yitzchak, hence the surname Yitzchaki. It makes sense that Rabbi Yitzchak, whom Rashi quotes, was none other than his father. Why does he begin his commentary with a dvar Torah from his father? I think it goes beyond Rashi's fulfillment of the mitzvah of Kibud Av, honoring his father. Rashi had a sense of hakoras ha'tov, gratitude, recognizing that whatever he had achieved was the result of his father's sacrifice. Hakarah means recognition. In every word of Torah that Rashi learned, he acknowledged his father. Thus, as he begins his commentary to the Torah, he commences with a dvar Torah from his father.

Interestingly, his father teaches us to look to the beginning, the source of everything. Throughout history, various groups have laid claim to Eretz Yisrael. Rabbi Yitzchak asserts that all strife can be settled easily by focusing on the Owner/Creator of Eretz Yisrael: Hashem. He decided to give His land to His People. Subject closed. Likewise, Rashi is intimating that his own ability to write such an unparalleled pirush, commentary to the Torah, is due to his father's mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice.

The story is related that Rabbi Yitzchak merited a son who would illuminate the Torah world for all generations through his commentary, which made Torah accessible to everyone. Apparently, his father, a poor vintner, found an unpolished stone, which he immediately took to the local jeweler for an appraisal. Lo and behold, the stone was valued at a price beyond the means of anyone in the entire city – except for the church. When the local priests heard about Rabbi Yitzchak's discovery, they were prepared to pay an exorbitant sum of money for the stone. Rabbi Yitzchak refused to sell the stone to the church at any price, fearing that it would contribute to idolatry.

The priests thought of a ruse to obtain the stone. They hired a ship and convinced Rabbi Yitzchak to join them for a short trip. As soon as they were away from land, the priests demanded the stone. They were prepared to pay for it, but, if necessary, there were "other" means of obtaining it. Tradition tells us that Rabbi Yitzchak flung the stone into the sea, either on purpose or "accidentally on purpose." A Heavenly voice then decreed, "Because you were willing to sacrifice a precious diamond for the glory of G-d, you will be blessed with a son who will illuminate the eyes of the Jewish People."

