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THE LOUIS WEISFELD EDITION

חומש שטיינזלץ

THE STEINSALTZ HUMASH



עם ביאורו של הרב עדין אבן-ישראל שטיינזלץ

COMMENTARY BY RABBI ADIN EVEN-ISRAEL STEINSALTZ

# **The Steinsaltz Humash**

*Humash Translation and Commentary*

Commentary by

**Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz**



**Steinsaltz Center**



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# Introduction to the Steinsaltz Humash

Scholars and lay readers alike are aware that writing a new commentary on the Bible requires assistance and blessings from Above, as well as substantial effort from below. Two fundamental challenges stand before one who seeks to write a commentary on the Torah: First, the aspiration to relate to the loftiest and holiest text and to explain it faithfully risks hubris. Second, a huge number of commentaries on the Bible have been composed over the course of the past three thousand years by the greatest people in our history. Who has the audacity to attempt to join this holy assembly or even grasp its coattails?

Sanction for undertaking this daunting task can be found in Rashi's statement to his grandson Rashbam, himself the author of an important commentary on the Torah. Rashbam reports Rashi to have said that if he had had the strength, he would have written another commentary in accordance with the "plain meanings that are renewed every day" (Rashbam, Genesis 38:2).

In every generation and on each passing day, fresh light can be shed on the verses of the Bible and new perspectives can be found. Not only are new answers offered to old questions, but in every era additional questions are raised by students of the Bible, due to both the diversity of the personalities, and the differing interests and perspectives, of each era. Throughout the ages, the great commentaries have discussed a wide range of different issues. To this day, thank God, there are many scholars and students of the Bible raising unique questions and challenges that require attention, analysis, and investigation. All these illuminate the eternal words of the Torah through a range of viewpoints and give rise to "plain meanings that are renewed every day."

This commentary seeks to offer the reader the plain meaning of the text, the *peshat*. Ostensibly, this is the simplest level of interpretation, but the elucidation of the plain meaning is actually the most difficult type of interpretation. Other kinds of interpretation, based on allusion [*remez*], midrashic hermeneutics [*derash*], or esoteric, mystical traditions [*sod*] are free to forge links between the text and the sources from which they draw and are not constrained by the language and concepts of the Bible. In contrast, discovering the plain meaning of the text requires the interpreter to adhere closely to the literal meaning of the words while paying attention to syntax and context. The best way to go about this has always been a matter of debate, and the elucidation of the plain meaning of the Torah as a holistic entity will never be fully achieved (see, e.g., Ibn Ezra's introduction to his commentary on the Torah).

Finally, there is a fundamental problem that is unique to interpretation of the Torah: The aim of finding the plain meaning is related to the author's intent, yet the infinite consciousness of the Giver of the Torah is unfathomable and boundless (see Ramban's introduction to the Torah).

Although this commentary includes references to many other commentaries, it is not an anthology. It was not intended to provide a comprehensive array of interpretations from across the generations. The aim of the references is to show that a suggested interpretation is based on earlier sources or discusses a similar question. Moreover, this work does not aspire to be revolutionary or novel. Rather, it aims to present what might be called a "transparent" commentary, one whose explanations should go almost unnoticed and serve only to give the reader and student the sense that there is no barrier between him or her and the text. The aim is to let the Torah speak for itself, to allow the prophets to prophesy and the wise men to impart their wisdom. In order to enable the "voice" of the verses to be heard, the annotations are brief, serving as a thin, barely perceptible screen rather than a heavy, concealing coat of armor.

At Mount Sinai, the entire Jewish people heard "a great voice" (Deuteronomy 5:18), which the Sages interpret to mean a voice that has never ceased (*Targum Onkelos*; *Sanhedrin* 17a). It is my hope that this project will help people hear the voice of the Torah even in our busy, noisy world.

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz

# Parashat Bereshit

Brief summary of themes in the narrative

Explanatory notes clarify the text and include a vast amount of rabbinical and contemporary sources

## The Seven Days of Creation

GENESIS 1:1–2:3

some preexisting process. Had the verse stated *bareshit*, it would have been understood as meaning simply “in the beginning.” By contrast, the term *bereshit* indicates the beginning of some specific, unnamed process. It appears that a fundamental message lies hidden in this first word: At some early stage in the mysterious process of creating existence, God created the heavens and the earth.

- 1 **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.** The opening verse takes the existence of God as a given. It does not address questions about God’s origin or nature; rather, God is understood to be the absolute existence from which everything begins. Already at the beginning of the account of Creation, heaven and earth appear as distinct entities and as a framework for all of creation, as detailed in the rest of the chapter.
- 2 **The earth was unformed and empty<sup>D</sup> [*tohu vavohu*].** The earth was completely lacking any structure or order. The heavens too were unformed and empty, but the verse initially focuses on the earth, its structure and content. Although these two terms appear together in other places in the Bible, the precise meaning of the word *vohu* is difficult to ascertain; it is even uncertain whether *vohu* refers to a distinct concept. **And darkness was upon the face of the deep.** The deep may refer to deep waters, or to the unstructured universe, that existed at the time. At this early stage of Creation, nothing had yet to receive definite shape; nothing had been revealed. Therefore, the darkness upon the face of the deep was merely the absence of the light that was about to be created. Some commentaries maintain that the darkness was not the absence of light, but an entity in itself, based on the verse “I form the light, and create darkness.” **And the spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water.** Water is the first actual substance mentioned in the Torah, as the heaven and the earth are not substances but general entities or zones. The verse does not discuss the creation of the primeval substance that served as the foundation for all of existence. In any case, the Torah indicates that God’s power, or will, exists in some form in this reality. God is not located within these entities, and He certainly is not to be identified with them; rather, He hovers close by while remaining separate from them.
- 3 The process of Creation begins: **God said: Let there be light, and there was light.**<sup>D</sup> It is difficult to understand the meaning or significance of the phrase “God said.” The most that can be understood from this cryptic description is that God transmitted a kind of message that there should be light, and His instruction came to pass. Light was the first creation to emerge from *tohu vavohu*. It was unlike any form of light known to mankind; it did not emanate from a prior source. Perhaps it was not even a physical light, but a unique phenomenon.
- 4 **God saw the light that it was good.**<sup>D</sup> As soon as the light emerged from the unformed universe, God evaluated it and distinguished between good and bad. **And God divided between the light and the darkness.** Once light was created and discerned as good, the next phase of its creation began, namely, the stage of separation, which established the light as a clearly defined entity. The act of discerning and separating between good and bad would continue till the end of time and manifest itself also in human history and civilization.
- 5 **God called the light day.** From the inception of the concepts of light and day, there was some measure of synonymy between them. Nevertheless, they are clearly and independently defined. Aside from day’s association with daylight, the day denotes a specific period of time. At this early stage of the Creation, with the formation of light comes the establishment of time. Until this point, the universe was in a raw state, completely unstructured and undefined; even space and time were not yet defined. These concepts came into being when God willed it. **And to the darkness He called night.** Darkness as well is removed from its previous status as a description of space alone and placed in a framework of time. The concepts of day and night as they appear in this verse express what the Sages called the order of time, in other words, the notions of before and after, relative concepts that did not apply when the earth was

**Bold text refers to direct translation while the regular text offers a fuller understanding of the narrative**

# בראשית

א בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ: והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך א  
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 ויקרא אלהים | לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי-ערב ויהי-בקר יום אחד: ה

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## רש"י

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## DISCUSSION

1:2 | **The earth was unformed and empty:** Some of the commentaries maintain that heaven and earth contained all the components of Creation from the outset in a chaotic jumble (see Ramban, verse 1; *Bereshit Rabba* 1:14). According to this opinion, the process of Creation essentially involved the arrangement of these various components, specifically the establishment of the location, status, and function of each and every entity.

1:3 | **And there was light:** If one assumes that the light was indeed physical, it can be described as radiating from all of existence. There

were no boundaries to it; it spread over the entire universe. Not for naught did the Sages teach that with this light one could see from one end of the world to the other (*Hagiga* 12a).

1:4 | **That it was good:** The process of appraisal and judgment will appear in the subsequent stages of Creation as well. It is a fundamental part not only of the book of Genesis but of the other books of the Bible too, and can even be considered a foundational principle of Judaism itself (see introduction to commentary on Leviticus). Consequently, the evaluative term "good" is among the first words of the Torah

and is the first abstract idea mentioned in the Torah.

The concept of good can refer to a positive evaluation on a number of levels. Earlier generations differentiated between the moral good, the opposite of which is evil; the practical good, or the effective; and the pleasant (see *Rambam's Introduction to Avot* 5; *Sefer Halkkharim* 3:35). The Bible also refers to the aesthetically beautiful as good. It seems that throughout the recounting of the process of Creation, the descriptive term "good" is used in all its various meanings.

# Parashat Noah

Explanations include scientific names of flora and fauna along with traditional rabbinic commentary and color pictures

## The Impending Flood

GENESIS 6:9–7:6

In addition to the sin of sexual promiscuity mentioned at the end of the previous section, theft was rampant among mankind as well. For this reason, humans, and along with them all animals living on dry land, were doomed to perish in a flood. Only a few representatives of each species would be saved from the calamity and form the nucleus of a new world.

- 9 **This is the legacy of Noah**, the story of his life in brief. **Noah was a righteous, wholehearted man in his generations**; in contrast to those surrounding him, **Noah walked with God**. Noah was connected to God, as he contemplated Him and lived with an awareness of the Divine. During this period, when mankind had not yet received God's commandments, one's relationship with God was not expressed in mandated actions. It is stated about Noah, as well as Hanokh before him and Abraham after him, that they walked with or before God (5:22, 17:1). This means that God was the subject of their lives, and they had a special relationship with Him.
- 10 **Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Yefet.**
- 11 After a brief description of Noah as a private individual, the focus returns to the history of the world and Noah's important role in the unfolding events. **The earth was corrupted before God, and the earth was filled with villainy**. The absence of law and order, described above in relation to men taking women as they chose (verse 2), was not limited to the sexual sphere. This corruption also found expression in the manner in which the powerful exerted control over the weak, as people began to steal and snatch property from one another without compunction. As a result, the very possibility of possession and ownership was eliminated.
- 12 **God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupted, as all flesh corrupted its path upon the earth**. People's lives in the environment of the time were apparently quiet and comfortable, with abundant food and water.<sup>1</sup> However, instead of being happy with their lot, the people exploited the abundance that was in easy reach by stealing from one another and refusing to recognize property laws and social conventions. Limits and boundaries did not exist for them.
- 13 **God said to Noah: The end of all flesh has come before Me**. According to My reckoning, the end of all living creatures has arrived, **as the earth is filled with villainy because of them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth**. I will destroy them together with the earth itself. However, you have been chosen to continue humanity.
- 14 Therefore, **make for you an ark of the relatively light gopher wood**;<sup>b</sup> **separate compartments shall you make the ark, and you shall coat it within and without with pitch**, a kind of tar from which asphalt is produced. The tar will serve as a water-proofing substance.



Cedar tree



Cypress tree

- 15 **And this is how you shall make it: Three hundred cubits shall be the length of the ark, fifty cubits its breadth, and thirty cubits its height**. This is a huge structure, of exceptional proportions even in comparison to structures built on land.
- 16 **You shall make a window for the ark**, to allow the entrance of light. **And to a cubit shall you complete it at the top**; the sides of the ark shall form a kind of trapezoid, with the roof of the ark one cubit long. **And the entrance of the ark you shall place in its side**, for entering and exiting. **Lower, second, and third stories you shall make it**; the ark shall have three floors.
- 17 **And behold, I am bringing the flood [mabbul]**. The term *mabbul* is commonly translated as flood, based on the context.<sup>2</sup> However, it is likely that the word actually means "judgment" or "sentence."<sup>3</sup> In other words, God is bringing a sentence of judgment in the form of **water upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which there is the breath of life, from under the heavens**. In those waters, **everything that is on the earth, everything that is generally found on dry land, shall perish**.
- 18 **But at this juncture I will keep My covenant with you**, which will be confirmed and fulfilled at a later point (see 9:9–11). **You shall come to the ark: you, and your sons, and your wife, and your sons' wives with you**.

### BACKGROUND

6:14 | **Gopher wood:** Some identify the gopher tree with the cypress, *Cupressus*, whose wood

is water-resistant and suitable for shipbuilding. Others suggest that it is the cedar tree (Onkelos).

The Septuagint translation renders gopher as squared and planed.

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אֱלֹהִים תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ׃  
וַיֹּולֵד נֹחַ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־חָם וְאֶת־יֶפֶת׃ וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים  
וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס׃ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחַתָּה כִּי־הִשְׁחִית כָּל־  
בָּשָׂר אֶת־דַּרְכּוֹ עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃  
לִפְנֵי כִּי־מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מִשְׁחִיתֶם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ׃ עֲשֵׂה לְךָ  
תֵּבַת עֲצֵי־גֹפֶר קַנִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וְכִפַּרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר׃ וְזֶה  
אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אַמָּה אֹרֶךְ הַתֵּבָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה רָחְבָּהּ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים  
אַמָּה קוֹמָתָהּ׃ צֹהַר וַתַּעֲשֶׂה לַתֵּבָה וְאֶל־אַמָּה תִּכְלְנָה מִלְּמַעַלָּה וּפִתַח הַתֵּבָה  
בְּצַדָּהּ תִּשִׂים תַּחְתִּים שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂה׃ וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵבִיא אֶת־הַמָּבּוּל מִיַּם  
עַל־הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחַת כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם כָּל אֲשֶׁר־בָּאָרֶץ  
יָגוּעַ׃ וְהִקְמוֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּךָ וּבֵאתָ אֵל־הַתֵּבָה אִתָּהּ וּבְנִיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וְנִשְׂיֹ-

## רשי

שָׁלַח יְרִיחַ רִיחַ רַע שָׁל זָפֵת, חָבֵל בָּחוּן מִפְּנֵי חֹזֶק הַמַּיִם וְזָפֵתָה מִפְּנֵי וּמִחוּץ׃

טו צֹהַר יֵשׁ חוֹמָרִים חֲלוּן, וְיֵשׁ חוֹמָרִים חָבֵן טוֹבָה הַמְחִירָה לָהֶם, וְאֵל אַמָּה תִּכְלְנָה מִלְּמַעַלָּה, כְּסוּיָה מְקַשֶׁעַ וְעוֹלָה עַד שֶׁהוּא קָנָה מִלְּמַעַלָּה וְעוֹמֵד עַל חֲמֵה, כְּדִי שְׂחוּבֵי הַמַּיִם לִמְטָה מִפָּחוּן וּמִכָּחוּן, בְּצַדָּהּ תִּשִׂים, שָׁלַח יִפְלֹוּ אֲשֵׁמִים בָּהּ, תַּחְתִּים שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים, שֶׁלֹּשׁ עֲלוֹתִים ז' עַל גַּב ז', עֲלוֹתִים לְאֶדָם חֲמֵנְעִיִים לְמַדּוּר הַבְּהֵמוֹת תַּחְתִּים לְזָבֵל׃

יז וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵבִיא, הִנְנִי מוּכָן לְהִסָּס עִם חוֹתֶם אֲזַדְוִנוּ כְּבָר: "מֵה חֲנוּשׁ כִּי תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ" (וַהֲלֹם ת, ה) מִבּוּל, שֶׁבִּלְיַת חֵת הַכַּל, שֶׁבִּלְיַת חֵת הַכַּל, שְׁחוּבִיל חֵת הַכַּל מִן הַצִּוָּה לְנִמְנוֹן, וְזֶהוּ שֶׁתִּרְגַּם חוֹנְקֵלוֹס: "טוֹפְנִיחַ", שֶׁהֵעִף חֵת הַכַּל וְהִנְיָחֵם לְבִבֵל שֶׁהוּא עֲנֻקָה, לְכָךְ נִקְרָאת שְׁעָנֵד, שֶׁכָּל מֵרַע מִבּוּל נִעְנֵדוּ לְשָׁם׃

יח וְהִקְמוֹתִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי, בְּרִית הִיא עֲרִיךְ עַל הַפְּרוֹת שָׁלַח יִרְקָנוּ וְיַעֲפִשׁוּ, וְשָׁלַח יִרְקָנוּ וְיַעֲפִשׁוּ דָשִׁים שְׂבֻדוֹ: אִתָּהּ וּבְנִיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ, הַחֲנִיטִים לְבָד וְהִנְיָחֵם לְבָד, מִכָּחוּן שְׂנֵאֲרָחוּ בְּתַשְׁמִיט הַמַּטָּה׃

יב כִּי הִשְׁחִית כָּל בָּשָׂר, חֲסִפּוֹ בְּהֵמָה חַיָּה וְעוֹר נִקְרָחוּ לְשִׁחְיוֹן מִיָּנוּן׃

יג קָן כָּל בָּשָׂר, כָּל מְקוֹם שֶׁחָתָה מוֹצֵחַ זְנוּת, חֲנִקְרָלְמוֹסִיחַ בָּחָה לְעוֹלָם וְהוֹצֵרָת טוֹכִים וְרַעִים: כִּי מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס, לֹא נִחְתָּם גִּזְרֵי דִינָם חָלָף עַל הַגּוֹל: אֶת הָאָרֶץ, כְּמוֹ מִן הַחֲרָף, וְדוּמָה לוֹ: "כִּי־חִתִּי חֵת הָעִיר" (שְׁמוֹת ט, טו) מִן הָעִיר, "חֵת הַחֲרָף" (מַלְאכִים ח' טו, טז) מִן רְגֵלוֹ, קָבַר חֲחֵה, "חֵת הַחֲרָף", עִם הַחֲרָף, שֶׁחַף שֶׁלֹּשָׁה טַפְחִים שֶׁל עֵמֶק הַמְּחֻדָּשָׁה נִמְחוּ וְנִשְׁטַפְּשׁוּ׃

יד עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תֵּבַת, הַרְבֵּה כּוֹחַ וְהִצֵּלָה לְפָנֶיךָ, וְלָמָּה הַטְּרִיחוּ בְּכֶנֶן זֶה? כְּדִי שִׁיְרָחוּהוּ חֲנִשֵׁי דוֹר הַמִּבּוּל עֵסוּק בְּהַ מַחֵה וְעֹשֵׂרִים עֲנֵה וְשִׁחְלוּן חוֹתוֹ: מֵה זֹאת לְךָ וְהוּא חוֹמֵר לָהֶם: עֲתֵד הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְהִבְיֹחַ מִבּוּל לְעוֹלָם, חוֹלֵי יָשׁוּב: עֲצִי יָפָר, כִּךְ שְׁמוֹ, וְלָמָּה מִמִּין זֶה? עַל שֶׁם צְרִיתִי שְׁעָנֵד עֲלֵיהֶם לְמַחֹזֵת נוֹ: קַנִּים, מְדוּרִים מְדוּרִים לְכָל בְּהֵמָה וְחַיָּה: בַּכֹּפֶר, זָפֵת בִּלְשׁוֹן חֲרָמִי, וּמִנְעוּן בְּתַלְמוּד 'כְּכָרָח', תִּבְרַתוֹ שֶׁל מִשָּׁה, עַל יְדֵי שְׁהוֹ הַמַּיִם תִּשִׂים, דִּיהַ בְּרָמֵר מִכְּפִטִּים וְזָפֵת מִכְּחוּן, וְעוֹד כְּדִי

ט אֱלֹהִים תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק, הוֹחִיל וְהוֹפְרִיו סִפְרָ בְּשִׁכְחוֹ שְׁנִחְמַר: "זָכַר צַדִּיק לְכִבְדָּהּ" (מְשִׁלִּי יז), דָּבַר חֲחֵה, לְמִדְרָךְ שֶׁקָּרָה תּוֹלְדוֹתֵיהֶם שֶׁל צְדִיקִים מִעֲנָשִׁים טוֹכִים: בְּדֹרֹתָיו, יֵשׁ מְדוּבָרֵינוּ דוֹקָשִׁים חוֹתוֹ לְשִׁבָּה: כָּל שְׂכָן חָלוּ הִיא בְּדוֹר צְדִיקִים הִיא צְדִיק וְיָחַד, וְיֵשׁ שְׂדוּקָשִׁים חוֹתוֹ לְגַנְחֵי: לְמִי דוֹר הִיא צְדִיק, וְחָלוּ הִיא בְּדוֹרֵי שֶׁל חֲבֵרָה שֶׁלֹּא הִיא נִחְשָׁב לְכָלוֹס: אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ נָח, וְהַבְּרָכָה הוּא חוֹמֵר: "חֲשֵׁר הַתְּהַלְכֵתִי לְפָנֶיךָ" (וְהִלֵּךְ כֵּה, טז) עַד הִיא עֲרִיךְ סַעַד לְתַמְכוּ, חָבֵל חֲבֵרָה הִיא מִתְחַזֵּק וְמִהֲלָךְ בְּרָחוּ מִחֲלוֹ: הִתְהַלֵּךְ, לְשׁוֹן עֲבָר, וְהוּא שְׁמוֹנָה שֶׁל לְמִי בִּלְשׁוֹן כְּבֵד, מִשְׁמָשֵׁת לְהִפָּךְ וְלִשְׁעָבֵד בִּלְשׁוֹן חֲחֵד: "חִיּוֹם הַתְּהַלֵּךְ" (וְהִלֵּךְ י, יז) לְהִפָּךְ, "הַתְּהַלֵּךְ נֹחַ" לְשְׁעָבֵד: "הַתְּהַלֵּךְ עֲבָד עֲבָדֶיךָ" (שְׁמוֹלִים ח' יב, יט) לְהִפָּךְ, "יִבְחָ וְהַתְּהַלֵּךְ חָל הַבֵּית הַזֶּה" (מַלְאכִים ח' י, טז) לְשׁוֹן עֲבָר, חָלָף שְׁהִיָּו שְׂבֻדָּשׁוֹ וְהוֹפְכוֹ לְהִפָּךְ׃

יז וְהִשְׁחִית, לְשׁוֹן עֲרִיכָה וְעִבּוּדָה זְרָה, כְּמוֹ: "כִּי תִשְׁחִיתוּן" (דְּבָרִים ז, טז), "כִּי הִשְׁחִית כָּל בָּשָׂר" (וְהִלֵּךְ פְּסוּחַ יב): וְהִמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס, גֵּבֵל׃



Title and brief summary give an overview to the entire narrative

## Parashat Beshalah



### The Beginning of the Journey in the Wilderness

EXODUS 13:17–22

to Joseph, that his bones would be returned from Egypt.

Certain commandments were enumerated before and after the account of the plague of the firstborn and the exodus from Egypt, in order to imprint the memory of these great events on the consciousness of the Jewish people for all time. The Torah now returns to the story of the children of Israel, describing the beginning of their journey into the wilderness. Here, the people's first campsites are briefly enumerated, as well as certain matters concerning their general route and manner of travel. The Torah also notes the fulfillment of the promise made

- 17** It was, in Pharaoh's sending forth the people, that God did not guide them via the land of the Philistines, along the Mediterranean coast, although it was near, for God said: Lest the people reconsider when they see war. Although the Philistines were not a large nation, they were militarily powerful. Passing through their land risked a war which might have caused the Israelites to reverse course and return to Egypt.
- 18** God led the people circuitously, via the wilderness of the Red Sea. Instead of turning northward, toward the Mediterranean coastline, God led them southeast. And the children of Israel came up armed from the land of Egypt, as they assumed that they would eventually be forced to fight.<sup>2</sup> God decided that they were not yet ready to stand in battle, and He therefore guided them on a path that would avoid direct confrontation with the Philistines.
- 19** Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he, Joseph, had administered an oath to the children of Israel, the children of Jacob,<sup>3</sup> or the Israelites in general, saying: God will remember and redeem you; and when this occurs, I request that
- you shall bring my bones up from here, from Egypt, with you.
- 20** They, the Israelites, traveled from a place called Sukot; alternatively, from a place where there were booths [*sukkot*], and they encamped in Etam, at the edge of the wilderness. Until this point, the Israelites traveled in fertile areas that were part of Egypt or Goshen. Now, they begin to travel in uninhabited areas.
- 21** So that they could navigate the desert, an angel of the Lord<sup>D</sup> was going before them by day in a pillar of cloud to guide them on the way. They followed the cloud, which represented the glory of God. And by night He would go with them in a pillar of fire to illuminate for them, to go day and night. It is unclear whether the Israelites actually traveled by night. In any event, the pillar of fire gave them the ability to do so.<sup>4</sup>
- 22** The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night would not move from before the people. The Israelites did not know where they were traveling; these two pillars represented God's guiding hand in the wilderness.

### The Israelites at the Red Sea

EXODUS 14:1–31

When God struck Egypt with the plagues, the Israelites remained on the periphery. They stayed in their dwellings, and they did not witness with their own eyes the wonders that Moses performed in God's name. Only at the Red Sea do Israel witness these miraculous events to their full dramatic extent. Furthermore, unlike the plagues that descended on Egypt within their borders, the occurrences described here come with sudden, quick intensity. This is also a defining moment for Moses in his

capacity as leader and redeemer in the eyes of the people.

- 14** **1** The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:
- 2** Speak to the children of Israel, that they return in the direction of Egypt and encamp before Pi HaHiroth,<sup>6</sup> a famous place
- at the time. The name Pi is Egyptian. It is located between Migdol and the Red Sea, before the pagan god Baal Tzefon.<sup>BD</sup> Opposite it you shall encamp, by the sea. On their way to

#### DISCUSSION

13:21 | **The Lord:** God appears in the world by way of angels or messengers (see Rashi; Rashbam; Ramban; *Hizkuni*; *Bekhor Shor* 14:19). The verse below (14:19) describes the

movements of this pillar, and there it is referred to as an angel.

14:2 | **Baal Tzefon:** This may be a reference to Set, Egyptian god of the desert, darkness, and

destruction. Over the course of many generations the Egyptians did not know how to relate to the God of Israel, and where to place Him within their pantheon. They saw Him as a local

פרשת  
בשלח

וַיְהִי בִשְׁלַח פְּרַעְיָה אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָחַם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא  
 כִּי וְאָמַר אֱלֹהִים פֶּן־יִנָּחַם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלַּחְמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרַיִם: וַיֹּסֵב אֱלֹהִים ו  
 אֶת־הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף וַחֲמִשִּׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַיִּקַּח  
 מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי הִשְׁבַּע הַשָּׁבִיעַ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פֶּקֶד  
 יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֵעֲלִיתֶם אֶת־עֲצָמוֹתַי מִזֶּה אֶתְכֶם: וַיִּסְעוּ מִסֹּפֶת וַיַּחֲנוּ  
 בְּאֶתְם בְּקֶצֶה הַמִּדְבָּר: וַיְהוּה הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ  
 וְלַיְלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהַאֲדִיר לָהֶם לַלַּיְתָּה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה: לֹא־יִמָּישׁ עַמּוּד הָעָנָן יוֹמָם  
 וְעַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ לַיְלָה לִפְנֵי הָעָם:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׁבוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ לִפְנֵי פִי הַחִירֹת

Linguistic explanations of names, places and phrases provide historical context and offer the reader a broad worldview

רש"י

כמו להרחיקם, חף פאן להנחותם על ידי שליח. ומי הוא השליח? עמוד הענן והקדוש ברוך הוא כבודו מולכו לכניהם, ומכל מקום חת עמוד הענן הכין להנחותם על ידו, שהי על ידי עמוד הענן הם הולכים עמוד הענן חינו לחזרה חלף להודותם הדקדק:

כב | לא ימיש. הקדוש ברוך הוא חת עמוד הענן יומם ועמוד האש לילה, מגיד שעמוד הענן משלים לעמוד האש ועמוד האש משלים לעמוד הענן, שעד שלא יסקע זה עולה זה:

דבר חכם, ו'חמשים', מחמשים, אחד מחמשה יחזו ו'חמשה' חלקים מיתו בשלשית ומי חפלה:

יט | השבע השביעי. השביעם שאפיעו לכניהם. ולמה לא השביע לבניו שאזוהו לחזן בענן מיד כמו שהשביע יעקוב? חמר יוסף. חני שליט הייתי במגרים והיה ספק בדי לעשות חבל עו לא יעזוב מגרים לעשות. לכך השביעם לקשוחלו ויחזו משם שאזוהו: והעליתם את עצמותי מזה אתכם. לחזיו השביע כן למדנו שאף עגמות כל השבטים העלו עמהם, שנאמר 'אתכם':

ו | ויהי בשלח פרעה. ולא נחם. נהגם, כמו: 'לך נחה חת העם' (להלן לב, לד). 'בההולךך מנחה אתך' (משלי ו, כב): כי קרוב הוא. ונח לשוב בחזיתו הדקדק למגרים ומדקדי חזרה יש הדקה בראתם מלחמה. כגון מלחמת 'וידד העמלקי והקנעני' וגו' (במדבר יד, מה). חס הלבן דרך ישר היו חוזרים מה חס פשהקיסם דרך מערקם חמרי: 'נתנה ראש ונשובה מנג'ימה' (סם פסוק ד) חס הולכים בפשטרה על חת כמה וכמה: פן ינחם. יחשבו מחסכה על שיחזו ויתנו לב לשוב:

פרק יד  
 ב | וישבו. לחזויהם, לצד מגרים היו מקדבין כל יום השלישי, כדי להטעות חת פרעה שיחמר תועים הם בדקדק, כמו שנאמר: 'חמרי פרעה לבני יאחזל' וגו' (להלן פסוק ג). ויחזו לפני פי החירות. היא פיתוס, ועכשו נקראת 'פי

כ | ויסעו מספת. ביום השני, שהי בראשון פאז מרעמסם לסקות (לעיל יב, לו):

כא | לנחתם הדרך. נקוד פתח, שהיא כמו להנחותם, כמו: 'לדחוקם בדקדק חשר תלכו בה' (דברים ח, לג) שהיא

יח | ויסב. הסבס מן הדקדק הפשוטה לדקדק העקומה. ים סוף. כמו לים סוף. יסוף. היא לשון חסם אגלים בו הניס, וכן: 'ויסבס פסוף' (לעיל ב, ג). 'הנה וסוף קמלו' (שעיה יג, י). ו'חמשים'. חין 'חמשים' חלף מ'חמשים' וכן היא חומר: 'וחתם תעבדו חמשים' (ויחזע ח, יד). וכן תרגם חוקקלוס 'מזקרו', כמו: 'ו'קיק חת חניכיו' (בראשית יד, יד) 'ו'קרו':

BACKGROUND

**14:2 | Pi HaHiro:** Pi means temple in Egyptian and appears in names of other Egyptian places, such as Pitom and Pi Beset. It is possible that Hirot is a reference to Hathor, an Egyptian goddess, or to Hirot, a Syrian goddess attested to in Syrian and Egyptian inscriptions, whom the Egyptians worshipped. Despite the theory that

Pi HaHiro refers to the location of a temple, the location is not known today.  
 A different view suggests that the name Pi HaHiro is of Semitic origin and signifies a canal or gulf (the word *khiritu* means canal in Ugaritic and Akkadian). Accordingly, this name could refer to two possible areas: The city known as Suez

(Jebel Attaka), on the coast of the Gulf of Suez, a branch of the Red Sea, or near the source of one of the branches of the Nile, perhaps the eastern (Pelusian) branch, called Shihor (Isaiah 23:3) after the Egyptian god Hor.  
**Baal Tzefon:** Baal Tzefon is the name of a Canaanite god mentioned in an Egyptian contract

Canaan, the Israelites did not need to cross the Red Sea. From the eastern bank of the Nile, their way was open toward the Land of Israel, even if the Red Sea once extended further north than it does today. Still, God instructed Moses to turn from their route and camp by the sea.



Possible locations of Sukot, Migdol, and Baal Tzefon

- 3 **Pharaoh will then say of the children of Israel: They are astray in the land.** They have lost their way, and are doubling back. **The wilderness has closed in on them,** allowing them to travel no further.
- 4 **I will harden Pharaoh's heart.** After the plagues, the ruin, and the destruction inflicted upon Egypt, Pharaoh's heart will be hardened one last time, **and he will pursue them; and I will be exalted through Pharaoh, and through his entire army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord,** for something will occur now more miraculous than the plagues of Egypt. **And they, the Israelites, did so.**
- 5 Meanwhile, **it was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled.**<sup>d</sup> The three days originally agreed upon (see 8:23–24) had passed, and the Israelites did not seem bound for any particular destination. **The heart of Pharaoh and his servants was transformed with regard to the people, and they said: What is this that we have done, that we have sent Israel from our servitude?** This nation of slaves filled an important

economic function for us, and was part of our way of life. We did not mean to set them free, only to allow them a respite.

- 6 **He harnessed his chariot.** Pharaoh commanded that his horses be harnessed to his personal chariot. **And he took his people, his soldiers, with him.**
- 7 **He took six hundred select chariots,** the best he had. These were the elite forces of Egypt, whose size is comparable to that of a modern armored division. **And he took as well all the chariots of Egypt; chariots played a dominant role in Egypt's military. And there were auxiliaries with all of them.**<sup>d</sup> In addition to the driver, who held the reins, and the warrior, who held a weapon, usually a bow, as seen in ancient Egyptian drawings, Pharaoh added an officer over each chariot.



Mural of Egyptian warriors on chariots laying siege, found in Rameses II's temple in Thebes, thirteenth century BCE

- 8 **The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; the children of Israel went out with a high hand,** not as escapees.
- 9 **Egypt pursued them; all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh and his horsemen and his army caught up with them encamped by the sea, by Pi HaHiro, before Baal Tzefon.**
- 10 **Pharaoh approached the Israelite encampment; the children of Israel lifted their eyes and behold, the forces of the**

## DISCUSSION

deity associated only with Israel, and despite the plagues, they retained their pagan beliefs. The encampment of the Israelites before Baal Tzefon was likely to suggest to Pharaoh that the Israelites worshipped a god of desolation and ruin, and that this cruel, capricious god might perhaps abandon them in favor of the Egyptians (see *Mekhilta*).

14:5 | **It was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled:** Pharaoh almost certainly

sent men to accompany the Israelites, either officially or as undercover spies, in order to gather information about their activities. He therefore learned that the people did not go out like slaves on a temporary break from labor, but as victorious free men (see *Mekhilta*).

14:7 | **And there were auxiliaries with all of them:** The ancient Egyptians harnessed their horses by the neck, as they had not yet developed methods of harnessing the horse's body,

which would have allowed them to fully benefit from the horse's strength. The addition of an auxiliary to the chariot would slow it considerably, and was not necessarily appropriate for a military maneuver. Still, the additional soldier would make the chariot appear more imposing. This suggests that Pharaoh did not intend to engage the Israelites in open battle. Rather, he wished to frighten the Israelites into returning, and in this regard he nearly succeeded.