



Lizechus refuah shleimah for my dear niece
Hadassa bas Sarah Rivka, neira ya'ir
hazekuka lirachamim rabim

[Video: "Don't Be a Locust" <https://www.torahanytime.com/#/lectures?v=277295>]

The Torah begins with the words, "*Bereishis bara Elokim*" – the events of creation.

Rabi Yitzchak questions the selection of "*Bereishis*." He proposes that it would have been more appropriate to introduce the Torah with the first of the *mitzvos*. The very first mitzva is the mitzva of *kiddush hachodesh*.

It is clear from Rabi Yitzchak's question that he believed it is inappropriate to begin the Torah with the process of creation. Why is this improper?

Is there something wrong with beginning from the "beginning?"

Rav Chaim Stein¹ explained, there is a reason why the Torah is called "Torah."²

The word "Torah" means to teach, to instruct. Indeed, arranging the events chronologically is more orderly, but nothing is learned from the arrangement.

Each and every word in the Torah is designed to teach us a valuable lesson.

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky³ and Rav Moshe Schneider⁴ were enjoying a conversation with one another. Rav Abramsky said to Rav Schneider, "I have a *geshmake ma'aseh* to tell you." Rav Schneider replied, "I would welcome hearing *divrei* Torah from you. I am not interested in stories. Rav Abramsky replied, "But Rav Schneider, the whole Torah is filled with *maasos*? What of the *maasos* of our Avos?" Rav Schneider responded, "These are not *maasos*. Each one of those *maasos* is filled with instructions on how a yid is to conduct himself."⁵

Rav Stein showed how this principle is evident in the answer of Rabi Yitzchak.

The reason for beginning the Torah with the story of creation is because contained within Bereishis is the mastery of the Creator over His creation. The Torah reveals, "*Bereishis bara Elokim es hashamayim vi'es ha'aretz*" – In the beginning Elokim created the *shamayim* and the *aretz*. The *aretz* belongs to Hashem for he created it. Hashem has complete control over the *aretz*. And so, He may grant sovereignty over the land to the one He sees fit. Hashem appointed the Canaanites as "guardians" over Eretz Yisrael. When the time was ripe, Hashem removed it from their possession and granted the land to the Bnei Yisrael.

The Torah did not begin with the events of Bereishis in order for the events to be arranged in chronological order. It began with Bereishis to teach us a valuable lesson. Our connection to Eretz

¹ Rosh Yeshiva, Telshe Cleveland

² Devarim 33:4 – *Torah tziva lanu Moshe*

³ Head of the London Beis Din

⁴ Rosh Yeshiva, Toras Emes-London

⁵ Addition of the author

Yisrael is due to a "*p'sak halacha*" from the Torah. The Torah instructs us that the Creator has mastery over what He has created. The true owner of a land is the one who the Creator has granted it to. (It is sad to see the results of those who have failed to learn this lesson, as more and more of our brethren have been losing their connection to Eretz Yisrael).⁶

This lesson occupies a prominent position in discussing the relationship with Pharaoh.

After being stricken with the makos, Pharaoh was quite ready to rid himself of these troubles. He was ready to "let the Jews go."

Hashem wasn't finished with Pharaoh. Hashem had more to reveal. And so, Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart.

This was unprecedented. Hashem granted man free will. Pharaoh was effectively blocked from doing teshuva. How could Hashem take away Pharaoh's *bechira*?

The early commentators deal with this question. The answer provided by the Seforno is that Hashem did not take away Pharaoh's *bechira*. In actuality, Hashem restored his *bechira*. The effect of the makos was so strong that Pharaoh did not have the strength to resist. If he would free the Jews, it would be because he was forced to do so. Hashem infused Pharaoh with the strength necessary for him to maintain his stubborn resistance.

It is evident from the commentator's efforts towards answering this question, that they consider it a difficulty that Hashem would go against his natural order by stripping Pharaoh of his *bechira*.

Rav Stein questions this. The entire narrative of *yetzias Mitzrayim* is filled with the acts of Hashem suspending the forces of nature. In light of those events, why is it difficult to understand one more "deviation" from the natural order? Hashem wished to reveal his "mighty hand" in Mitzrayim. In order to do that, Hashem caused a supernatural event to occur... the suspension of Pharaoh's *bechira*.

The Rosh Yeshiva concluded, had Hashem actually taken away Pharaoh's freedom of choice, there would be no lesson contained within those words for us. We have been given *bechira*. We require "teachings" on how to conduct ourselves and how to deal with our choices. The suspension of *bechira* contains no lessons for us.

In order for the words "*Vayechazek Hashem es lev Pharaoh*" to be considered "Torah", it must be that on some level, Pharaoh was still capable of making a choice.

⁶ The Rosh Yeshiva said this in 1987