



Beginning with *Bet*, ב

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And God said, 'Let there be light'

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אֹר וַיְהִי אֹר

In our daily morning service we have a prayer known as *Baruch Sheamar* בְּרוּךְ שְׂאֵמַר. The first four words are *Baruch Sheamar V'Haya HaOlam*, בְּרוּךְ שְׂאֵמַר וְהָיָה הָעוֹלָם, Blessed is God, who spoke and the world came into being.

In the Beginning, there was nothing, until words were proclaimed.

One of my favorite *Midrashim* (commentaries) for the entire Torah deals with how God decided to begin the Torah with the word *Breisheet*.

The Midrash begins with all twenty-two Hebrew letters standing in front of God as He set out to pick a letter with which to start the Torah. Each letter wanted to be the first letter of creation and prepared to present a defense in front of God.

The first letter to speak was ת *Tav*, proclaiming that it is the most important letter because it is the first letter of the word *Torah*, תּוֹרָה and that it has the highest numeric value (400). God's reply was that ת *Tav* could not be the first letter because in the future it would be used as a symbol put onto people to mark them for death.

Next to approach God was the letter, ש *Shin*. The ש *Shin* proclaimed that it should be first because it is the first letter of *Shaddai*, שְׁדַי (one of God's names). God again turned away the ש *Shin*, explaining that ש *Shin* is also the first letter of *shav*, שׂוֹא and *sheker*, שֶׁקֶר (lie and falsehood), which makes it a bad choice with which to begin a book full of truths.

The *Resh*, ר had the same problem (it begins the word *ra*, רָע, evil). So too the *Kuf*, ק (*Klelah*, קְלִלָּה, curse), the *Tzadi*, צ (*Tzarot*, צָרוֹת, troubles), the *Pey*, פ (*Pesha*, פְּשָׁע, transgression). Each letter came, each was turned away.

Then the *Bet*, ב, approached God, asking for creation to begin with it. God agreed with the *Bet*, ב because the word *bracha*, בְּרָכָה, blessing, begins with *Bet*, ב. We are given many blessings – so too the *Torah* will be blessed.

The letter *Bet*, ב has a special quality among the Hebrew letters. It is open on the right side, meaning all letters appear to come out of it (like a mouth). We use the letter *Bet*, ב to begin the word *Bracha* (blessing), *Bayit* (house), *Beyt Knesset* (synagogue), and *Beyt Sefer* (school).

Thirty years ago, the Cleveland Jewish community saw its own form of creation, by “creating” a new blessing in our community with the building of our *Bayit* (house), our *Beyt Sefer* (school). Coleman Brosilow (notice that in Hebrew, his last name begins with a *Bet*, ב) and a group of dedicated volunteers created, through words and actions, the Solomon Schechter Day School of Cleveland (later to become Gross Schechter Day School).

The school opened in 1980 with an enrollment of 15, in Cleveland Heights at Congregation *Beth Am* (notice the *Bet*, ב in *Beth Am*). Today we are thriving with 341 students in preschool through 8th grade!

As one of the earlier students in the school (I was in the Kindergarten class of 1982-83), I have had the opportunity to see the school grow and outgrow our buildings. In fact Schechter had 4 *batim* (homes) prior to moving to our permanent home in Pepper Pike.

Now that I am back at Schechter as an administrator, I am privileged to witness creation on a daily basis. Our teachers create curriculum, create bonds with students and families and create the future leaders of our people. Our students create new interpretations, new appreciations for their heritage and friendships that last a lifetime (in fact a number of those students from my kindergarten class are still among my close friends today).

None of us could create what we do without a guide. Our Torah serves as our light, our inspiration. For 30 years, students at Schechter have had to gain that knowledge, that inspiration using borrowed a Torah. We have learned the art of chanting from the Torah, we have heard its stories, but the school has never owned our own Torah.

I am proud that the school has commissioned its own *Sefer Torah* in honor of our thirtieth anniversary. On Monday night, October 19th at 7PM we will begin with *Bet*, ב. Rabbi David Hoffman of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and Rabbi Zerach Greenfield, a *sofer* (scribe) will lead a fascinating conversation about the specialized laws and customs surrounding the extraordinary act of writing a *sefer Torah*. They will also share with us teachings about how we all can fulfill the 613th Mitzvah during this 30th Anniversary celebration. Don't miss this great opportunity to learn together.

Please join us as we create a new beginning in our own *Bayit*... and for all of us it should be a *bracha*.

AS A FAMILY:

On Friday night go around the table and explain something new that you created this week.

Come on Monday night at 7PM to join us as we begin our journey. This event is for adults. Middle School students are invited to join us as well).

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:

1. What was created on each day of creation?
2. How were human beings created?
3. Why didn't Adam and Eve listen to God's command about eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge?
4. How were each of the participants in the Tree of Knowledge story punished?
5. Why did Cain hurt/kill (use the age appropriate word) Abel? Did he know what he was doing was wrong? How was he punished? What excuse did he use when God asked him where Abel was?

6. What blessings have you received from your education at Gross Schechter Day School (either as a child or an adult)?