

CHAPTER TWO:

Beis



The Symbol of Blessing and Creation; Duality and Plurality

The **ב** is the second of the holy letters. God began the Torah with it — **בְּרֵאשִׁית**, *In the beginning* — for it is the initial of **בְּרָכָה**, *blessing*, and **בְּרִיאָה**, *Creation*.

The Midrash relates that **ב** was chosen because every being — from the heavenly hosts, to man, to the tiniest creature — blesses God with the **ב**, saying **בְּרוּךְ ה' לְעוֹלָם וָאָמֵן**, *Blessed is HASHEM forever, amen and amen (Psalms 89:53)*.

With its *gematria* [numerical value] of two, **ב** represents the concept of duality, for there is diversity in every part of Creation (**בְּרִיאָה**). Only in the Creator Himself does absolute Oneness prevail. Literally, *beis* means *house* (**בֵּית**) and alludes to the focal point of holiness on earth — the **בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ** [*Beis HaMikdash*], *Sanctuary* or *Holy Temple* in Jerusalem; and to the **בֵּית** of man, which he can transform into a **בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ**, *miniature sanctuary*.

Blessing, Creation, Duality

Some phenomena seem to complement each other while others seem to oppose each other, yet all opposites are woven into a complete unity which guarantees the function of the universe.

Maharal connects the א of plurality with the א of blessing and the א of Creation: God created the world with א, and imbued it with blessing, for He is Blessed and from Him true blessing emanates. But true blessing is possible only when opposites work together to achieve a common beneficial purpose. The harmonious interaction in Creation involves such contrasting phenomena as heaven and earth, light and darkness, male and female, and so on. Through such cooperation, the world and its inhabitants can continue to exist and provide a blessing for mankind. Because א is the beginning of plurality, it best symbolizes the blessing of cooperative endeavor (*Be'er II*).

Maharzu (Devarim Rabbah 2:31) elaborates on the interaction of all the pairs in creation: Heaven gives light and rain; the earth receives it and produces its fruit. The moon reflects the light that is radiated by the sun.

Adam and Eve were a pair in which one was not complete without the other — as such they were the prototypes of all husbands and wives, who fulfill each other. Man must accumulate merits in This World so that he can merit eternal life in the World to Come. Indeed, only to provide man the opportunity to reach this height was the world created.

The proper functioning of nature, however, is contingent on man's capacity to overcome the duality of his nature by subordinating his inclination for evil to his inclination for good, in accordance with the Creator's covenant — as depicted by the Prophet Jeremiah: *If not for My covenant day and night, I would not have established the statutes of heaven and earth (Jer. 33:25)*. The Torah tells us: *If you walk in My laws and observe My commandments and fulfill them, then I will give your rains in their due season, and the land will yield its produce, and the trees of the field their fruit ... And I will give peace in the land ... (Leviticus 26:3-6)*.



If God's law is observed, nature will correspondingly function undisturbed. As *R' Hirsch* puts it: every seed pushes its way through, every blossom blooms, every fruit ripens, the sun's rays shine, the dew falls. The purpose of existence, however, is shattered when human society undermines its purpose by moral and social degeneration. Throughout Scripture and the history of the Jewish people, we see how Providence regulates nature in accordance with man's action on earth.

Accordingly, when Adam was cursed for his sin, the earth too was cursed. In Noah's time, when all living things had corrupted their way through immorality and idolatry, the destruction of the earth by the Flood was decreed (*Genesis 5*). The blessings of childbirth and rain are conditioned by man's conduct, and not by the mechanical laws of nature, nor by any meteorological forecast (*R' Hirsch*).



Thus, by observing the Torah's guidelines in inner harmony, man causes the numberless forces of nature to function harmoniously. When man contemplates the wonders of the universe and, above all, realizes that nature is not an unvarying machine, but is under constant direction of the *Hashgachah* [Providence], he realizes how great the Master of the universe must be if He can take into account the deeds of