

Bereishith

Traditionally, we conclude the reading of the last portion of the Torah, *Vezos Habracha*, on Simchas Torah. The following Shabbos we commence once again the weekly reading of the first of the five books of Moshe Rabenu, so arranged that we finish the entire Torah each year by reading one portion weekly.

Maimonides writes,¹ "Our teacher Moses introduced the custom of reading the Torah publicly on Sabbath, Monday and Thursday during the morning service, so that three days should not elapse without hearing the Torah. The Gemorah states that this custom evolved because of the incident related in the Torah:² "The Jewish people travelled three days in the desert and they did not find any water; therefore, they rebelled." The Rabbis teach that this refers to the fact that they were without the study of Torah (which is compared to water). Hence they found fault with the leadership of Moshe. It was then that Moshe Rabenu instituted the practice of reading the Torah every three days. To this, Ezra the Scribe added the order of having at least three people called to the Torah, and to have a minimum of ten sentences read each time.

The order of reading the Torah portion every Sabbath day thus has its origin in the very infancy of our Torah nationhood, initiated by our teacher Moshe Rabenu. When we conclude the final portion of the Torah reading at the end of a yearly cycle, on the last day of Succos, it thus becomes a Simchas Torah, an event of celebration and outpouring of joyous gratitude to the A-mighty for having enabled us to reach this day. At the very hour that we finish *Vezos Habracha*, the last portion, we immediately begin anew the reading of the book of Bereishith. This is to express our belief that the Torah has no ending; it constantly renews itself. And perhaps we can deduce this concept from the manner in which the Torah is written. The Torah is written on parchment in the form of a scroll, which constantly is turned and rewound, intertwining the beginning and the ending in one constant circle.

Bereishith, as the name implies, refers to the act of creation of the world.

Our Sages comment that the word Bereishith indicates, "Beis"—two—"Reishith"; G-d created the world solely because of two designated entities known by the name *Reishis*: The Torah and the people of Israel. The world was created for the Jewish people to study the Holy Torah.

There is no other purpose in creation.

As *Rashi* explains it, based on the Midrashic explanation of our Talmudic teachers, the entire act of creation was dependent upon the unconditional acceptance of the Torah by the Jewish people on the sixth day of Sivan, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah to Israel on Mount Sinai. Our Sages make the startling statement that "it was 2448 years after the creation that the universe actually became secured and solidified." The unification of the Torah with the Jews on that fateful date is what made the creation appear renewed and assured.

Many similar interpretations stressing the centrality of the Torah-Jew partnership in the cosmic scheme, appear throughout the Talmud and Midrash. Is it any wonder then that the Jews have become identified as the People of the Book, holding the future of the world in their hands. Throughout our entire history as a nation, we have always extolled and glorified Torah study. Under the most trying and oft-times terrifying conditions, we have remained loyal and steadfast to the Torah and its teachings. We have always sacrificed our very lives for the study and practice of our Holy Torah.

In our own time, it has become apparent that only the learned and religiously conscious will survive the overwhelming tides of ignorance, assimilation and intermarriage. An educated Jew is our best guarantee for the future of our people and, indeed, also of the world.

FOOTNOTES

1. Hilchoth Tefilla 12:1
2. Baba Kama 82a. Shmos 15:22