

# MILA YOMIT : THE TORAH, WORD BY WORD

by Rabbi Itzchak Marmorstein

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MILA YOMIT 36:

**מִתַּחַת לַרְקִיעַ**

MEE'TACHAT (LA'RAQIYAA)

FROM UNDER ( THE FIRMAMENT)

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CONTEXT:

We are in Breisheet 1:7. In this stage of creation, ELOHIM the Creator has made the **רְקִיעַ**-RAQIYAA-Firmament and is now placing it in its place. The verse began with:

**וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר**-VA'YAVDEL BEIN HA'MAYIM ASHER-

And Separated Between The Waters Which...

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MILA CHADASHA-New Word:

**מִתַּחַת**-MEE'TACHAT

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OTIOT: LETTERS

**מ** MEM-water-here used as a prefix meaning 'from'

טַ-**TAV**--final letter of Aleph Bet- 'seal' 'impression' -formed closed on three sides and open below.

חַ-**CHET**-related to Chayim-Life, also a letter whose form is closed on three sides and open below.

טַ-**TAV** -as previous Tav.

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## MEANING and RELATED WORDS:

This Mila is formed from the joining of מִ **MEE** and תַּחַת **TaCHaT**.

מִ-**MEE**- is a prefix meaning 'from'. It can have other meanings depending on context including 'of' and 'more than'.

תַּחַת **TACHAT**-is a M. noun meaning 'the under part'. In modern Hebrew, it refers to 'the buttock'.

As an adverb it means 'underneath, below'. As a preposition it means "under, below, beneath". It can also mean 'in one's place', 'in place of, instead of' or 'because of, on account of'.

תַּחְתּוֹן **TaCHToN** is an adjective meaning 'lower, lowest, inferior'.

תַּחְתּוֹנִים **TaChTONIM** is made up of 'tachton plus 'yud, mem' which is the plural of 'tachton'. Midrashically, it is a reference reference to this 'earthly world below'. In modern Hebrew it is the M. plural noun for for 'underwear'.

תַּחְתּוֹנִית **TaCHTONIT** is a New Hebrew F. noun for 'underskirt'.

**תַּת**TaT is an abbreviated form used in compound word- meaning 'sub-,under-, as in 'tat-yami'-underwater.

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The Mila **תַּחַת**-TACHAT forms a palindrome- a word that is the same from both directions.

The otiot:letters and their symmetry suggest a boundary of life, bounded on both sides by an environment- border that contains and encloses life within it.

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MILA CHOZERET-Repeating Word:

**לְרַקִּיעַ** -LA'RAQIYAA- literally 'towards' the firmament. The **לְ** serves as a prefix that can mean 'to, unto, toward, at, by, into'

It is interesting to note the similarity between **רַקִּיעַ** RAQIYAA and **קַרְקַע**- QARQAA- ground'. Is the firmament is somehow the ground (in a liquid form) above us.

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CONCEPTUAL MEANING:

**וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַרַקִּיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לְרַקִּיעַ**

-VA'YAAS ELOHIM ET HA'RAQIYAA VA'YAVDEL BEIN HA'MAYIM ASHER MEE'TACHAT LA'RAQIYAA-

-And ELOHIM Made The Firmament And Divided Between The Waters That Are Below The Firmament....'

Our tradition describes this development in a few related ways:

"the Creator separated between the waters and the firmament with the atmosphere," -placing the atmosphere in between two forms of water

(HaRecasim le Bikah, quoted in Artscroll)

The Malbim ( Eastern European Rabbi and Biblical commentator (1809-1879, Malbim is an acronym of his name Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel) explains that in the verse before, "let it separate between water and water" the division was made in space, between two similar substances. Now the division is also made in kind: the water below was literally a liquid, while the water above was a vapor. A border defined by differences in material form.

The amazing thing about water is as we noted earlier, that it can be solid, liquid, or vapor, depending on its proximity to light-heat. (quoted in Artscroll)

In Yeshiva -seminary, we were often reminded of the Creator's compassion in breaking one of the natural laws. It's a strange anomaly that lakes don't freeze all the way through. Water turns to ice at a certain temperature than apparently turns to liquid again at a lower temperature. Fish and wildlife in lakes can only survive because this is so.

When I was researching this, I received this explanation from Rabbi Howard Cohen of Congregation Beth El in Bennington, VT. I had asked "Why don't lakes freeze completely and thus kill the life forms in the water every time the lake freezes?"

"It all has to do with the viscosity of water at different temperatures. Actually, water does not return to a liquid state when it gets cold enough. (At least not that I've ever learned. But in any case, even if this might be true it is not the reason why lakes generally don't freeze over solid). Lakes can and do freeze all the way through if it is cold enough, long enough. The explanation, though, for why it doesn't happen except in high places or near the poles has to do with the fact that near freezing water and ice is lighter than warm water. I don't remember at what temp. cold water becomes lighter than warm water but it is near the freezing point. What happens, and this is miraculous, is that during the summer the water

surface slowly absorbs the heat from the sun. Meanwhile as the surface water warms cold water sinks slowly to the bottom of the lake pushing up the warm water that settled there during the winter, which has been further enriched by the nutrients on the bottom of the pond. You have, no doubt, experienced warm spots in otherwise cold lakes and the opposite in warm lakes. These are points where the waters of two different temperature are actually shifting places. (Think of a bottle of oil with something in that separates out when it the oil gets cold or when its shaken).

Through out the summer the water actually will do a flip flop with the water towards the bottom becoming colder and the surface waters warmer. As the days shorten and the water surfaces begin to cool then freeze the warmer water is pushed towards the bottom bringing up the colder water that was down below up towards the surface where it soon freezes. The reverse of this happens in the spring and early summer. This natural cycle helps to keep closed bodies of water from freezing solid. It takes really intense deep cold to completely freeze a pond or lake over entirely. Of course the depth of the body of water matters a lot as well.

The miracle here is at least twofold: because this happens the warm water that can sustain the micro life forms that sustains the larger animals doesn't die out; and the water itself maintains its liquid state necessary for fish and amphibians who in turn are necessary for birds and mammals etc."

Thank you Rabbi Howard.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that the Creator created the structure for existence-forming, separating, ordering and thus defining governance. Contrasts are unfolding, Heaven and earth, light and darkness, day and night, and now waters above and waters below.

"The waters below which by constantly beating against the dry land not only affect the physical formation and development of the land, but also as rivers, seas and oceans, separating and joining, found and regulate the historical development of the nations of the world." (Hirsch, p. 12)

The Zohar contains a fascinating teaching which we will begin now and continue with the next Mila.

It explains that the prior verse begins with ' יְהִי רָקִיעַ -YEHEE RAQIYAA- Let There Be A Firmament' which means 'let there be a gradual extension'.

It continues by explaining that the extension is of אֱלֹהִים EL-the Divine Power extended to אֱלֹהִים ELOHIM (which is EL+HEH,YUD, MEM). Existence is the Divine Name extended to a number of places. The letters הֵה, יֵי, מֵמ can and do permute into at least two forms.

The waters below are the permutation of יֵי, מֵמ, הֵה- which spells יַמַּיִם -YaMaH- meaning 'seaward' or 'toward th sea'.

Sefer Yetzira (1:5), the first book of Kabbalah introduces the Ten Sefirot as 'ten measures which have no end'. Each one is referred to as a 'omek:depth' One of these is 'omek תַּחַת TACHAT'-a depth of below.

"Each direction extends without limit, and in this respect, the Sefirot share a property with the Infinite Being. A meditation suggested in Sefer Yetzira is to meditate on the depth as a direction which has no end as it merges with the Infinite. As we apply this to 'below' and the other directions that we are surrounded by, we begin to experience ourselves as a 'sphere of finite, suspended within the Infinite'.

Directionality, different jurisdictions are being defined here as matter begins to differentiate form and function.

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מתחת לרקיע

MEE'TACHAT LA'RAQIYAA

Down here, down from the firmament above us, the waters of life contain us, support us, vivify and nurture us.

Our tradition teaches that the Divine is seeking "Dira be Tachtonim: A Dwelling Place Below" Our challenge and invitation is to create an environment that allows the Divine Presence to fully manifest.

BeShalom

Itzchak

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