

## The Universal Solvent - Breishit

השעור מקדש לרפואת שמעונה בת שרה

[Shiurim Main Menu](#)

ויאמר אלקים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים. ויעש אלקים  
את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ויהי כן.  
(בראשית א, ו-ז)

Simple question – "What did HKB"H create on the first day?" Most will  
answer – light, אהד, ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד.

However, things are not as simple as that. The Gemara says ואמר רב  
יהודה אמר רב עשרה דברים נבראו ביום ראשון ואלו הן שמים וארץ תהו ובהו אור  
נחשך רוח ומים מדת יום ומדת לילה (חגיגה יב, ע"א). *Ten* things were created on  
the first day - Heaven, earth, tohu, vohu, light, darkness, wind, water, the length  
of day, and the length of night.

Another question – is there anything *above* Heaven? We tend to think that  
earth is down here and Heaven is up there, where HKB"H sits on His הכבוד  
in the seventh layer of Heaven – ערבות (Rashi, ע"ב, חגיגה יב).

However, again, things are not simple. The psukim say ויעש אלקים את  
הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ויהי כן. ויקרא  
הרקיע רקיע. HKB"H created the רקיע which separates between "two waters" – the water below the רקיע and the water above  
the רקיע. And HKB"H called the רקיע – שמים, Heaven. Therefore, above Heaven  
is water??? In the second passuk in the parsha it says ורוח אלקים מרחפת על  
פני המים. But if HKB"H is in the 7<sup>th</sup> layer of Heaven *below the upper waters*, how  
can His spirit be "floating" above the surface of the water?

Confused yet?

Many regard the first chapter of Breishit, the six days of creation, as a kind  
of "children's story" (1<sup>st</sup> day - light, 2<sup>nd</sup> day - Heaven and earth, 3<sup>rd</sup> day - land and  
sea, etc.), but nothing could be further from the truth. Listen to what the Ramban  
says on the first passuk in the Torah –

שמעשה בראשית – סוד עמוק, אינו מובן מן המקראות, ולא יודע על בוריו אלא  
מפי הקבלה עד משה רבינו מפי הגבורה, ויודעו חז"ל להסתיר אותו ... והסיפור במה  
שנברא ביום ראשון ומה נעשה ביום שני ושאר הימים, והאריכות ביצירת אדם וחיה,

וְחִטָּאִם וְעוֹנָשִׁם, וְסִיפּוּר גֵּן עֶדֶן וְגִירוּשׁ אָדָם מִמֶּנּוּ, כִּי כָל זֶה לֹא יוּבֵן בִּינָה שְׁלֵמָה מִן הַכְּתוּבִים.

Breishit is anything but a "children's story". There is no way to understand it by just reading the psukkim, only by kabala that HKB"H revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu, and those who do understand it, are obligated to *conceal* it.

The Mishna (חגיגה ב, א) forbids studying בְּרֵאשִׁית in a forum of more than two people. מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית in this context is not referring to physics, chemistry and the big-bang theory, but to elevated *spiritual* realms that require holiness, purity and full knowledge of the Torah, before one can begin to study them, as the prophets did (רמח"ל, ספר דרך ה', רמח"ל).

Since most of us (me included) do not fit the bill above, I will not pretend to understand *anything* that is written in this parsha, much less give a shiur on it.

Instead, I would like to discuss the subject of water with some sources from the Torat Hanistar, not chas vechalila to contravene the Ramban's directive, but to try understand two practical water-related מִינּוֹת נִפְקָא מִינּוֹת regarding the halachot of – מִיִּם נְטִילַת יָדִים (מִיִּם רְאוּשׁוֹנִים) – performed before eating bread and מִיִּם אַחֲרוֹנִים, performed after eating bread and before בְּרֵכַת הַמִּזוֹן.

Why davka these two mitzvot?

R' Yosef Karo, author of the שְׁלַחַן עָרוֹךְ, wrote another sefer called מַגִּיד מִיִּשְׁרָיִם in which he says –

מִיִּם רְאוּשׁוֹנִים מְצֻנָּה, אַחֲרוֹנִים חוּבָה ... כִּי הַמִּיִּם הָרְאוּשׁוֹנִים רָמְזוּ לְמִיִּם עֲלִיוֹנִים שֶׁאֵין שָׁם שֶׁטָן וּפְגַע רַע אֲלָא הַכֹּל טָהוֹר וְקָדוֹשׁ וְלָכֵן נִקְרְאוּ מְצֻנָּה וְאַחֲרוֹנִים הֵם חוּבָה רָמְזוּ לְכַנְסֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל (סִפְרֵית מַלְכוּת) שֶׁצָּרִיךְ לְדַחוֹת מִמֶּנָּה כַּחוֹת חִיצוֹנִיּוֹת הַנִּקְרְאוֹת חוּבָה. (מגיד מישרם, בחוקותי)

R' Yosef Karo says that נְטִילַת יָדִים is connected to the "upper waters" and מִיִּם אַחֲרוֹנִים is connected to the "lower waters" mentioned in this week's parsha.

The reason water is called מִיִּם חַיִּים, is because it is essential for life. The presence of water in our world enables life. About 71% of the earth's surface is covered by water. Water is the major element from which our bodies are made, varying between babies (75%), males (60%) and females (55%). Water has the highest specific heat capacity of any liquid, making it the ideal liquid for temperature regulation (e.g. in the body, in the car radiator). Water is capable of dissolving more substances than any other liquid, giving it the title "Universal Solvent". Even physically speaking, water is unique from other liquids.

Spiritually speaking, water, מִיִּם, is a synonym for the Torah. The Torah is likened to water in many ways –

מה מים חיים לעולם, כך תורה חיים לעולם.

מה מים מן השמים, כך התורה מן השמים.

ומה המים מטהרים הגוף, כך תורה מטהרת הגוף.

ומה המים יורדיו טיפיו-טפיו ונעשים נחלים-נחלים וכו'

(שיר השירים רבה א, יט)

Simply stated, the "upper waters" are rain (ז, א) and the "lower waters" are the sea (salt) water and river (fresh) water.

After HKB"H separated the upper waters from the lower waters, the lower waters cried to HKB"H (בראשית רבה ה, ד) "We want to be up in Heaven with the upper waters!" HKB"H replied "You will get your compensation in 2448 years-time, when Am Yisrael build the Mishkan". The sea water will be used to make salt to salt the korbanot on the Mizbeach and the fresh water will be brought in a special korban נסוך המים on Sukkot (רש"י ויקרא ב, יג).

Rain is formed by an intermingling of the (left) male attribute of Gvura with the (right) female attribute of Chesed, (שיר השירים ב, ו) making up the attribute of Tiferet. Avraham's mida was Chesed, Yitzchak's was Gvura and Yaakov was a combination of the two – Tiferet. The procedure of switching the cup between the left and right hands during נטילת ידים is symbolic of this intermingling (see shiur [Eikev 2022](#)). The process of procreation also embodies the same principle. Both are derived from the מים, which are pure and holy, over which the שטן has no control over. Thus, every child is born pure and holy.

The Tosefta does not say that נטילת ידים is a mitzva, instead it says מים ראשונים רשות (תוספתא ברכות ה, יד), i.e. that it is "optional". In fact, washing your hands before eating bread is not a mitzva de'oraita, Sefer HaChinuch does not list נטילת ידים before eating bread as a separate mitzva, but as an "offshoot" of the mitzva for the Kohanim to wash their hands and feet in the Kiyor (מצוה). However, according to the Shulchan Aruch (אורח חיים קנח), since נטילת ידים before eating bread is derived from the upper waters which are pure and holy, it is a mitzva de'Rabbanan, based on a Gemara (עירובין כא ע"ב), which says that Shlomo HaMelech instituted נטילת ידים.

On the other hand, מים אחרונים is derived from the lower waters which is susceptible to external influences of the yetzer hara. Therefore, it is not a mitzva but rather a חובה (שו"ע אורח חיים קפא), which is another name for unwanted, external influences.

On a purely practical level, the purpose of מִים אֶחָרוֹנִים is to clean the hands of מֶלַח קְדוּמִית, salt (derived from the lower waters) eaten in ancient times with bread (which is more astringent than modern day table salt), lest a person accidentally touch their eyes with the salt on their fingers and burn their eyes, perhaps even go blind. However, if you read through siman קפא in the Shulchan Aruch regarding מִים אֶחָרוֹנִים, the language there is "ambiguous" and could apply equally to removing a physical contaminant as well as a *spiritual* one.

Chazal were very makpid about performing מִים אֶחָרוֹנִים and מִים ראשונים and the Gemara brings a stark warning of the severity of the outcome if these two mitzvot are not observed. מִים ראשונים הָאֵכִילוּ בֶּשֶׁר חֲזִיר מִים אֶחָרוֹנִים הָרָגוּ – failure to do מִים ראשונים (יוםא פג, ע"ב) and failure to do מִים אֶחָרוֹנִים resulted in *murder*.

The Gemara tells two disturbing "stories".

The first story tells that during a period of persecution when the goyim forbade Am Yisrael to observe the mitzvot, there was a Jewish restaurant owner who used to cook (separately) kosher meat and non-kosher (pork) so that the authorities would not think he was trying to observe kashrut. If a goy entered the restaurant, he would serve them the pork for 10 shekels. If a Jew entered the restaurant he would serve them the kosher meat for 8 shekels. How did he know if it was a Jew or a goy? The Jew would do נְטִילַת יָדִים and make a bracha before eating.

One time a Jew came into the restaurant and did not do נְטִילַת יָדִים, so the owner thought he was a goy and gave him the pork to eat. At the end when he came to pay, he was handed a bill for 10 shekels. The man said "Hang on, yesterday I came to eat and you charged me only 8 shekels?" The owner was flabbergasted and said to him "I saw you did not do נְטִילַת יָדִים and didn't make a bracha, so I thought you were a goy and I gave you the pork!"

The second story tells about R' Meir, R' Yehuda and R' Yossi who were travelling and decided to stop off at an inn for the night. The inn was owned by a man named Kidor. All three were carrying valuables with them and as is common when sleeping in a hotel, you ask the proprietor to lock your valuables in the hotel safe. R' Yehuda and R' Yossi were not makpid regarding a person's name and handed over their valuables. R' Meir, however, refused saying "There is no way I am going to hand my money over to someone named Kidor. The passuk says כִּי דֹר תִּהְיֶה לְךָ הָמָּה בָּנִים לֹא אֱמֹן בָּם (דברים לב, כ), you cannot trust someone named Kidor!" R' Meir snuck out round behind the hotel to the cemetery and, making sure nobody was watching, dug a hole and hid his wallet.

That night while Kidor was serving them dinner, he approached them "Rabbis, do you mind if I ask you a question? This afternoon, while I was having a nap, my late father came to me in a dream and said 'Kidor, you won't believe

what happened! Someone just buried a large sum of money next to my tombstone'. Rabbis, do you think that there could be any truth to this dream?"

All three told him "You must have had too much beer for lunch and it has made you woozy. That is why you are dreaming such crazy dreams. Go to sleep early tonight and sleep it off". During the night, R' Meir hurriedly retrieved his stash.

The following morning, they met Kidor as he was racing out in the direction of the cemetery. They noticed he had lentil crumbs on his mustache from breakfast. "Kidor, we would like to head out, can you please return our money from the safe". "Money? What money? I never received any money from you to put in the safe!" said Kidor as he ran out to start digging around his father's grave. R' Yehuda and R' Yossi realized that R' Meir had been correct, but being talmidei chachamim, they knew how to outwit Kidor. With Kidor out of the hotel they approached his wife "Dear Mrs. Kidor, your husband said he had to step out and told us to ask you to get our money from the safe. So that you will know that we are telling the truth, he gave us a sign - he said to tell you that you both were eating lentil soup for breakfast!" Kidor's wife knew that to be true so she believed them and went to return their money". Later Kidor returned home full of mud and empty handed. "I gave those men back their money like you told me", said his wife. "Me? I told you? When did I tell you?" Kidor was so angry that he struck his wife and she died.

So far, the shiur seems to be a "hotchpotch" of different subjects and stories, but in fact they are all tied together and they all relate to the sin of Adam HaRishon.

The first rain occurred after Adam was created וַאֲדָ יַעֲלֶה מִן הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה. אֶת כָּל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה (בראשית ב, ו). After Adam was created, he prayed for rain and all the plants, which had not yet emerged from the ground (HKB"ח created them on the third day, but they did not yet emerge from the ground on the third day) sprouted forth from the earth. This first rain was from the מִיִּם עֲלִיּוֹנִים which were pure and holy.

The Tosefta brings an interesting lashon מִיִּם רְשׁוּת – which you could translate as "optional", but what the Tosefta really means by the word רְשׁוּת is "permission". Adam HaRishon ate from the עֵץ הַדַּעַת created by the מִיִּם בְּשׂוֹר – *without permission*! This resulted in Adam essentially eating "treif" חֲזִיר (as in the story above).

Another name for the עֵץ הַדַּעַת is מַלְכוּת (לה ע"א). R' Yosef Karo says וְאַחֲרוֹנִים הֵם חוֹבָה רָמְזוּ לְכַנְסֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל (סְפִירַת מַלְכוּת) שְׁצָרִיךְ לְדַחוֹת מִמֶּנָּה כָּחוֹת חִיצוֹנִיּוֹת הַנִּקְרָאוֹת חוֹבָה. By eating from the עֵץ הַדַּעַת through the "external influence" of the נֶחֱשׁ, Adam in fact committed murder. Before the sin,

Adam was immortal, by eating from the tree without permission, he made himself mortal מִיָּם אַחֲרוֹנִים הָרְגוּ אֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ (as in the story above).

The tikkun for this debacle is the takanat Chazal to do נְטִילַת יָדִים before eating bread and a seuda – which is in fact asking HKB"H *permission* to eat.

While we are eating, we might mistakenly think that the food we have eaten comes from the kitchen and was created by our wife (it was, but that is only the "postscript"). We may allow foreign, "outside influences" to cloud our judgment regarding where our food actually comes from. Therefore, before we do Birkat HaMazon, to thank HKB"H for the food that HE created and gave us, we have to do מִיָּם אַחֲרוֹנִים to clean our hands and minds of these "foreign, external" thoughts.

The water used for נְטִילַת יָדִים, is pure and holy, corresponding to the attribute of Tiferet, the upper waters. The salt that we add to the bread before we eat it, is from the lower waters. They are both *tikkun* for the sin of Adam HaRishon. We perform these mitzvot practically every day and whether we understand their purpose or not, they do tikkun for the sin of Adam HaRishon regardless. By understanding their purpose, we can now perform them with the appropriate kavanot and thus exponentially increase the effectivity of the tikkun.

The intended purpose of water is to be מִיָּם חַיִּים, to give life. Babies are born pure and holy, with the highest percent of water (75%). Water is a very good temperature regulator, cooling down the heat of the desire caused by the yetzer hara. Water dissolves more substances than any other liquid, thus making it both the universal solvent, but also the universal cleanser, to wash away our sins and purify us.

Shabbat Shalom

Eliezer Meir Saidel

Machon Lechem Hapanim

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