

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

The opening *pesukim* of *Sefer Bereishis* detail the process of Creation. This process progressed over a period of six Creation days. The last day was *yom Shabbos kodesh*, the holy *Shabbos*, a day on which Hashem rested from Creation. It was after these days of Creation that the natural clock of time with which we identify began. The *Talmud Rosh Hashanah*, 32a, explains that the word *bereishis*, in the beginning, is much more than a chronological term which describes when it all began; rather, the word *bereishis* is the word which Hashem employed to commence creation itself. **Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl**, explains (citing a number of *Midrashic* and *Kabbalistic* sources) that, when Hashem uttered the word *bereishis*, He actually created the entire spectrum of spiritual "concepts" which later transformed into the physical universe. The *Zohar HaKadosh* adds that the word *bereishis* brought with it a spiritual potential which contains the roots of the entire Torah. Thus, the first word of the Torah is the DNA of both the physical world and the Torah itself.

To have us understand the above statement, *Rav Tzadok* explains that the word *bereishis* includes within it three fundamental *mitzvos* which represent the essence of life for a Jew. True, the Torah has 613 *mitzvos*, but, like everything else that is comprised of many components, there are always a few vital components without which it will not work. The following three *mitzvos* define us and characterize our DNA. They are: *yiraas Hashem*, fear of G-d; *Shabbos*; and *Bris Milah*. We all know that these *mitzvos* are important. We are now taught exactly how important they are to us as Jews. Essentially, without their observance, we are deficient in our Jewishness.

The *Zohar* derives this etymologically by taking the six letters of the word *bereishis* and moving them around in such a manner that each arrangement produces a different word or word combination. The *Zohar* then expounds upon each of these permutations, explaining the overriding significance of each one and delineating how it is a vital component to the Jewish DNA. First is *yira boshes*, spelled: *yud, reish, aleph, bais, shin, tav*; fear and fame; fear of Hashem and the inherent shame one must harbor to prevent him from transgression. The second is *bris eish*, spelled: *bais, reish, yud, tav, aleph, shin*; covenant of fire, which is a reference to the *mitzvah* of circumcision. Last, is *yira Shabbos*: *yud, reish, aleph, shin, bais, tav*; fear – observance of *Shabbos*. These *mitzvos* are not just exceptional or compelling *mitzvos*; they represent the very foundation of both the material world and the Torah! They are the spiritual seeds that give rise to and sustain the Torah, as well as all of the material elements of the world.

Rav Tzadok goes on to explain the nature of each of these *mitzvos*, thereby demonstrating how each plays a pivotal role in defining a Jew. The first *mitzvah*, *yiraas Hashem*, without a doubt is the most significant *mitzvah*, without which one cannot survive as a Jew. *Rav Tzadok* explains that *yirah* goes beyond the rudimentary desire for survival, ie. one is good because he fears punishment; one fears an entity that is more powerful than he is. It is more than this. The Torah wants us to develop a sense of fear which demands that we introspect and cultivate within

ourselves a profound and meaningful awareness of Hashem – in our thoughts, speech and actions. A thoughtful, intimate, tangible consciousness of Hashem's ubiquitous Presence in every aspect of our lives leads us to a sense of inadequacy and shame, whereby we would not dare do anything that would cause us to look "bad" in Hashem's eyes. Fear of Hashem should be part and parcel of our psyche and written all over our faces. Thus, *yira boshes* is a sense of fear and shame of acting inappropriately before Hashem. This concept is the greatest deterrent to wrongdoing. A sincere and reverent sense of fear and shame, which molds a person's spiritual persona, differentiates between an observant Jew and one who is not yet observant. In other words, an observant Jew manifests this intrinsic sense of fear and shame as part of his observance, as part of his spiritual integrity.

The second *mitzvah* included in the *bereishes* is *bris milah*. According to *Rav Tzadok*, *bris eish*, the covenant of fire, is a reference to the fiery passion of one's base desires, the urge to indulge in sensual pleasure, that is tempered by the *mitzvah* of *bris milah*. The physical dimension of man is not easily controlled. It requires the sacred covenant of *bris milah* which imbues the Jewish body, soul and psyche with a strong desire to do what is holy – even at the expense of temporary self-gratification.

The covenant of *milah* brings to mind that spirituality takes precedence over everything. One does not sacrifice the holy for the profane, the spiritual for the physical, the sacred for the mundane – regardless of its enticing nature. Avraham *Avinu* was the first man to be instructed to perform the *mitzvah* of *bris milah*. He personified the lesson of *milah*. He demonstrated that one can transcend the consuming fires of egocentric passion and channel that same energy towards living a life of sanctity, lovingkindness and self-sacrifice. Who better than he to be granted that the *mitzvah* that represents the hallmark of Judaism? Avraham *Halvri* – who stood on one side in opposition to an entire pagan world-taught us the importance of standing up, alone, for that in which one believes. An entire depraved world, a society drowning in the morass of moral filth and hedonistic pleasure seeking, challenged our Patriarch. He did not care. He stood alone then – as we do today-bolstered and strengthened by the *mitzvah* of *bris milah*, which gives us the ability to overcome the challenges to our inherent *kedushah*, holiness.

The final *mitzvah* in the *bereishis*/Jewish DNA group is *Shabbos kodesh*. Our holy *Shabbos* is the pinnacle of Creation, the apex of Hashem's handiwork. Indeed, its observance is tantamount to the fulfillment of all the *mitzvos*. The sacred essence of *Shabbos* is the basis and ultimate goal of the entire Torah. Indeed, Hashem's Presence has greater palpability on *Shabbos* than at any other time of the week. One can almost feel the sanctity. The "fear of *Shabbos*," explains *Rav Tzadok*, is the ability for a Jew to sense Hashem's closeness as He watches over our thoughts, speech and actions. Thus, the vehicle of "fear," generated throughout the *Shabbos*, ensures our compliance with all of the Torah's *mitzvos*. One who desecrates the *Shabbos* misses that spiritual antibody which gives him the strength and perseverance to observe the other *mitzvos* of the Torah.

Shabbos represents an exclusive relationship between Hashem and His children. Thus, while

gentiles are allowed to perform any other *mitzvah* of the Torah – *Shabbos* is off limits. They are strictly prohibited from observing *Shabbos*. *Shabbos* is ours. It belongs to us; it is our gift from Hashem. *Chazal* compare our relationship with *Shabbos* to that of a king and queen who are engaged in intimate conversation. Clearly, a stranger who interjects himself into their discussion will be severely punished. He has no business mixing into a private conversation between two monarchs. Likewise, a gentile has no right to observe *Shabbos*. He treads on hallowed ground where he does not belong. *Shabbos* is an intimate domain which Hashem shares with His People. Outsiders are neither invited nor wanted.

As we begin the Torah anew, having just come full circle, we should pause for a moment to think and rededicate ourselves to the three foundation stones of the entire Torah: fear of Hashem; leading a holy and sacred life; maintaining a loving and careful observance of *Shabbos*.