

חומש קורן  
THE KOREN HŪMASH

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY  
RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

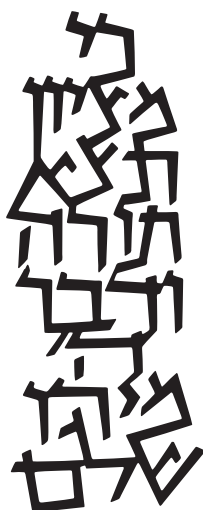




THE CONRAD MORRIS EDITION

חומש קורן

THE KOREN HUMASH



TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks זצ"ל

KOREN PUBLISHERS JERUSALEM

The Koren Humash

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”ואברוך ואגדלה שמך והיה ברכה”

*In loving memory of*

*Conrad Morris*

שמואל משה בן ישראל וביילה ע”ה

*Who was always ready to share his blessings and his advice  
with family, friends and all who came knocking at his door.*

*His deep love for Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael  
inspired him to work tirelessly on behalf of his people,  
both in Israel and in England.*

*Dedicated by his family*



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## BERESHIT/GENESIS

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וידא	107 · 1419	Vayera
חיי שרה	139 · 1423	Hayei Sara
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עשרת הדיברות בטעם תחתון - ואתחנן	1639	The Ten Commandments – Vaethanan
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INTRODUCTION BY  
CHIEF RABBI SIR EPHRAIM MIRVIS

*“Vayelekh Moshe... Moshe departed and spoke these words to all Israel”* (Deut. 31:1).

The Noam Megadim (Rabbi Eliezer HaLevi Horowitz, nineteenth century, Lviv) explains: Moshe departed from this world, and even beyond his physical life he continues to speak the words of Torah to the Jewish people.

So too, with my illustrious predecessor, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *zt”l*. After his untimely passing, his words of Torah continue to educate, guide and inspire numerous people around the globe. His extraordinary legacy will be made all the more impactful by the publication of this monumental *Koren Humash* with Rabbi Sacks’ translation and commentary. On these pages, he presents our Torah heritage in all its immeasurable beauty, conveyed with his inimitable profundity and incisive clarity.

Rabbi Sacks’ Hebrew name was Yaakov. Just as his biblical namesake is remembered for his distinctive voice – *hakol kol Yaakov*, “the voice is the voice of Yaakov” (Gen. 27:22) – so too, as is evident in this significant publication, the distinctive voice of Rabbi Sacks – a voice of faith, hope and love – will continue to be powerfully heard for generations to come.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the fascinating way the Torah describes the descendants of Noah. *“Eleh toledot Noah”* – these are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.” Only afterwards are the names of his children enumerated, “Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Yefet” (Gen. 6:9–10). Rashi offers two possible explanations for the chosen order. The first is “the memory of a righteous person is for a blessing.” When mentioning the name of an upright individual, we extol the virtues of his or her character. Having mentioned Noah’s name, the Torah does justice to his memory by recalling his greatness.

In his second explanation, Rashi states that the primary “generations” of a person are the good deeds that he or she has performed. In the same way that one can give birth to physical generations, so, too, it is within the grasp of every single individual to produce “generations” through

the hearts we touch and the minds we mould. Thus, in addition to the physical descendants Noah bore, he immortalised himself through his impactful legacy, which continues to inspire our world to this day.

The voice of Rabbi Lord Sacks will continue to live on in the generations to come. And these countless “*toledot*” will live lives of greater meaning and fulfilment because of the inspirational teachings imparted on these pages.

I applaud Matthew Miller and Koren Publishers Jerusalem, for yet another monumental work of the great scholarship and expertise with which Koren has become synonymous.

May this Ḣumash inspire generations *lehagdil Torah u’lehaadirah* – to magnify Torah and bring glory to its name.

Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE  
London, Elul 5785

## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

### THE KOREN H̄UMASH

The publication of the new *Koren H̄umash* with commentary by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a time of celebration, but one that is bittersweet. Its publication close to his fifth *yahrzeit* is a reminder that his living presence is no longer with us, but also that his Torah lives on and continues to grow in influence. Rabbi Sacks' enthusiasm, joyful scholarship, erudition, and penetrating insight permeated all his writings, conveying to us and to future generations that our Torah is a limitless source of wisdom, faith, and moral clarity. We were well into this ambitious endeavor when he went into hospital, from which he fully expected to return.

I cannot write a preface for him; no one can. But his many books on *H̄umash* – the *Covenant & Conversation* series, and those exploring leadership, ethics, spirituality, life-changing ideas, and belief – speak for themselves. These works, alongside his astonishing range of books, articles, and lectures – all of which have marshalled to complete Rabbi Sacks' commentary – reveal the depth, breadth, and relevance of the Torah's messages for the current age. The Torah is, as the Rabbis teach, “betrothed” to the Jewish people; yet it also contains the blueprint for a healthy and holy society that has universal relevance. Rabbi Sacks was our guide through the bewildering thickets of modernity, our guide to a fresh and refreshing engagement with Torah, and we gratefully follow the path he has charted for us.

✧ In the best of circumstances, the creation of this *H̄umash* would be a collaboration of many. It is my privilege to thank them.

The British Edition of *The Koren Humash* has been sponsored by the family of the late Conrad Morris, himself a visionary and leader of the community. We thank Mrs. Ruth Morris, Liz Pushett, Sara Jo Ben Zvi, and David Morris of London and Jerusalem for their partnership and friendship. With continual encouragement, they shared the vision that animated both Rabbi Sacks and Koren, and enabled us to create this work you hold in your hands. For my colleagues at Koren, we thank you; for the many future generations who will read and use this *H̄umash* weekly, we are forever in your debt.

◀ We thank

We thank the family of Rabbi Sacks, Lady Elaine Sacks and her children Joshua, Dina, and Gila, for their encouragement and commitment, particularly after his passing. The leadership of The Rabbi Sacks Legacy, its chief executive, and my friends, Joanna Benarroch and Alan Sacks, provided encouragement during the awful days of 2020 and 2021, when we felt leaderless, and they continue to be valued and cherished partners.

Thank you to Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis for his support and encouragement in helping us produce this volume.

Jessica Sacks' scholarship and erudition is not simply hereditary but unique to her, and she engaged with her uncle's writings with compassion and dedication. Rabbi Reuven Ziegler oversaw the entire project, and Dayan Ivan Binstock of the London Beth Din reviewed the *Humash*.

Management of the editorial side was led by Gila Chitiz and Ashirah Firszt, and the production and design side was led by Rabbi Avishai Magence and Caryn Meltz; the typography was designed by Esther Be'er and Tomi Mager. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Joel B. Wolowelsky for the initial commentary drafts, Rabbi Julian Sinclair, Yaffa Aranoff, Dr. Yoel Finkelman, and Tani Bednarsh for their review and comments, Debbie Ismailoff and Ita Olesker for copyediting, Rabbi Yedidya Naveh for authoring and translating the haftara commentary, Rabbi Yinon Chen, Tali Simon, Doron Chitiz, Ruth Pepperman, and Avichai Gamdani for proofreading, Eliyahu Misgav for cover design, and Gila Chitiz, Tani Bednarsh, and Elchanan Spitz for creating a database of books, essays, articles, and broadcasts of Rabbi Sacks.

✎ Rabbi Sacks taught: "In Judaism we not only learn to live; we live to learn. In study, we make Torah real in the mind so that we can make it actual in the world." We pray that this masterful commentary on the Torah will allow countless people to ascend to ever greater heights in *living* and *learning*, to internalise the Torah's relevance to the individual and to society, and to help heal our fractured world.

Matthew Miller, Publisher  
Jerusalem, Tishrei 5786 (October 2025)



## PREFACE TO THE MINHAG ANGLIA EDITION

Nearly a century ago, the then Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Dr J. H. Hertz, published the first volume of his commentary on the Ḥumash. It was to become the staple text for English-speaking communities around the world. As well as providing a clear exposition of the text, Hertz determined “not to lose sight of the allegorical teaching and larger meaning of the Scriptural narrative; of its application to the everyday problems of human existence; as well as of its eternal power in the life of Israel and humanity” (preface to the first edition, May 1929).

The late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks had similar aspirations in penning his masterly essays in his *Covenant and Conversation* series. He had planned a new edition of Ḥumash. Following his fresh translation, he had intended to produce new commentary, but sadly, his premature death deprived us of that treasure. We are deeply indebted to Matthew Miller and the team at Koren Publishers for skillfully drawing out the essence of Rabbi Sacks’ words from his many writings in constructing a commentary around the Torah text. The inclusion of source references at the end of the volume allows the interested reader to follow up a more complete treatment of the topics in Rabbi Sacks’ original essays.

It is fitting that the United Kingdom has its own edition of this Ḥumash following the tradition of the Hertz Ḥumash. We are deeply grateful to David and Karine Morris for sponsoring this publication, thereby facilitating the preservation of the customs of the Anglo-Jewish community.

There are three areas in which this Minhag Anglia edition differs from its American counterpart: some *aliya* breaks, the use of *taam elyon* in the *Aseret HaDibrot*, and some *haftarot*.

Prior to 1568, printed Ḥumashim didn’t contain any indications for the seven *hafsakot*, or breaks, in a *parasha*. Subsequent editions start to include breaks but there is much disparity between them. From 1602, there is more convergence, but differences still remain. (See the detailed treatment of this topic in I. Katzenelenbogen, *Sinai* vol. 119, p. 224, 1997.)

The edition of Wolf Heidenheim (Rodelheim, 1818–1821) became the standard for many Ashkenazic communities. Although other Ḥumashim with different breaks were in use in England in the nineteenth century, after Nathan Adler became Chief Rabbi in 1845 he gave his approbation

to an edition of the Rodelheim Ḥumash with English translation. When Chief Rabbi Hertz produced his Ḥumash, starting in 1929, he followed the breaks in the Heidenheim-Adler Ḥumash. This Minhag Anglia edition of the Koren Ḥumash includes the same breaks. It should be stressed that the differences are very minor and occur mainly in the first chapter of *Bereshit*.

It is well known that there are two sets of *taamim* for the *Aseret HaDibrot*, both for Parashat Yitro and for Parashat Vaethanan. Prof Mordechai Breuer has shown that these emanate from two masoretic schools. The Babylonian Masorites enumerated the *Dibrot* into twelve verses with *taam tahton*. The Tiberian Masorites grouped the passage into ten units with *taam elyon*. (See “Dividing the Decalogue into Verses or Commandments,” in *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition*, B. Z. Segal ed., Jerusalem, 1990, pp. 291–330.) Early manuscripts and printed bibles put both sets of *taamim* on the words, making it difficult for the *baal korei* to know precisely the correct *taam*. Modern Ḥumashim have made it easier by putting just one set of *taamim* on the words.

Customs differ across communities. Many use *taam tahton* on the Shabbatot of Yitro and Vaethanan and reserve *taam elyon* for Shavuot. The custom in the United Synagogue, in consonance with other Ashkenazic communities, is to use *taam elyon* for all public readings (S. Geiger, *Divrei Kehilot*, p. 112; second view in *Biur Halakha* 494). Thus, this edition of the Koren Ḥumash has *taam elyon* in the main body of the text, with *taam tahton* printed at the back.

Whilst the Talmud lists specific *haftarot* for festival days (Megilla 31a), the choice of a prophetic reading for a regular Shabbat was originally left to the decision of the reader (*Kesef Mishneh*, *Hilkhot Tefilla Unesiat Kapayim* 12:12). Natan Fried in his comprehensive article in *Encyclopaedia Talmudit* (vol. 10) tabulates the different customs that have arisen across communities. The custom in the United Synagogue is in line with most other Ashkenazic communities, with a few exceptions.

The *haftara* for Vayishlah is listed in the first and second editions of the Hertz Ḥumash for Ashkenazim as being from Hosea (11:7–12:12 – *Ve’ami teluim*) and for Sepharadim from Obadiah. Printings of the Hertz Ḥumash since 1987 list Hosea for “Some Ashkenazi Congregations” and then Obadiah without further qualification, suggesting that this is also

an option for Ashkenazim. Some Ashkenazic communities read Hosea, e.g., the Golders Green Beth Hamedrash. A recent article (E. Duker, The Seforim Blog, November 2021) demonstrates that the original universal practice for Haftarat Vayishlah was Obadiah, across all communities. The option of Hosea was introduced because of a printing error in the Venice Hūmash of 1517. Nevertheless, it has become established, and in the new Koren Hūmash it is listed as the custom of the United Synagogue, together with Obadiah as an option.

On Shabbat Hagadol, the *haftara* for Shabbat Hagadol is read. In leap years, When Aḥarei Mot and Kedoshim are read separately, and Kedoshim either coincides with Shabbat Rosh Hodesh, or is Erev Rosh Hodesh, the usual *haftara* for Kedoshim, Amos 9 (*Halo khivnei Kushiyim*), is instead read on Aḥarei Mot.

On the much rarer occasion when Aḥarei Mot is read separately and does not fall under one of the above scenarios, the Koren Hūmash, like the Hertz Hūmash, designates Ezekiel 22 as its *haftara*. This will only occur four more times in the twenty-first century (2041, 2068, 2071, and 2095).

The *haftara* for Shabbat Shuva is from Hosea 12, with additions from Micah and Joel. In the first edition of Hertz, the additional reading alternated between Vayelekh and Haazinu, with Micah being prescribed for Vayelekh and Joel being prescribed for Haazinu. The one-volume edition of Hertz removed these options and instead presented both passages as the addition to Shabbat Shuva whenever it occurred. Indeed, this is the prevailing custom in a number of communities. It should be noted that the passages should be read in the order in which they appear in *Trei Asar*, namely: Hosea, Joel, and then Micah.

Rabbi Sacks describes Moshe as “the man who burned but was not consumed.” This Koren edition of the Hūmash enables the enduring flame of Rabbi Sacks’ words to kindle the hearts and minds of this generation, and, *im yirtze Hashem*, will inspire many generations to come.

Dayan Ivan Binstock  
London, Tishrei 5786

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Rabbi Sacks intended that this *Humash* be his flagship project, one in which he could incorporate many of his timeless messages and ideas. “Traditional commentaries,” he wrote of the Haggada, “are usually close readings of individual words and phrases rather than reflections on the meaning of the whole. That is a classic Jewish response, and I have not hesitated to do likewise.... But it is the great themes, the overarching principles, that are often neglected or taken for granted.” These great themes – freedom and responsibility, love and justice, the meaning of the covenant between God and humanity and God and Israel – were for Rabbi Sacks the lifeblood of Judaism, and their text is the Torah as we read it week by week.

After translating the *Humash* for *The Koren Tanakh*, Rabbi Sacks began writing his commentary, beginning with the book of Exodus. Regretfully, he was unable to see it to completion. The *Humash* editorial team at Koren, led by Rabbi Sacks' niece Jessica Sacks, compiled the rest of the *Humash* commentary from his vast array of books, articles, commentaries, and lectures. The work was always done with Rabbi Sacks' intention for the *Humash* commentary as our guiding light, mission statement, and purpose. Great care was taken to present his invaluable ideas and messages in his own words, only adapting and reshaping them to preserve his style in the new format. We pray that we have managed to bring Rabbi Sacks' words alive through the Torah and his dream project to fruition. May this work allow his beautiful Torah to enlighten and inspire all of us for generations to come.

### Haftarot

Following the *Humash* section we have printed the haftarot according to the various customs of the Ashkenazim, Sepharadim, and Yemenites. We included a short commentary for each haftara, originally written in Hebrew by Rabbi David Nativ (for Koren's *Humash Yisrael*) and translated by Rabbi Yedidya Naveh. The commentary for the special haftarot was composed especially for this volume by Rabbi Yedidya Naveh. We hope that these commentaries provide the reader with the context to appreciate the significance of the words of the prophets and their depth and timeless teachings.

TORAH READINGS FOR SPECIAL DAYS  
MINHAG ANGLIA

Rosh Hodesh	Numbers 28:1–15, p. 1065
Fast Days	Exodus 32:11–14, p. 591 Continues with Exodus 34:1–10, p. 601
Ninth of Av	Shaḥarit: Deuteronomy 4:25–40, p. 1167 Minḥa: See Fast Days, above
Ḥanukka – Day 1	Ashkenazim: Numbers 7:1–17, p. 909 Sepharadim: Numbers 6:22–7:17, p. 907
Ḥanukka – Days 2–7	Read the offering for the respective day, Numbers 7:18–53, p. 913 On Rosh Hodesh, read the Rosh Hodesh reading from the first Torah scroll, and the Ḥanukka reading from the second Torah scroll.
Ḥanukka – Day 8	Numbers 7:54–8:4, p. 917
Purim	Exodus 17:8–16, p. 481
Purim on Shabbat (in Walled Cities)	Exodus 17:8–16, p. 481 <i>Haftara</i> : Same as Shabbat Zakhor

TORAH READINGS FOR FESTIVALS  
MINHAG ANGLIA

Pesaḥ – Day 1	Exodus 12:21–51, p. 443 On Shabbat, Sepharadim read Exodus 12:14–51, p. 439 <i>Maftir</i> : Numbers 28:16–25, p. 1069
Day 2	Leviticus 22:26–23:44, p. 805 In Israel: <i>Revi'i</i> (second Torah scroll): Numbers 28:19–25, p. 1069 In the Diaspora: <i>Maftir</i> : Same as Day 1

Day 3	Exodus 13:1–16, p. 449 <i>Revi'i</i> (second Torah scroll): Numbers 28:19–25, p. 1069
Day 4	Exodus 22:24–23:19, p. 521 (If it falls on a Sunday, Sepharadim read the pas- sage for Day 3.) <i>Revi'i</i> (second Torah scroll): Numbers 28:19–25, p. 1069
Day 5	Exodus 34:1–26, p. 601 (If it falls on a Monday, Sepharadim read the pas- sage for Day 4.) <i>Revi'i</i> (second Torah scroll): Numbers 28:19–25, p. 1069
Day 6	Numbers 9:1–14, p. 927 <i>Revi'i</i> (second Torah scroll): Numbers 28:19–25, p. 1069
Shabbat Ḥol HaMoed Pesah	Exodus 33:12–34:26, p. 599 <i>Maftir</i> : Numbers 28:19–25, p. 1069
Day 7	Exodus 13:17–15:26, p. 455 <i>Maftir</i> : Numbers 28:19–25, p. 1069
Day 8 (Diaspora)	Deuteronomy 15:19–16:17, p. 1253 On Shabbat: Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17, p. 1243 <i>Maftir</i> : Numbers 28:19–25, p. 1069
Shavuot – Day 1	Exodus 19:1–20:23, p. 491 <i>Maftir</i> : Numbers 28:26–31, p. 1069
Day 2 (Diaspora)	Deuteronomy 15:19–16:17, p. 1253 On Shabbat: Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17, p. 1243 <i>Maftir</i> : Same as Day 1
Rosh HaShana – Day 1	Genesis 21:1–34, p. 125 <i>Maftir</i> : Numbers 29:1–6, p. 1071
Day 2	Genesis 22:1–24, p. 131 <i>Maftir</i> : Same as Day 1

Yom Kippur – Shaḥarit	Leviticus 16:1–34, p. 759 <i>Maftir</i> : Numbers 29:7–11, p. 1073
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Sukkot – Day 1	Leviticus 22:26–23:44, p. 805 <i>Maftir</i> : Numbers 29:12–16, p. 1073
Day 2	Israel: Numbers 29:17–19, p. 1075 Diaspora: Same as Day 1
Day 3	Israel: Numbers 29:20–22, p. 1075 Diaspora: Numbers 29:17–25, p. 1075
Day 4	Israel: Numbers 29:23–25, p. 1075 Diaspora: Numbers 29:20–28, p. 1075
Day 5	Israel: Numbers 29:26–28, p. 1075 Diaspora: Numbers 29:23–31, p. 1075
Day 6	Israel: Numbers 29:29–31, p. 1075 Diaspora: Numbers 29:26–34, p. 1075
Hoshana Rabba	Israel: Numbers 29:32–34, p. 1077 Diaspora: Numbers 29:26–34, p. 1075
Shabbat Ḥol HaMoed Sukkot	Exodus 33:12–34:26, p. 599 <i>Maftir</i> : Read the offering for the respective day (in the Diaspora adding the offering for the previous day).
Shemini Atzeret (Diaspora)	Deuteronomy 15:19–16:17, p. 1253 On Shabbat: Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17, p. 1243 <i>Maftir</i> : Numbers 29:35–30:1, p. 1077
Simḥat Torah (Israel and Diaspora)	First Torah scroll: Deuteronomy 33:1–34:12, p. 1395 Second Torah scroll: Genesis 1:1–2:3, p. 5 Third Torah scroll ( <i>Maftir</i> ): Numbers 29:35–30:1, p. 1077

ADDITIONAL HAFTAROT  
MINHAG ANGLIA

Fast Day Minhà		Isaiah 55:6–56:8
Ninth of Av – Shaḥarit	Ashkenazim & Sepharadim:	Jeremiah 8:13–9:23
	Yemenites:	Jeremiah 6:16–17 and 8:13–9:23
Ninth of Av – Minḥa	Ashkenazim:	Isaiah 55:6–56:8
	Sepharadim:	Hosea 14:2–10
	Yemenites:	Hosea 14:2–10 and Micah 7:18–20
Pesaḥ Day 1		(Some begin with Joshua 3:5–7) Joshua 5:2–6:1 and 6:27
Pesaḥ Day 2 (Diaspora)	Ashkenazim & Sepharadim:	II Kings 23:1–9 and 21–25
	Yemenites:	II Kings 22:1–7 and 23:21–25
Shabbat Ḥol HaMoed Pesaḥ	Ashkenazim & Sepharadim:	Ezekiel 37:1–14
	Yemenites:	Ezekiel 36:37–37:14
Pesaḥ Day 7		II Samuel 22:1–51,
Pesaḥ Day 8 (Diaspora)		Isaiah 10:32–12:6
Shavuot Day 1	Ashkenazim & Sepharadim:	Ezekiel 1:1–28, 3 and 3:12
	Yemenites:	Ezekiel 1:1–2:2 and 3:12



Shavuot Day 2 (Diaspora)		Habakkuk 2:20–3:19
Rosh HaShana Day 1		1 Samuel 1:1–2:10
Rosh HaShana Day 2		Jeremiah 31:1–19
Yom Kippur – Shaḥarit		Isaiah 57:14–58:14 (Yemenites add 59:20–21 )
Yom Kippur – Minḥa		The Book of Jonah, and Micah 7:18–20
Sukkot Day 1	Ashkenazim & Sepharadim:	Zechariah 14:1–21
	Yemenites:	Zechariah 13:9–14:21
Sukkot Day 2 (Diaspora)	Ashkenazim & Sepharadim:	1 Kings 8:2–21
	Yemenites:	1 Kings 7:51–8:21
Shabbat Ḥol HaMoed Sukkot	Ashkenazim & Sepharadim:	Ezekiel 38:18–39:16
	Yemenites:	Ezekiel 38:1–23
Shemini Atzeret (Diaspora)	Ashkenazim:	1 Kings 8:54–9:1
	Sepharadim, Yemenites, & Minhag Anglia:	1 Kings 8:54–66
Simḥat Torah	Ashkenazim:	Joshua 1:1–18
	Sepharadim & Yemenites:	Joshua 1:1–9 (Yemenites add 6:27)

BLESSINGS BEFORE AND AFTER  
READING THE TORAH (ASHKENAZI CUSTOM)

*Before reading the Torah, the Oleh says:*

*Oleh:* בָּרְכּוּ Bless the LORD, the blessed One.

*Cong:* בָּרוּךְ Bless the LORD, the blessed One, for ever and all time.

*Oleh:* בָּרוּךְ Bless the LORD, the blessed One, for ever and all time.

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,  
who has chosen us from all peoples  
and has given us His Torah.

Blessed are You, LORD, Giver of the Torah.

*After the reading, the oleh recites:*

*Oleh:* בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,  
who has given us the Torah of truth,  
and everlasting life He has planted in our midst.  
Blessed are You, LORD, Giver of the Torah.

BLESSINGS BEFORE AND AFTER  
READING THE HAFTARAH

*Before reading the Haftara, the person called up for Maftir recites:*

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, who  
chose good prophets and was pleased with their words, spoken in truth.  
Blessed are You, LORD, who chooses the Torah, His servant Moses, His  
people Israel, and the prophets of truth and righteousness.

*After the Haftara, the person called up for Maftir recites the following blessings:*

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God King of the Universe, Rock of  
all worlds, righteous for all generations, the faithful God who says and  
does, speaks and fulfils, all of whose words are truth and righteousness.  
You are faithful, LORD our God, and faithful are Your words, not one of  
which returns unfulfilled, for You, God, are a faithful (and compassion-  
ate) King. Blessed are You, LORD, faithful in all His words.

## ברכות התורה (מנהג אשכנזים)

Before קריאת התורה, the עולה says:

עולה: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הַמִּבְרֹךְ.

קהל: בְּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמִּבְרֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

עולה: בְּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמִּבְרֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

After קריאת התורה, the עולה says:

עולה: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָנוּ תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

## ברכות ההפטרה

Before reading the הפטרה, the person called up for מפטיר says:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בַּנְּבִיאִים טוֹבִים, וְרָצָה  
בְּדַבְרֵיהֶם הַנְּאֻמִּים בְּאֵמֶת. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, הַבּוֹחֵר בַּתּוֹרָה וּבַמִּשָּׁה  
עֲבָדוֹ, וּבִישְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ וּבַנְּבִיאִי הָאֱמֶת וְצִדֵּק.

After the הפטרה, the person called up for מפטיר says the following blessings:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, צוּר כָּל הָעוֹלָמִים, צִדִּיק בְּכָל  
הַדּוֹרוֹת, הָאֵל הַנְּאֻמָּן, הָאוֹמֵר וְעוֹשֶׂה, הַמְדַּבֵּר וּמַקְיֵם, שְׂכָל דְּבָרָיו  
אֱמֶת וְצִדֵּק. נֶאֱמַן אַתָּה הוּא יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנֶאֱמַנִים דְּבָרֶיךָ, וְדַבֵּר אֶחָד  
מִדְּבָרֶיךָ אַחֲזוֹר לֹא יֵשׁוּב רִיקָם, כִּי אֵל מֶלֶךְ נֶאֱמָן (וְרַחֲמָן) אַתָּה. בְּרוּךְ  
אַתָּה יְיָ, הָאֵל הַנְּאֻמָּן בְּכָל דְּבָרָיו.

יְהוָה Have compassion on Zion for it is the source of our life, and save the one grieved in spirit swiftly in our days. Blessed are You, LORD, who makes Zion rejoice in her children.

שְׂמֵחָנוּ Grant us joy, LORD our God, through Elijah the prophet Your servant, and through the kingdom of the house of David Your anointed – may he soon come and gladden our hearts. May no stranger sit on his throne, and may others no longer inherit his glory, for You took an oath to him by Your holy name that his light would never be extinguished. Blessed are You, LORD, Shield of David.

*On Shabbat, including Shabbat Ḥol HaMo'ed Pesah, say:*

עַל הַתּוֹרָה For the Torah, for divine worship, for the prophets, and for this Sabbath day which You, LORD our God, have given us for holiness and rest, honour and glory – for all these we thank and bless You, LORD our God, and may Your name be blessed by the mouth of all that lives, continually, for ever and all time. Blessed are You, LORD, who sanctifies the Sabbath.

*On Yom Tov and on Shabbat Ḥol HaMo'ed Sukkot, say  
(adding on Shabbat the words in parentheses):*

עַל הַתּוֹרָה For the Torah, for Divine worship, for the prophets,  
(for this Sabbath day) and for this day of

*On Pesah:* the Festival of Matzot

*On Shavuot:* the Festival of Shavuot

*On Sukkot:* the Festival of Sukkot

*On Shemini Atzeret and Simḥat Torah:* the Festival of Shemini Atzeret

which You, LORD our God, have given us (for holiness and rest),  
for joy and gladness, honor and glory –

for all these we thank and bless You, LORD our God,  
and may Your name be blessed by the mouth of all that lives,  
continually, for ever and all time.

Blessed are You, LORD, who sanctifies (the Sabbath), Israel and  
the festivals. (Amen.)

רַחֵם עַל צִיּוֹן כִּי הִיא בֵּית חַיִּינוּ, וְלַעֲלוּבֵת נַפְשׁ תוֹשִׁיעַ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְשַׁמֵּחַ צִיּוֹן בְּבִנְיָהּ.

שְׂמַחְנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַלְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיאַ עֲבָדְךָ, וּבְמַלְכוּת בֵּית דָּוִד מְשִׁיחְךָ,  
בְּמַהֲרָה יָבוֹא וְיַגְל לִפְנֵינוּ. עַל כִּסְאוֹ לֹא יֵשֵׁב זָר, וְלֹא יִנְחִלוּ עוֹד אֲחֵרִים  
אֶת כְּבוֹדוֹ, כִּי בְשֵׁם קִדְשְׁךָ נִשְׁפָּעֶתָ לוֹ שְׁלֹא יִכְבֶּה נֵרוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מִגֵּן דָּוִד.

On שבת, including פסח שבת, say:

עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל הַנְּבִיאִים וְעַל יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה, שְׁנַתָּה  
לָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְקִדְשָׁהּ וּלְמִנוּחָהּ, לְכָבוֹד וּלְתַפְאֲרָתָהּ. עַל הַכֹּל יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מוֹדִים לָךְ וּמְבָרְכִים אוֹתְךָ, יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמְךָ בְּפִי כָל חַי תָּמִיד  
לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת.

On שבת חול המועד סוכות and on יום טוב שבת,  
say (adding on שבת the words in parentheses):

עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל הַנְּבִיאִים (בשבת: וְעַל יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה),  
וְעַל יוֹם

בפסח: חַג הַמִּצּוֹת הַזֶּה

בשבועות: חַג הַשָּׁבוּעוֹת הַזֶּה

בסוכות: חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת הַזֶּה

בשמיני עצרת ובשיר: (ה)שְׁמִינִי חַג (ה)עֲצֵרַת הַזֶּה

שְׁנַתָּה לָנוּ, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (בשבת: לְקִדְשָׁהּ וּלְמִנוּחָהּ)

לְשִׁשּׁוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָהּ, לְכָבוֹד וּלְתַפְאֲרָתָהּ.

עַל הַכֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מוֹדִים לָךְ וּמְבָרְכִים אוֹתְךָ.

יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמְךָ בְּפִי כָל חַי תָּמִיד לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְקַדֵּשׁ (בשבת: הַשַּׁבָּת ו)יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזְּמַנִּים. (אֲמֵן).

BLESSINGS BEFORE AND AFTER  
READING THE TORAH (SEPHARDIC CUSTOM)

*Before reading the Torah, the Oleh says:*

*Oleh:* The LORD is with you      *Cong:* May the LORD bless you

*Oleh:* בָּרוּךְ Bless the LORD, the blessed One.

*Cong:* בָּרוּךְ Bless the LORD, the blessed One, for ever and all time.

*Oleh:* בָּרוּךְ Bless the LORD, the blessed One, for ever and all time.

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,  
who has chosen us from all peoples  
and has given us His Torah.

Blessed are You, LORD, Giver of the Torah.

*After the reading, the oleh recites:*

*Oleh:* Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,  
who has given us His Torah, the Torah of truth, and everlasting  
life He has planted in our midst.

Blessed are You, LORD, Giver of the Torah.

BLESSINGS BEFORE AND AFTER  
READING THE HAFTARA

*Before reading the Haftara, the person called up for Maftir recites:*

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, who chose  
good prophets and was pleased with their words, spoken in truth.  
Blessed are You, LORD, who chose the Torah, His servant Moses, His  
people Israel, and the prophets of truth and righteousness.

*After reading the Haftara, he recites:*

גְּאֻלָּנוּ Our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name, Holy One of Israel      *Isaiah 47*

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, Rock of  
all worlds, righteous for all generations, the faithful God who says and  
does, speaks and fulfills, all of whose words are truth and righteousness.

## ברכות התורה (מנהג ספרדים)

Before עולה, קריאת התורה, the עולה says:

עולה: יהוה עמכם קהל יברכך יהוה

עולה: (רבנן) ברכו את יהוה המברך.

קהל: ברוך יהוה המברך לעולם ועד.

עולה: ברוך יהוה המברך לעולם ועד.

ברוך אתה יהוה, אלהינו מלך העולם,  
אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים, ונתן לנו את תורתו.  
ברוך אתה יהוה, נותן התורה.

After the reading, the עולה recites:

עולה: ברוך אתה יהוה, אלהינו מלך העולם

אשר נתן לנו (את) תורתו תורת אמת

וחיי עולם נטע בתוכנו.

ברוך אתה יהוה, נותן התורה.

## ברכות הפטרה

Before reading the הפטרה, the person called up for מפטיר recites:

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר בחר בנביאים טובים, ורצה  
בדבריהם הנאמרים באמת. ברוך אתה יהוה, הבוחר בתורה ובמשה  
עבדו, וב ישראל עמו ובנביאי האמת והצדק.

After reading the הפטרה, he recites:

ישעיה מו

גאלינו יהוה צבאות שמו, קדוש ישראל:

ברוך אתה יהוה, אלהינו מלך העולם, צור כל העולמים, צדיק בכל  
הדורות, האל הנאמן, האומר ועושה, מדבר ומקיים, כי כל דבריו אמת  
וצדק. נאמן אתה הוא יהוה אלהינו ונאמנים דבריך, ודבר אחד מדברך

You are faithful, LORD our God, and faithful are Your words, not one of which returns unfulfilled, for You, God, are a faithful (and compassionate) King. Blessed are You, LORD, faithful in all His words.

**רַחֵם** Have compassion on Zion for it is the source of our life, and save the one grieved in spirit swiftly in our days. Blessed are You, LORD, who makes Zion rejoice in her children.

**שְׂמַחֲנוּ** Grant us joy, LORD our God, through Elijah the prophet Your servant, and through the kingdom of the house of David Your anointed – may he soon come and gladden our hearts. May no stranger sit on his throne, and may others no longer inherit his glory, for You took an oath to him by Your holy name that his light would never be extinguished. Blessed are You, LORD, Shield of David.

*On Shabbat, including Shabbat Ḥol HaMo'ed Pesah, say:*

**עַל הַתּוֹרָה** For the Torah, for divine worship, for the prophets, and for this Sabbath day which You, LORD our God, have given us for holiness and rest, honour and glory – for all these we thank and bless You, LORD our God, and may Your name be blessed by the mouth of all that lives, continually, for ever and all time. Blessed are You, LORD, who sanctifies the Sabbath.

*On Yom Tov and on Shabbat Ḥol HaMo'ed Sukkot, say  
(adding on Shabbat the words in parentheses):*

**עַל הַתּוֹרָה** For the Torah, for Divine worship, for the prophets,  
(for this Sabbath day) and for this day of

*On Pesah:* the Festival of Matzot

*On Shavuot:* the Festival of Shavuot

*On Sukkot:* the Festival of Sukkot

*On Shemini Atzeret and Simḥat Torah:* the Festival of Shemini Atzeret

which You, LORD our God, have given us (for holiness and rest),  
for joy and gladness, honor and glory –  
for all these we thank and bless You, LORD our God,  
and may Your name be blessed by the mouth of all that lives,  
continually, for ever and all time.



אַחֲרֵי לֹא יָשׁוּב רִיקָם, כִּי אֵל מֶלֶךְ נֶאֱמָן (וְרַחֲמָן) אֶתָּה. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה,  
הָאֵל הַנֶּאֱמָן בְּכָל דְּבָרָיו.

רַחֵם עַל צִיּוֹן כִּי הִיא בֵּית חַיִּינוּ, וְלַעֲלוּבֶת נַפְשׁ תּוֹשִׁיעַ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְשַׁמֵּחַ צִיּוֹן בְּבִנְיָהּ.

שְׁמַחְנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַלְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיא עֲבָדְךָ, וּבְמַלְכוּת בֵּית דָּוִד מְשִׁיחְךָ,  
בְּמַהֲרָה יָבוֹא וַיַּגֵּל לִבָּנוּ. עַל כִּסְאוֹ לֹא יֵשֵׁב זָר, וְלֹא יִנְחֲלוּ עוֹד אֲחֵרִים  
אֶת כְּבוֹדוֹ, כִּי בִשְׁם קֹדֶשְׁךָ נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לוֹ שְׁלֹא יִכְבֶּה נֵרוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מִגֵּן דָּוִד.

On שבת, including חול המועד פסח, say:

עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל הַנְּבִיאִים וְעַל יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה, שְׁנַתָּה  
לָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְקֹדֶשֶׁה וְלִמְנוּחָה, לְכָבוֹד וּלְתַפְאֶרֶת. עַל הַכֹּל יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מוֹדִים לָךְ וּמְבָרְכִים אוֹתְךָ, יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמְךָ בְּפִי כָל חַי תָּמִיד  
לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת. אָמֵן.

On שבת חול המועד סוכות and on יום טוב, say (adding on שבת the words in parentheses):

עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל הַנְּבִיאִים (בְּשַׁבָּת: וְעַל יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה),  
וְעַל יוֹם

בפסח: חַג הַמִּצּוֹת הַזֶּה, וְעַל יוֹם טוֹב מְקָרָא קֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה

בשבועות: חַג הַשְּׁבוּעוֹת הַזֶּה, וְעַל יוֹם טוֹב מְקָרָא קֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה

בסוכות: חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת הַזֶּה, וְעַל יוֹם טוֹב מְקָרָא קֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה

בשמיני עצרת ובשבת: שְׁמִינִי חַג עֲצֶרֶת הַזֶּה, וְעַל יוֹם טוֹב מְקָרָא קֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה

שְׁנַתָּה לָנוּ, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (בְּשַׁבָּת: לְקֹדֶשֶׁה וְלִמְנוּחָה)

לְשִׁשּׁוֹן וּלְשִׁמְחָה, לְכָבוֹד וּלְתַפְאֶרֶת.

עַל הַכֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מוֹדִים לָךְ וּמְבָרְכִים אוֹתְךָ.

יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמְךָ בְּפִי כָל חַי תָּמִיד לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְקַדֵּשׁ (בְּשַׁבָּת: הַשַּׁבָּת ו) יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזְּמָנִים. (אָמֵן.)



בראשית

GENESIS

know (epistemology), are we free (philosophical psychology), and how we should behave (ethics). But it does so in a way quite unlike the philosophical classics from Plato to Wittgenstein. To put it at its simplest: Philosophy is *truth as system*. Genesis is *truth as story*. It is a unique work, philosophy in the narrative mode.

So we learn about what exists by way of a story about creation. We learn about knowledge through a tangled tale of the first man, the first woman, a serpent, and a tree. We begin to understand human freedom and its abuse through the story of Kayin. We learn how to behave through the lives of Avraham and Sara and their children. It is this that has helped to make Tanakh the most widely read and influential book in the history of civilisation. Only the gifted few can fully understand a philosophical

classic, but everyone can relate to a story.

Everyone can understand Genesis, yet not understand at the same level; that is another feature of the book. Each of its stories has layer upon layer of meaning and significance, which we only grasp after repeated readings. Our understanding of the book grows as we grow. Each age adds insights, commentaries, and interpretations of its own. The book's literary style allows it to be read afresh in each generation. Only stories have this depth, this ambiguity, this principled multiplicity of meanings.

Torah is God's book of humanity, and each of us is a chapter in its unfinished story. Its words form our covenant with Heaven. And as we listen and respond, we add our voice to the unbroken conversation between the Jewish people and its destiny.

## THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Genesis, the book of Bereshit, is as its name suggests, about beginnings: the birth of the universe, the origins of humanity, and the first chapters in the story of the people that would be known as Israel. It tells of how this people began, first as an individual, Avraham, who heard a call to leave his home and begin a journey, then as a family; it closes as the extended family stands on the threshold of becoming a nation. The journey turns out to be unexpectedly complicated and fraught with setbacks. In a sense, it continues till today. This is part of what makes Genesis so vivid. We can relate to its characters and their dilemmas. We are part of their world, as they are of ours. This is our story; this is where we came from; this is our journey.

But this is not all Genesis is. Rambam makes the fundamental point that

*reshit* does not mean “beginning” in the sense of “first of a chronological sequence.” For that, Biblical Hebrew has other words. *Reshit* implies the most significant element, the part that stands for the whole, the foundation, the principle. Genesis is Judaism’s foundational work, a philosophy of the human condition under the sovereignty of God.

This is a difficult point to understand, because there is no other book quite like it. It is not myth. It is not history in the conventional sense, a mere recording of events. Nor is it theology: Genesis is less about God than about human beings and their relationship with God. The theology is almost always implicit rather than explicit. What Genesis is, in fact, is *philosophy written in a deliberately non-philosophical way*. It deals with all the central questions of philosophy: what exists (ontology), what can we



## PARASHAT BERESHIT

- <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> When God began creating heaven and earth, the earth was void and desolate, there was darkness on the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved over the waters.
- <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light. God

Parashat Lekh Lekha, does it narrow in on the particular. As far as Plato was concerned, knowledge starts with the particular – this tree, this person; looking at these you begin to realise that what is interesting is not this tree but tree-ness, not this person, but the universal things that make a person a person. Following Plato, Western thought has not been interested in the particular or parochial. It considers truth to be universal and eternal or not truth at all. Judaism is structurally unique – it is the only world religion ever to believe in a universal God, the God of all peoples, times, and places, and at the same time to believe in a particular way of life that not all people have to follow, because there is more than one way to find God. The structure we see in Genesis – first universal, then particular – recurs repeatedly in our prayers and our thought. It is a basic form of the Jewish mind.

### LET THERE BE...

Just as God is called gracious, so you be gracious. Just as He is called merciful, so you be merciful. The prophets described the Almighty by all the

various attributes: long-suffering, abounding in kindness... powerful, and so on – to teach us that these qualities are good and righteous and that a human being should cultivate them, and thus imitate God as far as we can. (*Hilkhot Deot* 1:11)

Implicit in the first chapter of Genesis is a momentous challenge: Just as God is creative, so you be creative. What is more, it tells us how to be creative – namely, in three stages. The first is the stage of saying, “Let there be.” What is truly creative is not science or technology per se, but the word. Because we can speak, we can think and therefore imagine a world different from the one that currently exists. Creation begins with the creative word, the idea, the vision, the dream. The first stage in creation is imagination.

The second stage is for us the most difficult. “And there was...” It is one thing to conceive an idea, another to execute it. Between the intention and the fact, the dream and the reality, lies struggle, opposition, and the fallibility of the human will. It is all too easy, having tried and failed, to conclude that nothing ultimately can be achieved, that the world

## פרשת בראשית

א בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ א  
הָיְתָה תֵהוֹ וּבְהוֹ יִחְשֹׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת  
ד עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי־אֹר וַיְהי־אֹר: וַיֵּרָא

### BERESHIT

The Book of Books starts with the beginning of beginnings: the creation of the universe and life. The story is told from two different perspectives, first as cosmology (the origins of matter), then as anthropology (the birth of humanity).

The first narrative (Gen. 1:1–2:3) emphasises harmony and order. God creates the universe in six days and dedicates the seventh as a day of holiness and rest. The second (2:4–3:24) focusses on humanity, not as a biological species but as persons-in-relation. God fashions man, sees that “it is not good for man to be alone” (2:18), and then fashions the woman. The serpent tempts them; they sin and are banished from the garden.

From then on, the human drama unfolds as tragedy. Kayin murders his brother. By the end of the *parasha*, God sees “how great man’s wickedness was upon the earth” (6:5) and “regretted that He had made man on earth” (6:6). God creates order; man creates chaos. The question that remains to challenge us is which will prevail?

1:1 בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים *When God began creating* – Rashi begins his commentary: “Rabbi Yitzhak said: The Torah should have

begun with the verse ‘This month shall be to you the beginning of months’ (Ex. 12:2), which was the first mitzva given to Israel.” To understand a book, one needs to know to which genre it belongs. What Rashi is succinctly saying in his enigmatic question is that the Torah is not a book of history, even though it includes history. It is not a book of science, even though the first chapter of Genesis is the necessary prelude to science, representing as it does the first time people saw the universe as the product of a single creative will, and therefore as intelligible rather than capricious and mysterious. The Torah is, first and last, a book about how to live.

Rashi gives one answer to his question. I would suggest an additional one. Jewish ethics is not confined to law. It includes virtues of character, general principles, and role models. It is conveyed not only by commandments but also by stories. And so the book of how to live opens with the most fundamental question of all. As the psalm (8:4) puts it: “What are mortals, that You should be mindful of them?”

1:1 אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ *Heaven and earth* – The Torah begins with the universal, and only later, in chapter 12,



- saw the light: it was good; and God separated the light  
 5 from the darkness. And God called the light “day,” and the  
 darkness He called “night.” There was evening, and there  
 was morning – one day.  
 6 Then God said, “Let an expanse stretch through the

justice, compassion, faithfulness, loving-kindness, the dignity of the individual, and the sanctity of life.

1:4 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ *God separated the light from the darkness* – “I am the LORD; there is no other, forming light, creating darkness, making peace, creating evil” (Is. 45:7). The first act of creation inspired the single most emphatic rejection of dualism in the Bible. Dualism is the view that there is not one force operative in the universe but two: a force of good and a force of evil. Evil, in this worldview, comes not from God but from an independent force: Satan, the Devil, Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, and the many other names given to the force that is not God but is opposed to Him and those who worship Him. This idea, which has surfaced in sectarian forms in each of the Abrahamic monotheisms, as well as in secular totalitarianisms, is one of the most dangerous in all of history. It divides humanity into the unshakably good and the irredeemably evil, giving rise to a long history of bloodshed and barbarism of the kind we see being enacted today in many parts of the world in the name of holy war against the greater and lesser Satan. Dualism is not monotheism, and the Sages, who called it *shetei reshuyot*, “two

powers” or “two domains” (Berakhot 33b), were right to reject it utterly. In the words of historian Jeffrey Russel, dualism “denied the unity and omnipotence of God in order to preserve His perfect goodness.” Further, it allows people to commit “altruistic evil”: evil committed in a sacred cause, in the name of high ideals. Dualism resolves complexity. But monotheism requires the ability to handle complexity. God who creates light brings back the darkness also. “There was evening, and there was morning – one day.”

1:6 וַיְהִי מִבְדִּיל *Let it separate* – The narrative of creation is tightly structured. For three days, God creates domains – light and dark, sea and sky, sea and dry land. Order is a matter of distinction and separation; the verb *lehavdil*, to separate and divide, appears five times in Genesis 1. For the next three days, He populates those domains with their appropriate contents: the sun, moon, and stars; fish and birds; land animals and man. The seventh day, the Sabbath, is the apotheosis of creation: an enduring symbol of the world at peace with itself and its maker, the first thing in the Torah to be called holy.



אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאָדָם וּבֵין  
הַחֹשֶׁךְ: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר  
וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:  
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין

is as it is, and that all human endeavour is destined to end in failure. Yet Judaism holds the opposite, that though creation is difficult, laborious, and fraught with setbacks, we are summoned to it as our essential human vocation: “It is not for you to complete the work,” said R. Tarfon, “but neither are you free to desist from it” (Avot 2:16). There is a lovely rabbinic phrase: *Ma’hashava tova HaKadosh barukh Hu metzarefa lemaaseh* (Tosefta, Pe’ah 1:4). This is usually translated as “God considers a good intention as if it were the deed.” I translate it differently: “When a human being has a good intention, God joins in helping it become a deed,” meaning, He gives us the strength, if not now, then eventually, to turn it into achievement. If the first stage in creation is imagination, the second is will.

Finally: “God saw...it was good.” This is the hardest of the three stages of creation to understand. But Genesis makes clear that to see that someone is good and to say so is a creative act. There may be some few individuals who are inescapably evil, but they are few. Within almost all of us is something positive and unique but which is all too easily injured, and which grows only when exposed to the sunlight of someone else’s recognition and praise. To see the good in others and let them see themselves in the mirror

of our regard is to help someone grow to become the best they can be. “Greater,” says the Talmud, “is one who causes others to do good than one who does good himself” (Bava Batra 9a). To help others become what they can be is to give birth to creativity in someone else’s soul. This is done not by criticism but by searching out the good in others, and helping them see it, own it, and live it.

“God saw...it was good” – this too is part of the work of creation, the subtlest and most beautiful of all. When we recognise the goodness in someone, we do more than create it; we help it become creative. This is what God does for us, and what He calls us to do for others.

1:4 כִּי־טוֹב *It was good* – *Tov*, “good,” is a moral word. The Torah in Genesis 1 is telling us something radical. The reality to which Torah is a guide (the word “Torah” itself means “guide,” “instruction,” or “law”) is *moral* and *ethical*. The question Genesis seeks to answer is not “How did the universe come into being?” but “How then shall we live?” This is the Torah’s most significant paradigm shift. The universe that God made and that we inhabit is not about power or dominance but about *tov* and *ra*, good and evil. For the first time, here, religion is ethicised. God, we are told, cares about



- 7 water; let it separate water from water.” So God made the  
 expanse, and it separated the water beneath the expanse  
 8 from the water above. And so it was. God called the  
 expanse “heavens.” There was evening, and there was  
 morning – a second day.
- 9 Then God said, “Let the water beneath the heavens be  
 gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And  
 10 so it was. God called the dry ground “earth,” and the  
 gathered waters He called “seas.” And God saw: it was  
 11 good. Then God said, “Let the earth produce vegetation:  
 seed-bearing plants and trees of all the kinds on earth  
 12 that grow seed-bearing fruit.” And so it was. The earth  
 produced vegetation: plants bearing seeds, each of its  
 kind, and trees bearing fruit containing seeds, each of its  
 13 kind. And God saw: it was good. There was evening, and  
 there was morning – a third day.
- 14 Then God said, “Let there be lights in the heavens’ SHENI  
 expanse to separate day from night and to serve for signs  
 15 and seasons, days and years. They shall be lights in the  
 heavens’ expanse, shining upon the earth.” And so it was.  
 16 God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule  
 by day and the lesser light to rule by night – and the stars.

work of His hands’ (Is. 5:12). How do we know that it is one’s duty to calculate the cycles and planetary courses? Because it is written, ‘For this will be your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the peoples’ (Deut. 4:6). What wisdom and understanding is in the sight of the peoples? Say, that is the science of cycles and planets” (Shabbat 75a).

The Sages attached religious dignity and integrity to science, both as human wisdom and as an insight into the divine wisdom evident in the cosmos. The Babylonian Talmud sees the study of

astronomy, for those who are capable of it, as a religious duty. There is a blessing to be recited on seeing “one of the sages of the nations of the world.” For the Sages to institute a blessing – a religious act of thanksgiving – over Greek and Roman scholars showed a remarkable open-mindedness to wisdom, whatever its source. The heavenly bodies are intended not just to exist, but also as “signs” to be studied, to help us navigate in time and space. Rambam sees science as a way to the love and awe of God.

מִים לְמִיִּם: וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָרְקִיעַ וַיְבַדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם  
אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לָרְקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מַעַל לָרְקִיעַ וַיְהִי־  
כֵן: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לָרְקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם  
שֵׁנִי:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְווּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד  
וְתִרְאָה הַיַּבֵּשָׁה וַיְהִי־כֵן: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַיַּבֵּשָׁה אֶרֶץ  
וּלַמָּקוֹה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: וַיֹּאמֶר  
אֱלֹהִים תְּדַשָּׂא הָאֶרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזֵּרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פֶּרִי  
עֵשֶׂה פֶרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זֶרַע־וּבו עַל־הָאֶרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן: וַתֵּצֵא  
הָאֶרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזֵּרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה־פֶּרִי אֲשֶׁר  
זֶרַע־וּבו לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר  
יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹדֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין שְׁנֵי  
הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה וַהֲיוּ לְאֹתוֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וְלַיָּמִים וּשְׁנָיִם:  
וַהֲיוּ לְמְאֹדֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַאֲיִר עַל־הָאֶרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן:  
וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹדֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת־הַמָּאֹר הַגָּדֹל  
לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמָּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה

1:12 *Each of its kind* – The key recurring word is *leminehem*, *lemino*, *lemina*. God creates plants, animals, birds, fish *leminehem*, according to their different kinds. The essence of Genesis 1 is ordered diversity. This is the priestly way of seeing the world, one which we will see expressed most clearly in the book of Leviticus. For the priest, the moral life is something we learn by honouring the distinctions God has taught us to see in the structure of reality. There is milk, a sign of life, and meat, a sign of death. There is plant life and there is animal life.

There are brothers and others. Each has its boundaries that must be respected. That is sacred ontology and it creates an ethic of holiness. Its theoretical foundations lie here in Genesis 1.

1:14 *וַהֲיוּ לְאֹתוֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים* *To serve for signs and seasons* – Nature is something we can observe and learn from. “He who knows how to calculate the cycles and planetary courses, but does not, of him Scripture says, ‘[They] feast... never once turning to look at the LORD’s workings, never once noticing the

