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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org**. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.**

Mazel-Tov to Zev Mendelson on his Bar Mitzvah at Beth Sholom this Shabbas. Mazel-Tov also to his parents, Jesse and Elana Mendelson, brothers Jonah and Gabey, and Grandparents Marilyn & Murray Hammerman and Judy & Abby Mendelson.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

It is strange starting a new Torah cycle after having to daven at home for all the Tishrei holy days (let alone every day for the past seven months). We start again investigating the world that God created for us. The Torah covers approximately 3500 years of history with very selective coverage. In two weeks, we cover the first 2000 years. Sefer Devarim, which we read over nearly three months, covers essays that Moshe presented to B'nai Yisrael over approximately five weeks. Whatever the Torah is, we can quickly deduce that it is not a history book. Sorry, kids. Since the Torah is not presenting history, we cannot fault it for determining that the dinosaurs have nothing that God wants humans today to learn from these reptiles.

Rabbi Marc Angel's brilliant Devar Torah, "Torah and Evolution," reprinted several pages below, is one of the most insightful essays I have ever read on how the Torah relates to science. The Torah tells us that God created the world. Science focuses on the details of the process by which inanimate objects evolved, created simple forms of life, and eventually developed into the complex forms of life we have today. The Torah explains that God created the original inanimate objects and directed the process that led to later forms of life. The Torah is not interested in presenting these details, while science focuses on how each set of details leads to the next. Science does not discuss who created the original items, while the Torah tells us that God created them and set up the process that science studies. In short, the Torah and science focus on different questions and ignore the issues of the other discipline. The Torah is completely consistent with science, properly understood. Rabbi Angel's presentation is far more sophisticated and beautifully done than my brief summary of some high points.

In a brilliant essay (video class), Rabbi David Fohrman (alephbeta.org) discusses the question of whether the big bang theory could have happened by chance rather than by God's direction. For a big bang to have led to complex forms of life requires a long string of events, each of which would have required precisely calculated events taking place under exacting conditions. For example, for a big bang to have created planets in orbit around the sun without being driven away from the center, or without crashing into the sun, required extremely precise calculations virtually certain not to have occurred by chance. Each of the steps that science says had to be involved in evolution requires similar very precise

conditions. All these steps could never have meshed together by chance. Such exacting precision required an incredibly brilliant mind to put the process together. We call that brilliant organizer God, the One who was here first, oversees the human world, and put together the conditions necessary for our world to exist. The Torah investigates the question of why God created this world, what He wants from humans, and how we can relate to God in the world He created for us. In my college philosophy class, the professor taught us that we could neither prove or disprove the existence of God. (My philosophy professor later was the first candidate for US President for the Libertarian party.) Rabbis Angel and Fohrman convince me that a proper understanding of what science and God means enables us actually to provide a convincing proof that God exists.

Over the years, I have learned that many of the best Rabbis are also extremely fine scientists. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, started studying science before switching to Rabbinic studies. Anyone reading or listening to Rabbi David Fohrman's exposition of the virtual impossibility of a big bang leading to life as we know it will realize that Rabbi Fohrman would have been a brilliant scientist. Our teachers fifty years ago might have told us that religion and science are inconsistent with each other. When I was in college and graduate school, many of my professors were Jewish – and only one of them was religious. I agree with Rabbis Angel, Cahan, and Fohrman that advances in science have made it easier than ever for scientists to be religious Jews. As we study the Torah this year, may we keep in mind that God's lessons for us are consistent with science, as long as we learn both Torah and science correctly.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Nossan ben Pessel, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Bereishis: Spreading the Fate

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

What began as a good-will gesture turned terribly sour. Worse, it spurred the first murder in history. It could have been avoided if only…

The Torah tells us of Cain's innovation. He had all the fruit of the world before him and decided to offer his thanks to the Creator, albeit from his cheapest produce — flax. Cain's brother Hevel (Abel) imitated his brother, by offering a sacrifice, too, but he did it in much grander form. He offered the finest, fattest of his herd. Hevel's offer was accepted and Cain's was not. And Cain was reasonably upset.

Hashem appears to Cain and asks him, "Why is your face downtrodden and why are you upset?" Hashem then explains that the choice of good and bad is up to every individual, and that person can make good for himself or find himself on the threshold of sin. Simple as all that. (Genesis 4:6-7)

Many commentaries are bothered by what seems to be another in a litany of questions that G-d knows the answers to. Obviously, Cain was upset for the apparent rejection of his offering. Why does Hashem seem to rub it in?

The story is told of a construction worker who opened his lunch pail, unwrapped his sandwich and made a sour face. "Peanut Butter!" he would mutter, "I hate peanut butter!" This went on for about two weeks: every day he would take out his sandwich and with the same intensity mutter under his breath. "I hate peanut butter sandwiches!"

Finally, one of his co-workers got sick and tired of his constant complaining.

"Listen here," said the man. "If you hate peanut butter that much why don't you just tell your wife not to make you any more peanut butter sandwiches? It's as simple as that."

The hapless worker sighed. "It's not that simple. You see, my wife does not pack the sandwiches for me. I make them myself."

When Hashem asks Cain, "why are you dejected?" it is not a question directed only at Cain. Hashem knew what caused the dejection. He was not waiting to hear a review of the events that transpired. Instead Hashem was asking a question for the ages. He asked a question to all of us who experience the ramifications of our own moral misdoing. Hashem asked a haunting question to all whose own hands bring about their own misfortunes.

Then they mutter and mope as if the world has caused their misfortunes. "Why are you upset, towards whom are you upset?" asks G-d.

"Is it not the case that if you would better yourself you could withstand the moral failings and their ramifications? Is it not true that if we don't act properly, eventually, we will be thrust at the door of sin?"

Success and failure of all things spiritual is dependent on our own efforts and actions. Of course Hashem knew what prompted Cain's dejection. But there was no reason for Cain to be upset. There was no one but himself at whom to be upset. All Cain had to do was correct his misdoing. Dejection does not accomplish that. Correction does.

A person in this world has the ability to teach and inspire both himself as well as others. He can spread the faith that he holds dear. But his action can also spread more than faith. A person is the master of his own moral fate as well. And that type of fate, like a peanut butter sandwich, he can spread as well!

Good Shabbos!.

How Humankind Became Adults: The Challenges of Knowing Good and Evil

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2011, 2020

It is just a few hundred years since the world has been created, and everything has gone to pot. When the world was freshly minted and created, we heard the refrain with each act of creation, "And God saw that it was good," and that the world as a whole was "exceedingly good." Now, humans have come and made a mess of everything, and a different refrain is heard: "And God saw that "massive was the evil of man on the earth, and all the thoughts of his heart were only evil the entire day." (Breishit 6:5). How did we get to this stage? How did man bring evil – in his heart and in his actions – to the earth that God had made. Undoubtedly, this is the result of eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Man now knows evil, and as a result, evil has entered into the world. So God starts again. God wipes out the entire world and preserves only Noach, hoping that this time humans will choose the good. All of this, because of the tree.

What was the knowledge that the tree imparted and how did it introduce evil into the world? There are those that say that the eating from the tree gave humans free choice, gave them the ability to choose between good and evil. But if this is the case, if they did not have this ability prior, how could they have chosen to eat from the tree, and how could they have been held accountable? A more satisfying explanation is the one offered by Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch and, more recently, the philosopher Michael Wyschograd. Rav Hirsch explains that the tree did not give them the ability to choose, it gave them the ability to know, that is, to judge. Until they ate from the tree, they only knew of God's definition of right and wrong. They could violate God's commandment, but with the clear knowledge that they were doing something wrong.

We, of course, make choices all the time that we know are wrong. Cheating on our diet, speaking lashon hara, and the like. These bad choices come from weakness of will, what Greek philosophy terms akrasia. This is the source of much wrongdoing. But it is not the only source. For when humans ate from the tree, they began, for themselves, to determine what is good and what is bad. The gained not moral choice, but moral judgment, an ethical sensibility. Now, not only could they choose to disobey, but they might also decide that what God has determined to be bad is, in their eyes, good. They could do the wrong, thinking that it was good.

The Biblical verses bear out this interpretation. We are told, not only by the snake, but by God as well, that the tree will make the humans "like God." What is it that we know about God so far in the narrative? We know that God creates. We also know that God assesses and makes judgments. "And God saw that it was good." And what do we hear as soon as the woman chooses to eat from the tree, "And the woman saw that it was good…" (Breishit 3:6). The tree has made them like God. Man and woman will from this day forward see, for themselves, whether something is good or evil. They will make their own moral decisions.

And what is wrong with that? According to Hirsch, what is wrong is that the moral decisions of humans will, oftentimes, be incorrect. We are not omniscient. We have our own drives, lusts, and self-interest. What about the tree did the woman see that was good? She saw "that it was good for eating, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and desirous for gaining wisdom." It is good from a self-interested perspective, from a perspective of satisfying desires, but not from a moral perspective. For Hirsch, the problem is that we might decide that something is good, when it is, in fact, bad.

Wyschograd goes one step further. He states that even were we to judge correctly, there is a sin in making the judgment ourselves, in being independent moral agents. If we are to be in a truly faithful relationship with God, then only God should define what is good and what is bad. To judge other than God, even if we choose in the end to obey, is to have left the Garden of Eden, to have left a perfect relationship with God.

Read this way, the narrative of the first two parshiyot of the Torah is one of a fallen humankind. How much better would it have been had we never eaten from the tree, had we not known of good and evil, had we never become independent moral agents! But… really? Is this how we think of our own humanness? Don't we feel that in not having the ability to make moral judgments we are giving up a very central part of what it means to be human, of the value of being human?

Rather than seeing the eating from the tree as a "fall," Nechama Leibowitz (echoing to some degree Immanuel Kant) offers a different explanation of this newfound state. The sin of the first man and woman was inevitable. It was a necessary act of becoming independent, of growing up. Adam and Eve had been living like children – everything was provided, all decisions and rules were made for them, all they had to do was obey the rules. But this is not the life of an adult. And to become independent, to leave the home, inevitably some rebellion, rejection, statement of separateness will have to take place. The sin was an act of individuation, it was what allowed Adam and Eve to become adults, but it forced them to leave home, where everything was perfect and taken care of for them. Now they would have to go it on their own.

And when our children leave home, we want them to think for themselves. We want them to make their own judgments, their own decisions. There is just one thing. We want those decisions to be the same ones we would have made. This will be the challenge for humans from here on in. As independent moral agents, we can make judgments, decisions, that are not as God would have us choose. But the other side of the coin is that as independent moral agents, we bring something important into our relationship with God. We bring our own thoughts, ideas, and judgments. Many of them may be bad and misguided, but some will be good, worthwhile suggestions and contributions.

The first generations after the sin tell the story of how easy it is for this independence to lead us astray. Left totally to our own devices, we will make one wrong decision after another, we will turn "good" into "bad." We continue to see, to judge, but to see wrongly, and to act wrongly. "The sons of elohim saw the daughters of men that they were beautiful; and they took as wives all those whom they chose." (Breishit 6:2). We have what to contribute, but for this relationship to succeed, we will need more guidance. And thus, when God starts the world all over again, God formalizes our relationship and God gives us the needed guidance. God makes a covenant, a brit, and God gives commandments. With these clear directives, with a relationship built on brit and mitzvot, it is hoped that humans, if they act like responsible adults, will be able to take a world that is good, and to build it.

This is the complicated and complex reality in which we live as humans in a relationship with God. Even with a covenant, even with commandments, we can continue to see, to judge and to choose wrongly: "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside." (Breishit 9:22). Of course, because we can now think and

make decisions for ourselves, it is also possible that we can introduce something new, something that God has not commanded, but that is nevertheless good: “And Noah built an altar to the Lord … And the Lord smelled the pleasing odor…” (Breishit 8:20-21).

We are adults. We can judge and choose, and we must face the responsibility of doing so wisely, with a commitment to God’s covenant and God’s mitzvot. And because we are adults, because we are able to think for ourselves, because we are able to innovate and contribute in the moral and religious realm as well, we have the ability not only to preserve the good of the world, but to increase the good within it.

Bireishis: SMALL Talk

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2020 Teach 613

Kayin had an idea to bring an offering to G-d, but he brought the lowest quality offering he could. Perhaps he thought that G-d doesn’t really need anything; it is just the gesture that counts. In any case, G-d did not show pleasure to Kayin’s offering.

Kayin’s brother, Hevel, copied him, and brought and offering to G-d, but he brought it from his very best. His offering was an expression of heartfelt devotion. G-d showed favor and accepted Hevel’s offering.

Kayin was angry.

The Torah then describes the steps leading up to the first murder. “And Kayin said to Hevel, his brother, and it was when they were in the field, and Kayin arose upon Hevel, his brother, and killed him.”

Interestingly, the Torah does not record what Kayin said, or how Hevel responded. We are only told that Kayin spoke to Hevel. Rashi explains that the content of the communication is not relevant. Kayin was jealous and angry. He engaged his brother in conversation in order to create a conflict-- to have an excuse to kill him. Kayin was looking to pick a fight.

Often, the small talk people engage in is really a prelude-- setting the groundwork for what will follow. The content of the small talk isn’t what is important, but rather the role it plays in human interaction. A simple neighborly “Hello! How are you doing?” might not be a forum to exchange significant information. But it does send the message that we are “good” with one another. For this reason, there is great benefit to living in a region that has fluctuating weather. It gives us something to talk about. Again, no significant information is necessarily exchanged. But it gives us the opportunity for a cheery interaction about how it is or isn’t raining, and how it is warmer or colder than yesterday. (I sometimes wonder if people in very temperate climates are at a disadvantage in trying to make small talk.)

One of Moshe Rabbeinu’s first interactions as a budding leader was with Doson and Aviram, who were arguing, and had almost come to blows. Interestingly, there too, the Torah does not relate what they were arguing about. Perhaps the message is that it does not really matter what they were arguing about. If it hadn’t been one thing, it would have been another. The point is that they were looking to pick a fight. One of the great messages of the story is that in the way a person wants to go, he will manage to go.

Small talk is, in some ways, inconsequential. It does not intrinsically say much. But small talk bridges the reality between where we are and where we want to go. For Kayin, that meant murder; for the two men that Moshe encountered, it meant they wanted to fight. For most people, small talk is an opportunity to set the stage for friendship.

Small talk is a powerful tool for good. People who are at odds might find that simply meeting face to face can diffuse the tension and enable them to reach resolution. Often, just starting a meeting with the basic greetings and pleasantries of life can pave the way to mutual understanding.

In these unusual times of COVID, small talk can help people get through extreme challenges of logistics and of loneliness. Simply reaching out to say “Hello!” can, in some cases, make all the difference.

All things considered, I think you will agree. Small talk is really very big.

* Rav of Southeast Hebrrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.

Torah and Evolution: Thoughts for Parashat Bereishith

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

I recently received an email communication from an Orthodox Jewish organization stating in unequivocal terms that "Orthodox Judaism rejects the theory of evolution." In certain Orthodox circles, it is posited as a matter of faith that "true" Judaism does not and cannot accept evolution. God created the universe; God created Adam and Eve. This is clear from the first chapter of Bereishith, and there is nothing more to say on the subject. Any other position is heresy.

Actually, there is much more to say on the subject. I believe that it is religiously incorrect to state that "Orthodox Judaism rejects the theory of evolution." This is not only an invalid statement from an intellectual point of view, it is also invalid from an Orthodox religious point of view. The statement reflects obscurantism, not faith.

The first chapter of Bereishith presents a lofty, beautiful and poetic account of creation. It does not present a scientific account of creation. It does not describe how God created things, only that He did indeed create the world.

It has been pointed out that the six "days" of creation are not 24-hour days as we know them today; the sun wasn't created until day four! Rather, the Torah poetically speaks of six periods of time—each of which could have been billions of years long—in which the universe came into being. Current scientific calculations place the "big bang" at a bit over 13 billion years ago. These calculations are not based on idle speculation but on carefully studied cosmic phenomena. Religious Jews, along with all thinking people, should feel comfortable embracing the findings of science. There is no contradiction at all between Torah and the "big bang" calculations.

The theory of evolution, which has a strong body of scientific support, posits that life emerged gradually, over the course of many millions of years. Simple life forms gradually evolved into more complex life forms. Human beings ultimately emerged from a long process of evolution. The Torah neither affirms nor denies the theory of evolution. It makes clear, though, that God created the world; things did not develop randomly. God could have created things in an instant; or He could have created things by a process of evolution spanning millions of years. When the Torah states that God created Adam from the dust of the earth, this could mean that God created Adam via a process of evolution spanning a vast period of time—beginning with the simplest cells found in the dust and ultimately developing into thinking human beings. The Torah simply does not provide us with scientific details about the formation of human beings.

Since the weight of scientific information indicates a gradual development of life, we can embrace this information without religious qualms or conflicts. The Torah tells us that God created the world; scientists have been trying to figure out the process of the creation. Thus, the theory of evolution poses no threat whatever to our religious tradition. Rather, it fills in scientific information that was not discussed in the Torah.

Our conflict is not with the theory of evolution per se. Our conflict is with those who claim that evolution happened entirely on its own, without any Divine impetus. Religious Jews may properly accept the findings of science, but must always make clear that it was God who fashioned the universe, who set things in motion, and who indeed created the scientific phenomena upon which the scientists are drawing their conclusions.

During the middle ages, a conflict raged between science and religion on the question of the nature of matter. Science, as represented by Aristotle, argued for the eternity of matter. Religious tradition, based on the first chapter of Bereishith, argued for a created universe. Maimonides, in his Guide of the Perplexed 2:25, maintained the traditional religious view of God as creator. He argued that it is philosophically impossible to prove the eternity of matter. On the other hand, since it is philosophically plausible to posit God as creator of matter, we can safely rely on religious tradition to teach us that which science/philosophy cannot teach.

Yet, Maimonides points out that if indeed it could be demonstrated that matter is eternal, then we would necessarily accept scientific truth. Since God is the Author of both Torah and Science, it is impossible for the two to be in conflict. If science could prove the eternity of matter, then the Torah would need to be re-interpreted accordingly. "Know that our shunning the affirmation of the eternity of the world is not due to a text figuring in the Torah according to which the world has been produced in time. For the texts indicating that the world has been produced in time are not more numerous than

those indicating that the deity is a body. Nor are the gates of figurative interpretation shut in our faces or impossible of access to us regarding the subject of the creation of the world in time. For we could interpret them as figurative, as we have done when denying His corporeality."

Maimonides' methodology is of profound significance. Religious texts do not and cannot conflict with demonstrated scientific truths. If the texts seem to conflict with scientific truth, then the texts need to be re-interpreted.

People are welcome to accept or reject the theory of evolution, as they think best after they have actually studied the scientific data carefully. But regardless of their personal opinion, they are not entitled to say that "Orthodox Judaism rejects the theory of evolution." If the theory of evolution is scientifically valid, then religious Jews—along with all thinking people—should necessarily accept it—with the proviso that the process of evolution itself was God's means for creating life..

* Jewishideas.org. **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time**.

For a stimulating article that was too long to include here, see How the Torah Broke with Ancient Political Thought by Rabbi Professor Joshua Berman of Bar Ilan University, attached to the E-mail or the download for Bereshit at PotomacTorah.org.

Cain, Abel...and Us: Thoughts for Parashat Bereishith

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

The story of Cain and Abel is deeply troubling. For some unstated reason, God accepts the offering of Abel and rejects the offering of Cain. In his bitterness and jealousy, Cain murders Abel, the first homicide.

In his discussion of this story in his book, Messengers of God, Elie Wiesel considers the feelings of Cain upon God's rejection of his offering. Cain was humiliated, dejected, angry. But Elie Wiesel raises important questions. When their son Cain was so obviously distraught, where were Adam and Eve? Nowhere in the biblical account do we see the parents offering consolation or encouragement to their troubled son.

Nor do we read of any words uttered by Abel to Cain—no attempt to soothe or comfort a suffering brother. Wiesel writes: "Abel remained aloof. He did nothing to console his brother, to cheer him up or appease him. He regretted nothing, said nothing. He simply was not there, he was present without being present….Therein lay his guilt. In the face of suffering, one has no right to turn away, not to see. In the face of injustice, one may not look the other way….Though too weak to oppose God, man is strong enough to defend his fellow-man or at least to dress his wounds. Abel did nothing—such was the nature of his fault" (pp. 56-57).

The tragedy of Cain and Abel was not simply about the sin of Cain. It was about an absence of proper relationship between parents and son, between brother and brother. Had the four of them sat down together to ponder the situation, things could have turned out differently. Instead of murder and exile, we might have read about a troubled family that learned to heal its wounds…together, lovingly, thoughtfully.

The absence of meaningful communication is the source of much grief and much suffering.

The story of Cain and Abel provides an important ongoing message. Life is not always fair; bad feelings rise among people. When people do not communicate honestly and compassionately, tragedy almost always ensues. Instead of ignoring the pain of others, everyone is better served when that pain is addressed, soothed, dealt with directly.

When I was in college, a friend of mine had a cousin who was killed in a gang war in the Bronx. At the Shiva home, family members reminisced about the dead young man: yes, he was tough, but he had a good heart. He got mixed up with the wrong people, but he had so much good in him. He was respectful to his parents and kind to friends and neighbors. Everyone seemed to find something good to say about him. My friend stood up and said with great emotion: if he had heard these things from you while he was still alive, maybe he would still be alive! All I ever heard you say about him was that he was a no-good hoodlum, a bad person, a violent person. There was a great hush in the room. Indeed, that young man's self-image and self-esteem might have been very different if he had heard loving words of praise during his lifetime, if someone had taken the trouble to share his pains and frustrations.

Sometimes people go through life without ever knowing how much others love them, admire them, and see virtue in them. No one seems to understand them, or share their deepest concerns, or be tuned in to their inner turmoil.
Words of sincere appreciation and understanding can change a human life. A loving hug, a pat on the back, a smile, a genuine compliment--these things can give joy and meaning to others, beyond what we might imagine. Being sensitive to the sufferings and feelings of others is a virtue all of us can cultivate.

The story of Cain and Abel can be read as an eternal condemnation of humanity to a reality of jealousy, violence, and murder.

Or it can be read as a challenge to humanity to rise above jealousies, antagonisms and hatred. It can be read as a challenge to foster understanding, dialogue, sympathy and compassion.

The world would be a much better place if we would follow the second reading.

* Jewishideas.org.

Parshas Bereishis

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

Bereishis is perhaps the most cryptic and difficult parsha to comprehend in any meaningful way. Beginning with the repeated overview and outline of the creation it requires careful study of the commentaries and our traditions to glean any lessons even on a basic level.

One area that is particularly perplexing is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. From a simple reading of the Chumash it would seem that Adam and Chava were created without this knowledge. What was the human being without the knowledge of good and evil? We were created to choose between good and evil, to use our free will to elevate G-d's world and bring G-dliness into the world. How could we possibly achieve that goal if we do not know the difference between good and evil? What's more, why would G-d forbid us from attaining that knowledge? Who would keep the Torah, if human beings would not know the difference between good and evil? What purpose would this initial creation of mankind have served?

Rabbeinu Bechaye (Bereishis 3:5) explains that the knowledge we are referring to is the understanding of the difference between living life for G-dliness versus living for passions and desires. It is the understanding that when one lives for desires and passions, those desires and passions have the ability to sway us and lead us astray. This was the knowledge that they lacked, because they had never experienced it.
Adam and Chava certainly knew the difference between good and evil. They were purely intellectual beings, with a depth of clarity and understanding of G-dliness and all that is good and just. What they lacked was this knowledge of just how different good and evil are. As purely intellectual beings, their lives and all of their decisions were focused only on G-dliness. Even their passions and desires were seen and used only as tools to serve G-d. They had never experienced or even considered passions and desires as a purpose unto themselves. Never having lived for passion – even for a moment of their existence – they did not understand how the passions and desires can sway one's mind and lead one astray.

It was for this reason that G-d forbade them to eat from the tree. So long as they did not eat from the tree, evil remained only an external concept, but not something that would ever be a part of their own lives. Once they ate from the tree, their perspective would drastically and devastatingly change. They would now see passions and desires as an end, as well as

a means. The challenge to choose good over evil would be much more difficult. They would understand through painful personal experience just how different good and evil are. They would see the difference between a moment of G-dliness and a moment of passion. They would know of the dangerous power of passion and desire to cloud one's judgement and lead one astray.

Rabbeinu Bachye notes (ibid. 3:6) that this devastating force of passions and desires can apply even when the passions and desires are being used for good. The Torah tells us that Chava was swayed to eat from the tree because it was "good to eat, and tempting for the eyes and desirous for becoming wise". Chava's desire for the Tree of Knowledge was as a means to become wise. She desired a greater knowledge and understanding of G-d's world and of the great privilege of serving G-d and the beauty of G-dliness. Yet, that very desire led her to violate G-d's will and choose passion over G-dliness. Even healthy and proper passions can lead one astray and bring about devastating consequences.

Now that the tree was eaten from, we have those passions and desires to reckon with. We know only too well, the difference between a path of goodness and a path of evil and how far off course the path of evil can go. As we begin learning the Torah again, we need to remember that even passion for good can lead one astray. We must always think and rethink before we act. No matter how just our cause may be.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

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60 Days Till Chanukah

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Hello Moshe. So how was your holiday season? I'm sure however it was, it was different. The thought on most Jews' minds (whether in the mind's front and center or gnawing in the back) when this whole situation started was "what will the holiday season look like this year?".

And now we're on the other side. Today, the day after the holidays, is called Isru Chag, which means "The Binding of the Festival," when we bind ourselves to the last vestiges of the festival season before we say a complete goodbye. (This is expressed halachically by not saying Tachanun or Lamnatzeach in davening today.)

For me, saying farewell to this season can be bittersweet. On the one hand, the holidays are fun and packed full of meaning with all kinds of rituals ranging from fasting to dancing. To paraphrase Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schenersohn, it's like starting the year with a magnificent buffet of experiences. Routine life gets upended and we do all kinds of new things. For this year this happened tenfold as we sought ways to accommodate our new reality and do everything we could to fulfill our mitzvot and enjoy time with our family and communities in a safe way. Looking back, that's exactly what we did, and we succeeded. Even those who spent the holidays completely at home have communicated to me that they enjoyed the holidays in their own way. Holidays were still wonderful this year, and it's hard to leave that behind.

But it's also sweet. It's sweet and exciting to look ahead to the road in front of us and experience life anew as we bring our changed selves into life as it's usually lived. How will our routines change? How will our attitudes change? Personally, I saw firsthand our resilience and the resilience of our Jewish community. We all have scripts for how things should be, especially during Tishrei. No other time of the year are we more under the "tyranny of the have-to." We have to recite this poem on Rosh Hashanah. Services have to be exactly like so. We have to gather with our family and community in this specific way.

But we adjusted based on the circumstances. We did it differently, and what happened? The world didn't end, the sky did not fall, and we did not melt. It makes me believe that no matter what the rest of 5781/2020 may bring us, we'll be just fine as long as we have each other to lean on. It should be interesting to see how this affects us moving forward.

And now onward into the year. The next stop in this tour through 5781 is Chanukah. In 60 days, we have another holiday. Traditionally, 60 represents completion in Judaism. In halacha, this plays out by permitting a meat and milk dish if the ratio of each is 60 to 1. One part of milk to 60 parts of meat cannot change the dish because it gets subsumed under the meat's established identity.

So we can think of this as a complete trial run. As we look back fondly at the holidays, we also look forward towards the

year and all the latent possibilities within. There's a lot happening in the world in the next 60 days. Let us be confident that with the fortitude we have picked up from God's gift of the holiday season, we can get through anything together.

I can smell the latkes already.

Shavua Tov and (for the final greeting of this sort in 5781) Shanah Tovah!

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Rav Kook Torah
Breishit: The Torah of Eretz Yisrael

"And the gold of that land is good..." (Gen. 2:12)

Why is the Torah suddenly interested in the quality of gold? Was this verse written for prospectors of rare metals?

The Midrash (Breishit Rabbah 16:4) explains that the land referred to is Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel), and the precious commodity is none other than the Torah itself. The Midrash then declares,

"This teaches that there is no Torah like the Torah of the Land of Israel."

This is a pretty remarkable statement. Is there really a different Torah in the Land of Israel? And in what way is it superior to the Torah outside of Israel?

Details and General Principles

According to Rav Kook, the Torah of Eretz Yisrael is fundamentally different in its method and scope. The Torah of the Diaspora focuses on the details — specific laws and rules. The Torah of the Land of Israel, on the other hand, uses a more holistic approach. It connects those details with their governing moral principles.

This approach is particularly needed in our time of national renascence. We must reveal the truth and clarity of our divine treasure. We must demonstrate the beauty and depth of practical mitzvot, by endowing them with the light of the mystical and philosophical side of the Torah. And the true depths and foundations of Torah can only be experienced in the Land of Israel.

The Individual and the Nation

The contrast in Torah between the prat and the klal, the details and the whole, also exists on a second level.

The Torah of the Diaspora concerns itself with developing the spiritual potential of the individual. The Torah of Eretz Yisrael, on the other hand, relates to the nation as a whole. This Torah deals with physical and spiritual needs of a nation who, as an organic whole, sanctifies God's holy Name in the world. The Torah of Eretz Yisrael occupies itself with a long list of national institutions belonging to this special people, including kings and prophets, the Temple and Sanhedrin, Levites and kohanim, Sabbatical and Jubilee years.

All of the ideals and philosophies that are dispersed and diluted in the Diaspora, become relevant and united in the Land of Israel. In Eretz Yisrael, the life of the individual derives its existential meaning from the nation's crowning destiny and is uplifted through the nation's spiritual elevation.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 26-27. Adapted from Orot HaTorah, chap. 13.)

The Three Stages of Creation (Bereishit 5779)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Former UK Chief Rabbi,*

"And God said, let there be… And there was… and God saw that it was good."

Thus unfolds the most revolutionary as well as the most influential account of creation in the history of the human spirit.

In Rashi's commentary, he quotes Rabbi Isaac who questioned why the Torah should start with the story of creation at all.[1] Given that it is a book of law – the commandments that bind the children of Israel as a nation – it should have started with the first law given to the Israelites, which does not appear until the twelfth chapter of Exodus.

Rabbi Isaac's own answer was that the Torah opens with the birth of the universe to justify the gift of the Land of Israel to the People of Israel. The Creator of the world is ipso facto owner and ruler of the world. His gift confers title. The claim of the Jewish people to the land is unlike that of any other nation. It does not flow from arbitrary facts of settlement, historical association, conquest or international agreement (though in the case of the present state of Israel, all four apply). It follows from something more profound: the word of God Himself – the God acknowledged, as it happens, by all three monotheisms: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is a political reading of the chapter. Let me suggest another (not incompatible, but additional) interpretation.

One of the most striking propositions of the Torah is that we are called on, as God's image, to imitate God. "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2):

The sages taught: "Just as God is called gracious, so you be gracious. Just as He is called merciful, so you be merciful. Just as He is called holy, so you be holy." So too the prophets described the Almighty by all the various a tributes: long-suffering, abounding in kindness, righteous, upright, perfect, mighty and powerful and so on – to teach us that these qualities are good and right and that a human being should cultivate them, and thus imitate God as far as we can.[2]

Implicit in the first chapter of Genesis is thus a momentous challenge: Just as God is creative, so you be creative. In making man, God endowed one creature – the only one thus far known to science – with the capacity not merely to adapt to his environment, but to adapt his environment to him; to shape the world; to be active, not merely passive, in relation to the influences and circumstances that surround him:

The brute's existence is an undignified one because it is a helpless existence. Human existence is a dignified one because it is a glorious, majestic, powerful existence…Man of old who could not fight disease and succumbed in multitudes to yellow fever or any other plague with degrading helplessness could not lay claim to dignity. Only the man who builds hospitals, discovers therapeutic techniques, and saves lives is blessed with dignity…Civilised man has gained limited control of nature and has become, in certain respects, her master, and with his mastery he has attained dignity as well. His mastery has made it possible for him to act in accordance with his responsibility.[3]

The first chapter of Genesis therefore contains a teaching. It tells us how to be creative – namely in three stages. The first is the stage of saying "Let there be." The second is the stage of "and there was." The third is the stage of seeing "that it is good."

Even a cursory look at this model of creativity teaches us something profound and counter-intuitive: What is truly creative is not science or technology per se, but the word. That is what forms all being.

Indeed, what singles out Homo sapiens among other animals is the ability to speak. Targum Onkelos translates the last phrase of Genesis 2:7, "God formed man out of dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living creature," as "and man became ruaḥ memallelah, a speaking spirit." Because we can speak, we can think, and therefore imagine a world different from the one that currently exists.

Creation begins with the creative word, the idea, the vision, the dream. Language – and with it the ability to remember a distant past and conceptualise a distant future – lies at the heart of our uniqueness as the image of God. Just as God makes the natural world by words ("And God said…and there was") so we make the human world by words, which is why Judaism takes words so seriously: "Life and death are in the power of the tongue," says the book of Proverbs (18:21). Already at the opening of the Torah, at the very beginning of creation, is foreshadowed the Jewish doctrine of revelation:

that God reveals Himself to humanity not in the sun, the stars, the wind or the storm but in and through words – sacred words that make us co-partners with God in the work of redemption.

"And God said, let there be…and there was" – is, the second stage of creation, is for us the most difficult. It is one thing to conceive an idea, another to execute it. "Between the imagination and the act falls the shadow."[4] Between the intention and the fact, the dream and the reality, lies struggle, opposition, and the fallibility of the human will. It is all too easy, having tried and failed, to conclude that nothing ultimately can be achieved, that the world is as it is, and that all human endeavour is destined to end in failure.

This, however, is a Greek idea, not a Jewish one: that hubris ends in nemesis, that fate is inexorable and we must resign ourselves to it. Judaism holds the opposite, that though creation is difficult, laborious and fraught with setbacks, we are summoned to it as our essential human vocation: "It is not for you to complete the work," said Rabbi Tarfon, "but neither are you free to desist from it."[5] There is a lovely rabbinic phrase: maḥashva tova HaKadosh barukh Hu meztarfah lema'aseh.[6]
This is usually translated as "God considers a good intention as if it were the deed." I translate it differently: "When a human being has a good intention, God joins in helping it become a deed," meaning – He gives us the strength, if not now, then eventually, to turn it into achievement.

If the first stage in creation is imagination, the second is will. The sanctity of the human will is one of the most distinctive features of the Torah. There have been many philosophies – the generic name for them is determinisms – that maintain that the human will is an illusion. We are determined by other factors – genetically encoded instinct, economic or social forces, conditioned reflexes – and the idea that we are what we choose to be is a myth. Judaism is a protest in the name of human freedom and responsibility against determinism. We are not pre-programmed machines; we are persons, endowed with will. Just as God is free, so we are free, and the entire Torah is a call to humanity to exercise responsible freedom in creating a social world which honours the freedom of others. Will is the bridge from "Let there be" to "and there was."

What, though, of the third stage: "And God saw that it was good"? This is the hardest of the three stages to understand. What does it mean to say that "God saw that it was good"? Surely, this is redundant. What does God make that is not good? Judaism is not Gnosticism, nor is it an Eastern mysticism. We do not believe that this created world of the senses is evil. To the contrary, we believe that it is the arena of blessing and good.

Perhaps this is what the phrase comes to teach us: that the religious life is not to be sought in retreat from the world and its conflicts into mystic rapture or nirvana. God wants us to be part of the world, fighting its battles, tasting its joy, celebrating its splendour. But there is more.

In the course of my work, I have visited prisons and centres for young offenders. Many of the people I met there were potentially good. They, like you and me, had dreams, hopes, ambitions, aspirations. They did not want to become criminals. Their tragedy was that often they came from dysfunctional families in difficult conditions. No one took the time to care for them, support them, teach them how to negotiate the world, how to achieve what they wanted through hard work and persuasion rather than violence and lawbreaking. They lacked a basic self-respect, a sense of their own worth. No one ever told them that they were good.

To see that someone is good and to say so is a creative act – one of the great creative acts. ere may be some few individuals who are inescapably evil, but they are few. Within almost all of us is something positive and unique, but which is all too easily injured, and which only grows when exposed to the sunlight of someone else's recognition and praise. To see the good in others and let them see themselves in the mirror of our regard is to help someone grow to become the best they can be. "Greater," says the Talmud, "is one who causes others to do good than one who does good himself."[7] To help others become what they can be is to give birth to creativity in someone else's soul. This is done not by criticism or negativity but by searching out the good in others, and helping them see it, recognise it, own it, and live it.

"And God saw that it was good" – this too is part of the work of creation, the subtlest and most beautiful of all. When we recognise the goodness in someone, we do more than create it, we help it to become creative. This is what God does for us, and what He calls us to do for others.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Rashi 1:1

[2] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De'ot 1:6.

[3] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, The Lonely Man of Faith (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 16–17.

[4] T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men", in T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems 1909–1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p92.

[5] Mishna, Avot 2:16.

[6] Tosefta, Pe'ah 1:4.

[7] Bava Batra 9a.

Shabbat Shalom.

* https://rabbisacks.org/three-stages-creation-bereishit-5779/ Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

Why Did Cain Kill Abel?

By Yehuda Shurpin*

Murder is one of the most heinous—and oldest—crimes in the world. In the very first Torah portion, when the world is only a few days old, we read that Abel is murdered by his very own brother, Cain. Part of what makes this so shocking is that it seems to come out of nowhere. Here is the Torah's cryptic account:

> *Now, it came to pass at the end of days that Cain brought of the fruit of the soil an offering to the L rd. And Abel, he too brought of the firstborn of his flocks and of their fattest, and the L rd turned to Abel and to his offering. But to Cain and to his offering, He did not turn, and it annoyed Cain exceedingly, and his countenance fell. And the L rd said to Cain, "Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen? Is it not so that if you improve, it will be forgiven you? If you do not improve, however, at the entrance, sin is lying, and to you is its longing, but you can rule over it." And Cain spoke to Abel his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him.1*

In short, Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer. Cain brought an offering to G d from the fruit of his harvest, and Abel brought from his firstborn sheep. G d accepted the offering of Abel, but not that of Cain. Cain was upset, and G d spoke to him, letting him know that sin awaited him (in the future) unless he repented. And then, all of a sudden, Cain met Abel in the field and killed him, ostensibly out of jealousy.

But there seems to be more to the story. Right before Cain killed Abel in the field, the verse says, "Cain spoke to Abel his brother"2—yet the Torah does not tell us what this final exchange of words was all about. Could they have argued over something that led to the murder of Abel? The Midrash offers us a number of explanations, each of which represents a different philosophical reason for the sibling rivalry.

Over Inheritance and Property

According to one Midrash, it all boils down to what has caused much strife in families throughout the ages, namely, the division of property and inheritance.

Seeing that they were the only two humans around, Cain and Abel decided to divide "ownership" of the world. One would take all the lands and things that grow from it, while the other would take movable objects such as animals and the like. Thus, one became a farmer and the other a shepherd. It came to pass, however, that Cain said to Abel, "The land you stand on is mine," while Abel retorted, "What you are wearing is mine." One said: "Strip"; the other retorted: "Fly off the

ground." It was out of this quarrel that Cain rose up and murdered Abel.3

Others say that they both split the lands and the movable objects, but they were quarreling about on whose portion the future Temple should be built.4

Over a Woman

Another explanation is that they were fighting over—what else?—a woman. According to the Midrash, both Cain and Abel were born with twin sisters, whom they married. However, Abel was actually born with two sisters, and they fought over who would marry the extra wife. Cain said he was the oldest and thus it was his right, while Abel claimed that since she was born with him, it was his right.

Over Theology

Cain, upon seeing that his offering was not accepted but his brother's was, said to Abel, "It appears that G d isn't just and shows favoritism." Replied Abel, "Heaven forbid that it be as you say; rather, the reason why my offering was accepted was because it was better." Cain, in turn, replied, "It appears that there is no reward and punishment for good or bad." Said Abel, "Surely the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished." It was from this quarrel that Cain ended up killing Abel.5

In Conclusion

Although the Midrash explains that Cain ultimately killed Abel over either money, a woman or theology, perhaps one reason why the Torah records the incident in a cryptic manner is to teach us an important lesson. Cain may have been jealous that G d accepted Abel's offering, not his, but G d explained to him that it was his own fault that his offering wasn't accepted. His brother's offering did not make his offering better or worse by comparison; the onus was on Cain to better himself. Likewise, we should not be jealous of others; rather, it is up to us to better ourselves.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 4:3-8.

2. Genesis 4:8

3. Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 22:7; see also Midrash Tanchumah 1:9.

4. Midrash Rabbah, ibid.; see also Zohar, vol. 1, 50b.

5. Targum Yonatan on Genesis 4:8.

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[Ed. Note: Since no human had died before Abel, Cain might not have realized that he was about to kill his brother. If so, the sin was manslaughter rather than murder.]

Breishit: The New Perfect

An Insight from the Lubavitcher Rebbe*

> **G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, for on it He abstained from all His work that G-d created to do.** Bereishit 2:3

The New Perfect

On the seventh day from the start of Creation, G-d rested from his creation of the world -- "His work that G-d created to

do."

What is the meaning of this phrase? Would it not have been more accurate to refer to Creation as the work "that G-d created and did"?

The Midrash explains that indeed G-d created the world "to do" -- i.e., to be perfected by humankind. In the words of the Midrash, "Anything created in the six days of Creation requires enhancement."

This perspective seems to contradict the oft-repeated teaching of our Sages that the world was entirely perfect and complete upon creation. Which one is it? Was the world perfect upon creation, or does it require further improvement -- "to do"?

These two views are not contradictory, however, when we consider the context of the verse that refers to creation as the work "that G-d created to do" -- a verse which speaks about the seventh day, Shabbos.

In the first six days of Creation, the creation met all "expectations": it was perfect and complete. When the seventh day arrived, however, and G-d sanctified that day as Shabbos, the additional holiness drawn into the world made it suddenly possible for the world to attain greater heights than it had been capable of before, rendering its initial state of perfection deficient.

Thus began the requirement for humankind "to do" -- to bring creation to its newly endowed potential, for greater potential obligates greater responsibility and accomplishment.

-- From: Lightpoints *

* Newly published teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe on the weekly Torah portion.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

Likutei *Divrei* Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Taking Responsibility

If leadership is the solution, what is the problem? On this, the Torah could not be more specific. The problem is a failure of responsibility.

The early chapters of Genesis focus on two stories: the first is Adam and Eve; the second, Cain and Abel. Both are about a specific kind of failure. First Adam and Eve. As we know, they sin. Embarrassed and ashamed, they hide, only to discover that one cannot hide from God:

The Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Gen. 3:9-12)

Both insist that it was not their fault. Adam blames the woman. The woman blames the serpent. The result is paradise lost: they are both punished and exiled from the garden of Eden. Why? Because Adam and Eve deny personal responsibility. They say, in effect, "It wasn't me."

The second story is tragic. The first instance of sibling rivalry in the Torah leads to the first murder:

While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground." (Gen. 4:8-10)

Cain does not deny personal responsibility. He does not say, "It was not me," or "It was not my fault." He denies moral responsibility. In effect he asks why he should be concerned with the welfare of anyone but himself. Why should we not do what we want if we have the power to do it? In Plato's Republic, Glaucon argues that justice is whatever is in the interest of the stronger party. Might makes right. If life is a Darwinian struggle to survive, why should we restrain ourselves for the sake of others if we are more powerful than they are? If there is no morality in nature, then I am responsible only to myself. That is the voice of Cain throughout the ages.

These two stories are not just stories. They are an account, at the beginning of the Torah's narrative history of humankind, of a failure, first personal then moral, to take responsibility – and it is this for which leadership is the answer.

There is a fascinating phrase in the story of Moses' early years. He grows up, goes out to his people, the Israelites, and sees them suffering, doing slave labour. He witnesses an Egyptian officer beating one of them. The text then says: "He looked this way and that and saw no one" (vayar ki ein ish Ex. 2:12, or more literally, 'he saw that there was no man').

It is difficult to read this literally. A building site is not a closed location. There must have been many people present. A mere two verses later we discover that there were Israelites who knew exactly what had happened. Therefore, the phrase almost certainly means, "He looked this way and that and saw that there was no one else willing to intervene."

If this is so, then we have here the first instance of what came to be known as the "Genovese syndrome" or "the bystander effect,"[1] so-called after a case in which a woman was attacked in New York in the presence of a large number of people who all knew that she was being assaulted but failed to come to her rescue.

Social scientists have undertaken many experiments to try to determine what happens in situations like this. Some argue that the presence of other bystanders affects an individual's interpretation of what is happening. Since no one else is coming to the rescue, they conclude that what is happening is not an emergency.

Others, though, argue that the key factor is diffusion of responsibility. People assume that since there are many people present someone else will step forward and act. That seems to be the correct interpretation of what was happening in the case of Moses. No one else was prepared to come to the rescue. Who, in any case, was likely to do so? The Egyptians were slave-masters. Why should they bother to take a risk to save an Israelite? And the Israelites were slaves. How could they come to the aid of one of their fellows when, by doing so, they would put their own life at risk?

It took a Moses to act. But that is what makes a leader. A leader is one who takes responsibility. Leadership is born when we become active not passive, when we do not wait for someone else to act because perhaps there is no one else – at least not here, not now. When bad things happen, some avert their eyes. Some wait for others to act. Some blame others for failing to act. Some simply complain. But there are some people who say, "If something is wrong let me try to put it right." They are the leaders. They are the ones who make a difference in their lifetimes. They are the ones who make ours a better world.

Many of the great religions and civilisations are based on acceptance. If there is violence, suffering, poverty and pain in the world, they accept that this is simply the way of the world. Or, the will of God. Or, that it is the nature of nature itself. They shrug their shoulders, for all will be well in the World to Come.

Judaism was and remains the world's great religion of protest. The heroes of faith did not accept; they protested. They were willing to confront God Himself. Abraham said, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18:25). Moses said, "Why have You done evil to this people?" (Ex. 5:22). Jeremiah said, "Why are the wicked at ease?" (Jer. 12:1). That is how God wants us to respond. Judaism is God's call to human responsibility. The highest achievement is to become God's partner in the work of creation.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God called out "Where are you?" As Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, pointed out, this call was not directed only to the first humans.[2] It echoes in every generation. God gave us freedom, but with freedom comes responsibility. God teaches us what we ought to do but He does not do it for us. With rare exceptions, God does not intervene in history. He acts through us, not to us. His is the voice that tells us, as He told Cain, that we can resist the evil within us as well as the evil that surrounds us.

The responsible life is a life that responds. The Hebrew for responsibility, achrayut, comes from the word acher, meaning "other." Our great Other is God Himself, calling us to use the freedom He gave us, to make the world that is more like the world that ought to be. The great question, the question that the life we lead answers, is: which voice will we listen to? Will we heed the voice of desire, as in the case of Adam and Eve? Will we listen to the voice of anger, as in the case of Cain? Or will we follow the voice of God calling on us to make this a more just and gracious world?

[1] For a discussion, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Kitty_Genovese.

[2] Noted in Nissan Mindel, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, A Biography (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 1969).

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The beginning of our communal Torah readings once again with the Book of Genesis on the first Shabbat following the intensive festival period from Rosh Hashanah through to Shmini Atzeret-Simchat Torah is much more than a calendrical accident; the first chapters of Genesis serve as a resounding confirmation of the true nature of the human being on earth and what it is that God expects of him.

In his groundbreaking work Family Redeemed, my teacher and mentor Rav J.B. Soloveitchik typologically defines two aspects of the human being emanating from each of the first two chapters of Genesis. The first chapter is a majestic description of the Creation of the universe in six days (or epochs), with the human being emerging as an integral aspect of an evolutionary process of creation; the human may be the highest expression of this process, emerging as he does towards the conclusion of the sixth day after the earth has "brought forth every kind of living creature: cattle, reptiles and wild beasts of every kind" (Gen. 1:24), but he is and remains part and parcel of creature-hood nevertheless.

This becomes patently clear when the Almighty declares, "Let us make the human being in our image and as our likeness" (Gen. 1:26), and Nahmanides (Spain, 12th century) interprets that God was addressing the animals and beasts: The human being will be subject to the same physical strengths and limitations, to the same cycle of birth, development, desiccation and death, to the same requirements of nutrition, procreation and elimination of waste, which characterizes the animal world formed together with him on that primordial sixth day (epoch).

Rav Soloveitchik calls this aspect of the human being Natural Man; I would suggest calling him Bestial Man. Herein lies the source for viewing the human being as no more than a complex animal, devoid of true freedom of choice to truly change himself or change the world; bestial man is naturally programmed, the world is based on a "survival of the fittest" and "to the victor belongs the spoils" mentality. War is an ideal because it tests physical prowess and courageous bravery, and the weak and feeble are there to be enslaved or snuffed out.

From this perspective, morality is merely the hobgoblin of little minds and even weaker bodies, vainly attempting to curb the appetites of the truly powerful. This mind-set paves the way for totalitarian states, Aryan supremacy, Stalinist Soviet subjugation and the power of jihad to dominate the world. Might makes right. But this too must pass, for even the most powerful human being is, after all, only physical and mortal, a broken potsherd, a withering flower, a passing dream, so that a life becomes "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." ("Macbeth" by Shakespeare)

Chapter 2, however, tells a very different story of the genesis of man, of a world created not only by a powerful Elokim (the Hebrew Kel means Power) but rather by a loving HaShem (YKVK) Elokim, YKVK is the Eternal loving Lord of Israel and the world (Ex. 34:6).

This chapter begins "when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted because there was no human being to till the earth" (Gen. 2:5), and so the loving "Hashem Elokim formed the human being from dust of the earth into whose nostrils He exhaled the soul of life." It is as though the entire physical world is waiting for the human being to activate it, to complete and perfect it, to redeem it; the human being, "the last for which the first was made." ("Rabbi Ben Ezra," a poem by Robert Browning)

And yes, the world is physical and the human being is physical, with all the strengths and the limitations of the physical, but it is an eternal and spiritual God who created the world, and it is an eternal and spiritual God who inspirited part of His own spiritual being within the human physical form; and how meaningful are the words of the sacred Zohar and the Ba'al Ha-Tanya, "whoever exhales, exhales from within Himself, from His innermost, essential being" (as it were).

This is the creation of Celestial Man.

"The loving HaShem (YKVK) Elokim…. placed (the human) in the Garden of Eden (the primordial world at that time) to till it (le'abed, "to develop and perfect it") and to preserve it (le'shomrah, "to take responsibility for it"). Yes, the world is an imperfect creation, filled with darkness as well as light, with evil as well as good (Isa. 45:7); and yes, the human being is a hybrid creature, part dust of the earth and part tzelem Elokim, who will engage in a perennial struggle between the bestial and celestial within himself. But the Bible promises that "at the very portals to life, until the very opening of the grave, sin crouches, its desire energized to conquer [the human], but the human will conquer sin, will overcome evil" (Gen. 4:7).

And so we conclude Yom Kippur with the exultant shout that HaShem the Loving Lord YKVK is Elokim, the God of Love is the essence and the endgame of the God of Creative physical Powers, that Right will triumph over might and Peace will trump jihad.

And every human being must find within himself the God-given strength to be an emissary towards perfecting this world in the Kingship of the Divine (Aleynu): to recreate himself, to properly direct his/ her children, to make an improvement within his/her community and society. May we not falter on this God-given opportunity to make our lives a partnership with God, to bring us and our world a bit closer to Redemption!

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Creation Conversation

Anyone who has ever taught anything can confirm the adage of our Sages: "I have learned from all my teachers, but I have learned most from my pupils."

It is especially true that one learns a great deal from his students if he does not limit himself to lecturing to them, but rather engages in face-to-face conversation with them. It is in candid and interactive dialogue that one learns most from his students.

The immense value of simple conversation between teacher and student was brought home to me many years ago in a conversation I had with two very different students.

They both attended a series of lectures I gave for individuals with very little prior exposure to the Jewish religion and its teachings. One of them was almost exclusively interested in what he called, "the rules and regulations" of Judaism. The other was far less interested in Jewish law. He was more of the "spiritual" type and had a plethora of questions about the nature of God.

The first individual, let's call him Rick, was interested in a meaningful way of life. He wanted to be part of a congregation, to celebrate the holidays, and to learn how to live daily life as a Jew.

The other student, let's call him Seth, was consumed by questions of cosmology and the origins of the universe. He saw God as an almost impersonal force behind nature. He wanted a relationship with God but questioned whether that was at all possible.

Both students had in common an interest in engaging me, their teacher, in conversation after class. Usually, those conversations took place in the local kosher pizza shop.

I vividly recall the evening I gave a lecture on the opening chapter of the book of Genesis, which is, of course, the beginning of this week's Torah portion (Genesis 1:1-6:5). Rick and Seth appeared equally eager to corner me in the pizza shop after that lecture.

Rick began the conversation by firmly questioning why the Torah even bothered to give us details about the creation of the world and God's role in it. "As a Jew," he maintained, "I just need to know how to live my life. How to celebrate the holidays, what food is kosher and what is not, and what is right and wrong in the spheres of ethics and morality. I can satisfy my curiosity about the origins of the universe by consulting some scientific book on the matter. For me, this has nothing to do with religion."

Seth, sitting across the table, was absolutely astounded. "What?!" he exclaimed. "This opening chapter of Genesis is precisely what I need to know as I begin my exploration of Judaism. I need to know about God, from beginning to end. And this is His beginning."

I was fascinated by this conversation, because it helped me put into a new perspective the conflicting opinions of two of the greatest rabbinic commentators on the Bible, Rashi and Ramban.

Rashi, in the very first words of his magisterial commentary on the entire Pentateuch, asks the same question that was bothering Rick.

Rashi, whose actual name was Solomon the son of Isaac, begins by quoting a Rabbi Isaac, who some have maintained was none other than his own father. He avers that the Torah should have begun with the chapter in the later book of Exodus, which outlines the mitzvot which Jews were supposed to fulfill. Rashi struggles to find a reason for the Torah's description of creation and the detailed narratives of early human history.

"Rick," I was able to say, "your question was anticipated many centuries ago by a great man whom you never heard of." I continued to introduce him to the man who was Rashi and to his indispensable commentary. Rick was gratified that Rashi too seemed to conceive of the Torah as primarily a book of "rules and regulations," so that he felt compelled to seek a reason for its beginning with an account of the creation.

Seth was obviously hard put to restrain himself. But before he began to protest against Rick, and against Rashi, I attempted to placate him. "There was another great rabbinic commentator on the Bible," I explained. "His name was Rabbi Moses Ben Nachman. Some call him Nachmanides. Traditionally, we call him Ramban and consider him second only to Rashi as a rabbinic commentator."

I told Seth, and Rick who was listening reluctantly, that Ramban in his opening paragraph of his commentary on Genesis 1:1, contests Rashi's very question. "Of course," he asserts, "the Torah had to begin with a description of the creation. That is the root of our faith, so anyone who believes that the world always existed but was not created by the Almighty at one specific moment in time has no share in the Torah at all."

Rick and Seth were gratified to discover that their differing views on what was important in Judaism had precedents in the writings of two great medieval rabbis.

I hastened to disappoint them. I told them that it was incorrect to conceive of two mutually exclusive definitions of Judaism. It was not a matter of a "rules-based" religion versus a "God-based" one.

I quoted to them the marvelous passage in the writings of Maimonides in which he speaks of the mitzvah to love God, and he explains that there are two ways to achieve this. One way is by studying His Torah and its laws, and the other way is by contemplating His astonishing creation, the world of nature.

I admonished them to carefully avoid reducing our faith to one or the other conception. "Our faith is not a simplistic one," I argued. "As you proceed in your study of Judaism in general, and of the Five Books of Moses in particular, you will come to realize that our religion emphasizes that our God is both Creator and Lawgiver. Any conception of Him as one but not the other is not authentic Judaism."

I thanked them for once again demonstrating to me the great value of conversation between student and teacher. Before we parted that evening, I shared with them a story of another conversation between a teacher and a student that I had read about in philosopher Samuel Hugo Bergman's memoirs.

Bergman recounts the story of Hermann Cohen, the German-Jewish philosopher who drew closer to religious Judaism in his later years. The climax of his life's work was his book, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism. It seems that the philosopher Cohen once entered into a long conversation with an old and old-fashioned Jew who resided in the university town of Marburg with him. The philosopher attempted to explain to the old Jew his elaborate and highly intellectual theory about the nature of God. The old man listened with the respect due to a university professor. When Cohen was finished with his learned and lengthy discourse, his elderly partner in conversation responded in Yiddish: "I understand everything you said, but something is missing. Vu iz der Bashefer? Where is the Creator?"

Cohen heard the old Jew's response, and "got it." His eyes welled up with tears, but he remained speechless.

The opening chapter of this week's Torah portion assures that everyone who reads it will not make the philosopher's mistake, but will realize, along with the old-fashioned Jew, that whatever else God may be, He is primarily der Bashefer, the Creator.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Moon Receives a Consolation Prize—Let It Be a Lesson for All of Us

The Torah teaches, "And G-d made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night —and the stars." [Bereshis 1:16]. Rashi famously comments: "They were created equal in size, but the moon was reduced in size because it complained and said, 'It is impossible for two kings to use the same crown.'" Originally, Rashi explains, the sun and the moon were the same size, and besides that, the moon also possessed its own source of light. Today, as we all know, the moon just reflects the light of the sun, and it is much smaller than the sun. The moon is basically just a rock which has the sunlight bouncing off of its surface. However, when the Ribono shel Olam first created these heavenly bodies, they were equal in size and in power of illumination. The moon's diminishment resulted from its complaint to the Almighty. This is a famous teaching of Chazal.

Rashi comments on the last words of the pasuk ("and the stars") by saying "Because He reduced the size of the moon, He made its hosts many, to conciliate it." It appears from Rashi that the stars as well were part of "Plan B." Apparently, "Plan A" did not include stars in the sky – just two equally large and powerful luminaries. Once the moon advanced its complaint (that it is impossible for two kings to use the same crown), then the Almighty introduced Plan B – including a smaller moon accompanied by galaxies of stars, the stars being a "consolation prize", so to speak, for the moon.

If we think about it, this is an amazing thought. There are billions of stars in the heavens. Nowadays, because of all the artificial light in our cities, we cannot see all the stars. However, if someone who is out in the desert or the wilderness looks up on a clear night towards the sky, the amount of stars visible is magnificent. If we think about it, why are there stars? Rashi here says that the huge quantity of stars was provided to appease the moon! Why was this necessary? The Almighty could simply have told the moon, "It is your fault for complaining that you could not co-exist with the sun as equals, so now live with the consequences of your argument!"

I heard two insights to explain this phenomenon, both homiletic in nature, but I think they are both beautiful thoughts. One of them I mentioned in past years; the other I heard for the first time very recently.

The Ramo rules in Shulchan Aruch: "There are those who say one should make the chuppah (bridal canopy) under the heavens as a good omen that the couple's offspring should be like the stars of the heaven." [Even HaEzer 61:1] This is something I advise my young students to be particular about. When a fellow gets married, he has all kinds of questions about which wedding ceremony protocols are significant and which are less so. For many of these "customs" there is no authoritative source. I advise "Don't worry about it!" However, our master the Ramo says it is a nice custom to make the chuppah under the stars. This is worth taking into account. That is why virtually all wedding halls in New York, where people are particular about such matters, have "skylights." Even in Baltimore, many shuls were built with skylights for that reason.

My daughter got married in January. It was freezing. She got married at Beth Tefilla. There were two chuppah parts – there was an inside chuppah and an outside chuppah. They went outside to the "outdoor chuppah" for the siddur kiddushin. Why? Because of this Ramo. It is a siman tov (positive omen).

I once heard that there is another message in this custom, besides the fact that it is a segulah for having many children. The idea is that the couple wants their children to be "like the stars in heaven." In what way? This means that if the entire purpose of the creation of the stars was to appease the feelings of the moon and make it feel better after having lost its status—we want that type of children. We want to have children who have the same sensitivity as the stars in the heavens, children who sense that their mission in life is to make someone else feel better.

Of course, the moon has no feelings, and all these statements of Chazal are metaphors. The metaphor is that even if it is necessary to punish a person and put him in his place on occasion, still, after administering the punishment, you give him a hug. This is the significance of the couple standing under the heavens at their chuppah—so that their descendants should be like the stars of heaven.

That is the thought I heard long ago. Recently I heard another interesting thought from the Tolner Rebbe: The Gemara [Bava Basra, 8b] expounds on a pasuk in Daniel—"The wise will shine like the radiance of the firmament, and those who teach righteousness to the multitudes will shine like the stars forever and ever." [Daniel 12:3]. The Gemara says that the reference to "those who teach righteousness to the multitudes" (matzdeekei haRabim) refers to teachers of school children (melamdei tinokos). They are like the stars of the heavens.

Dozens of interpretations have been given to explain this simile. The Tolner Rebbe's comment was that this, too, is part of the job of the teacher of school children. I, Baruch Hashem, teach adults. They are all mature. Obviously, a teacher should never say anything demeaning or insulting to such students. But when you are teaching little kids, they sometimes act up, and the teacher sometimes needs to discipline them. When you discipline a child improperly, it can have repercussions that will last a lifetime. Unfortunately, far too many children were turned off to Yiddishkeit because of an abusive Rebbi – physically abusive and/or verbally abusive: Too strong, too strict, patch, this and that.

A teacher of children needs to be "like stars." Yes, you need to discipline, but attempts to "appease their mind" must always accompany discipline—to provide the disciplined child with some kind of consolation prize, as it were, just as the Almighty gave the stars to the moon as a consolation prize after insisting the moon "diminish itself." I do not know if anyone in this audience will become a professional teacher of children, but anyone who is or will become a parent, is by definition "a teacher of children."

Parents raise children, and children can be frustrating. Raising children is the hardest job in the world. It can be very trying at times. Parents lose their temper. They lose their patience. But they always need to remember that there needs to be an appropriate follow-up to the administration of discipline. There always must be a plan to provide appeasement to the disciplined child. The Talmud uses the expression "With a child, one should push away with the left hand and draw near with the right hand" [Sanhedrin 107b]. The weaker hand should discipline and the stronger hand should draw him back.

If the Almighty created the stars to appease the moon, the teachers of children—which is a title that can be given to any person who merits to have and raise children—should always apply this concept of appeasing their "disciples" to make sure that even when there is a "klap", it is immediately followed with a consolation prize.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Why does the Torah not count correctly? In Psalm 90 we are taught 'limnot yamenu kein hoda'ah, vnavi levav chochma – 'teach us Hashem, to number our days correctly so we should become wise hearted'. Now, in the biblical account of creation, right at the beginning of Parashat Bereishit, at the end of day one, the Torah says, 'vayehi erev vayehi voker Yom echad - there was evening and there was morning, one day'. But after that it says, 'vayehi erev vayehi voker' - there was yom sheni, the second day, third day, fourth day, etc. So therefore at the end of day one, the Torah should have said, 'yom rishon' - the first day, instead it says 'yom echad' - one day.

Rashi presents an explanation which is given in Bereishit Raba, where the Midrash tells us that on the first day of creation, Hashem was the one and only spiritual being in existence because the angels were only created by him at a later stage. Therefore the Torah is implying 'Yom Echad' - was the day on which God was the one and only. Indeed to this day, He is 'Hashem Echad' – the one and only God.

I'd like to add to this, and to suggest that here the Torah is highlighting the significance of every single day of our lives. Now it is correct that we should be responsible enough to see each and every day of our lives as part of a sequence, part of the journey of life and we must understand that today, we must invest in tomorrow - and in all the future months and years that, please God, we will have in our lives. At the same time, the Torah wants us to know that we should view each day as being important - as being significant in its own right.

The Ethics of the Fathers teaches us 'shuv yom echad lifnei mitatcha' – 'repent the day before your death'. Now obviously we can't predict the day we die, (God forbid) and therefore Chazal are teaching us to see every day as if it is our last. That is to say, appreciate every breath of life. Acknowledge how extraordinary Hashem is for providing us with the opportunities to achieve so much within a single day.

When it comes to bereavement there are various greetings that we use when we speak to mourners. The one I advocate using is, offering wishes for 'arichut yamim' – 'length of days'. Within Anglo-Jewish circles people often say, 'chayim aruchim' – wishes for 'a long life', but that isn't always appropriate. When we are lamenting the loss of someone whose life was cut short, we're not thinking about ourselves and how long our own lives will be. However when we say 'arichut yamim' – the implication is that the mourner should take the fond memories of the deceased and use them to make the most of every single day. So that each day will be long and productive, full of success and attainment. That is what the torah wants us to know when it says 'Yom Echad'. Every day should be like that original day of creation - one special and remarkable day in your life. It is in this sprit that we pray, "Baruch Hashem Yom Yom" – May Hashem bless us on each and every day of our lives.

OTS Dvar Torah
Rabbi Boaz Pash
Similar or Unique?

Are we humans more alike, or more different from one another? To put it another way: do we spend more time looking for our differences or our similarities?

To our dismay, we are, on the one hand, very similar. Yet on the other hand – again to our dismay – we are also quite different. We are always seeking our common identity, and we find it more convenient to be with those who dress like us, speak like us, or think like us. Conversely, we tirelessly seek out what makes each of us unique. What makes us different. Even if, at times, these differences are too vague for us to describe, we'll highlight them, even if we do so artificially (this should bring to mind the scene of two women wearing the exact same dress).

So, are we more alike, or are we more dissimilar? We seem to be living permanently somewhere on the scale between these two extremes – the convenience of a world which is like us, which suits us and is "built in our image", versus the adventure and challenge involved in living among those who are different from us, who, by virtue of being different, demand that we cause our unique traits to stand out.

Let's revisit that primordial point in time when humans appeared on the scene, namely, the Creation of Man, which is discussed in this week's parsha. Man was created as an individual. The Midrash states: "Therefore, man was created as an individual," for each individual is unique. Indeed, the mavens of genetic biology will confirm the singularity of human beings, but they will also limit that singularity to a very small percentage of the entire genome, since most of our genomes are almost identical, much more identical than individual specimens of a troop of chimpanzees, or a tower of giraffes. How humbling.

And then, along comes the second creature (and I hope we can avoid the gender issue). It isn't merely about one creature and another one. It's much more than that – it is at this very moment that a phenomenon appears, one that will have a greater impact on us than any other: society. Human society. This was the creation of another human being, who, by coming into being, introduced the most complex creation of all – human relationships. This seems to be an entirely independent entity, but the truth is that from its very inception, it has been linked to man, in whose world it had emerged. It reshaped that world, committing it to what it perceives as rather high standards.

This is when the singularity versus solidarity dilemma emerges.

We can presume that Adam – the first version, that is – wasn't particularly consumed with the question of how similar he was to other creations, or how different, since he ostensibly couldn't have compared himself to the other creatures roaming about (though there are midrashim that say he did…). Yet once they had the opportunity to do so – they did just that. Even the names they were given – ish for man and isha for woman – were so similar, yet so different, and demonstrate the nature of their evolving relationship – social symbiosis on the one hand, and individual independence on the other.

There were reverse implications here as well. Once the second creature was created, one that was a threat to the existence of the first creature, not on a physical level (that will be the next stage, with Cain and Abel), but rather on the existential level, tied to consciousness, as it poses one question: who am I? What is my status compared to my new companion? What is my companion's status compared to myself – the old versus the new? What is the essence of this new thing that was created between us, namely, social relationships? What does the acknowledgement of the other do to me? How does the other perceive my own self-perception?

The human race, in those days, was clearly troubled by these existential questions, since at that time, it wasn't particularly concerned with humdrum existential concerns, like where food and clothing could be found, how to keep safe, and so on. We mustn't forget that they were still living the Garden of Eden life.

I write these lines from Belmonte, a rural village high in the mountains of Portugal, in the Serra da Estrella region. I'm nestled among ancient olive trees. For over five hundred years, the Jews of the city gathered at this very point, in this olive tree grove, to commune with their Creator, far from the piercing gazes of their Christian neighbors. It was here, at the slopes of the mountain, just outside the city, that Portuguese Jewry persisted.

I specified that they are Jews, because this is precisely how they saw and see themselves. Their less-Jewish neighbors also saw them this way – as Jews. We call them anusim, but we are the only ones that make that distinction. They didn't see themselves as anusim. Perhaps, they saw us, the "free Jews", as anusim. That's just how it is. One diaspora was more perturbed by the "yeast in the dough" (the evil inclination), while the other was more concerned with the "subjugation to the kingdoms". Yes, that's just the way it is, the way we developed. This is the society that defines the traits of individuals, and those individuals, as they strive to identify with others, adopt those labels, though they may not always feel at ease with them.

Let us now turn to something written by two sages who lived here, and operated here.

Don Isaac Abarbanel (he was originally from Lisbon, but he was more active in Spain) asks why Hashem needed to put man to sleep in order to conduct a surgical procedure to extract one of his ribs? Were Hashem's abilities so limited that He couldn't harvest one of his organs without "anesthesia"?

One of our contemporaries, also from Portugal (though he followed the reverse path: he was born in Spain and ended up in Portugal, and his life story is particularly tragic, considering the hardships he endured in the Iberian peninsula, such as losing his two sons and all of his manuscripts, which were left "buried under the tree in Lisbon), asks why Adam was created as an individual. Couldn't Adam and Eve have been created all at once? That would have been more efficient, since they would have had to reproduce in any case…

These two thinkers draw us in opposite directions – one seeks similarity, while the other searches for variance and contrast.

Rabbi Abraham Saba, in his book, Tzror Hamor on Bereishit I, writes as follows: "… this is why he needed an ezer kenegdo, a "helper at his side" who could counterbalance his strength, like the sun is for the moon, and the moon is for the sun… and after there will be another who will hold back his hand, who is almost equal to him, they shall not err in following him…"

Just like the Creator himself, Adam needed to be an individual. "I am alone in My world, so, too, shall you be alone in your world," says Hashem to Adam.

Rabbi Saba argues that generally speaking, singularity is good for Adam, so when the verse states "it is not good for man to be alone", it is truly "not good", but it is also very "bad" (continuing with Rabbi Saba's line of thought, it is even worse to be together….). Social complexity, says Rabbi Saba, is physically, substantially, and even economically unhealthy. Though it is necessary for continuity, "… and he commanded to create a helper, who is a woman, through whom he will beget others that resemble him…", the ideal remains unchanged – to maintain singularity.

A different view is offered by the Abarbanel, who lauds similarities within society and social solidarity, which leads to harmony. The second creation, who had just been created from Adam's rib, will have the same genetic material as her predecessor (except for one chromosome, of course), so that they feel comfortable with one another. This is because a similar companion is also a comfortable companion, and a comfortable companion is a constructive one – so says Abarbanel.

Therefore, he says, man needed to be put to sleep for this new creation to emerge. He needed to be placed in a state of unawareness, because a high personal self-awareness would stop the evolution of this social creation. He says that complex general awareness is preferential.

"Male and female He created them, and He blessed them, and called their name Adam". Commentators who favored allegorical interpretations offered multiple explanations of the word "Adam", not sufficing with the basic biblical explanation, that Adam was given his name because he was min ha'adama – taken from the Earth.

There were those who drew Adam down to Earth, and interpreted his name as a testament to his most basic attributes, but there were also others who exalted him and elevated him to the highest heavens, stating that Adam is the creature aspiring to be like Hashem, something that happens, incidentally, in our parsha. He wished to be like His creator, as we read in Isaiah (14:13): "I will match the Most High".

These tendencies to either elevate man's status or humble him are intrinsically linked with the characteristics of man's creation – he was to stand out and to identify.

Both commentators address the most troubling question of them all, one that anyone reading the parsha would grapple with: why did the

verse state na'aseh Adam – we will make man – in the plural, as if there were other partners to the creation of man?

Each commentator will answer this question in his own way. One will talk about variance and individuality. Abarbanel sees the connections in the word na'aseh as the future collaboration between human beings, for better or for worse. The second commentator, Rabbi Saba, focuses on the tendency to unite and make individuals equal. For him, it is about how eloheinu becomes echad, "The One".

Why, then do we aspire for more, to be unique, to find common ground, or to forge a self-identity or collective identity?

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger
"In the Beginning" is Today!
This is a "must teach". That is what continues to be reinforced in my mind on many a Shabbos Breishis when I revisit one of the first entries in "Touching History", a gripping personal story of the most charismatic rebbeim from whom I was privileged to learn. There Rav Sholom Gold writes, in a fashion far more dramatic than I would ever attempt, how the "first Rashi on chumash" speaks to our generation in a way that no one who came before us could have imagined.

To be sure, we all remember and are about to review that Rashi "justifies" the recording of creation as Torah's opener as the way to establish Hashem's sovereignty and His resultant right to assign the Holy land of Israel to His people. Thus, Rashi asserts that in some future time we are now fully equipped to respond to unfriendly nations who will accuse of being thieves who have stolen the Holy land away from its rightful owners. Truth be told, there are many questions on this Rashi and they generate discussions that run far and deep.

However, Rav Gold points out how puzzled Jews must have been when a careful reading of the text informs them of a time when we would be held up as land thieves in Israel. Imagine a medieval Jew running from the recent pogrom, or a relatively secure Jew of the 1800's trying to put this together. Before Mashiach comes, how could it come to be that we would ever be accused of stealing any country, especially a land so distant from any significant group of our people? And, of course, this makes no sense after Mashiach. Exactly which generation is going to need this argument? What time necessitated these passages?

Yet the twentieth and twenty first century Jew does not bat an eye on this Rashi. We don't have to travel far at all to find no end of people who look at us as land grabbers. We don't even stop for a moment to think that this Rashi must have been uninterpretable for centuries and perhaps even "metaphorized" to satisfy a skeptical student.

It is remarkable that the opening passuk of the Torah betrays every attempt to make it grammatically consistent with what we think the passuk should say, thus requiring extra textual commentary. Additionally, we are thankfully not at a loss to find prophecies that predict what we witness, be it Yechezkel who speaks of the flourishing land of Israel, the ingathering of the Jews of which the Torah speaks about, or Ramban's assertion that only Jewish hands will successfully bring forth from the land of Israel.

Yet the fact that very opening rabbinic comment on the Torah should speak to us so clearly as it never did before is breathtaking and should deeply impress any heart open to strengthening his or her emunah.

OU Dvar Torah

Reflections on the Divine Image
Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages — Genesis
Parashat Bereshit teaches us one of the most fundamental concepts of our faith. It is something we speak of often, and that is perhaps why we frequently fail to appreciate its depth and the magnitude of its influence. The concept of man's creation betzelem Elohim, in the image of God, is one of the most sublime ideas that man possesses, and is decisive in the Jewish concept of man.

What does it mean when we say that man was created in the image of God? Varying interpretations have been offered, each reflecting the general ideological orientation of the interpreter.

The philosophers of Judaism, the fathers of our rationalist tradition, maintain that the image of God is expressed, in man, by his intellect. Thus, Sa'adia Gaon and Maimonides maintain that sekhel, reason, which separates man from animal, is the element of uniqueness that is in essence a divine quality. The intellectual function is thus what characterizes man as tzelem Elohim.

However, the ethical tradition of Judaism does not agree with that interpretation. Thus, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, in his Mesilat Yesharim, does not accept reason as the essence of the divine image. A man can, by exercise of his intellect, know what is good – but fail to act upon it. Also, the restriction of tzelem Elohim to reason means that only geniuses can truly qualify as being created in the image of God. Hence, Luzzatto offers an alternative and perhaps more profound definition. The tzelem Elohim in which man was created is that of ratzon – the freedom of will. The fact that man has a choice – between good and evil, between right and wrong, between obedience and disobedience of God – is what expresses the image of God in which he was born. An animal has no freedom to act; a man does. That ethical freedom makes man unique in the creation.

But how does the freedom of the human will express itself? A man does not assert his freedom by merely saying "yes" to all that is presented to him. Each of us finds himself born into a society which is far from perfect. We are all born with a set of animal drives, instincts, and intuitions. If we merely nod our heads in assent to all those forces which seem more powerful than us, then we are merely being passive, plastic, and devoid of personality. We are then not being free, and we are not executing our divine right of choice. Freedom, the image of God, is expressed in the word "no." When we negate that which is indecent, evil, ungodly; when we have the courage, the power, and the might to rise and announce with resolve that we shall not submit to the pressures to conform to that which is cheap, that which is evil, that which is indecent and immoral – then we are being free men and responding to the inner divine image in which we are created.

The late Rabbi Aaron Levine, the renowned Reszher Rav, interpreted, in this manner, the famous verse from Ecclesiastes (3:19) which we recite every morning as part of our preliminary prayers. Solomon tells us, "Umotar ha'adam min habehema ayin," which is usually translated as, "And the preeminence of man over beast is naught." Rabbi Levine, however, prefers to give the verse an interpretation other than the pessimistic, gloomy apparent meaning. He says: "And the preeminence of man over beast is – ayin, 'no.'" What is it that gives man his distinction? What is it that makes man different from the rest of creation, superior to the rest of the natural world? It is his capacity to say ayin, his capacity to face the world and announce that he will not submit to it, that he will accept the challenge and respond "no". An animal has no choice – no freedom – and therefore must say "yes" to his drives, to the world in which he lives. But a human being can say "no" to that which is unseemly and beneath his dignity. And when he says "no" to all that is ungodly, he is being Godly. He is showing that he was created in the image of God.

Adam and Eve had to learn this lesson, and their descendants forever after must learn from their failure. We are nowhere told in the Torah that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was in any way different from the fruit of the other trees in the Garden of Eden. Yet when she was tempted by the serpent, Eve looked at the fruit, and in her mind's eye its attractiveness grew out of all proportion to reality. It looked more luscious, it looked more juicy, it looked more appetizing. She even imagined that this was some kind of "intelligence food." Her instinct bade her to do that which was in violation of the divine command. But counter to this she had the capacity, as a free agent created in God's image, to say ayin, to say "no" to her instinct and her temptation. But she forfeited

her opportunity. The first human couple did not know how to say "no." This was the beginning of their downfall.

Abraham was a great Jew – the first Jew. Yet in our tradition he is not famous so much for saying "yes" as he is for saying "no." Abraham was the great iconoclast. It was he who said "no" to the idolatries of his day, who said "no" to his father's paganism, who was the one man pitted against the entire world, shouting "no!" to all the obscenities of his contemporary civilization.

Moses was a great teacher. He gave us 613 commandments. When you investigate the commandments, you find that only 248 are positive – commanding us what to do. But 365 of them are negative – they say "no" to our wills and our wishes. For when we learn to say "no," we are being free men and women under God. The famous Ten Commandments have only three positive laws; the other seven are negative. Indeed, it is only through these negatives that we can live and survive and thrive at all. Without "You shall not murder," there can be no society. Without "You shall not steal," there can be no normal conduct of commerce and business. Without "You shall not commit adultery," there can be no normal family life. Without "You shall not covet," the human personality must degenerate and man becomes nothing more than an animal, a beast.

"And the preeminence of man over beast is ayin" – it is this which gives man greater dignity and superiority over the animal – his power to say "no." It is this freedom of the human personality taught by our Jewish tradition that we Jews must reassert once again in our own day.

The author Herman Wouk told me some time ago that a number of years earlier he was boarding a ship to go on a trip overseas. Several hours after he boarded, a cabin boy brought him a note from the apostate Jewish author Shalom Asch, asking Wouk to come to his cabin. There Asch complained to him and said, "I don't understand you, Mr. Wouk. You are a young man – yet you are observant and Orthodox. When my generation of writers was young, we were rebels, we were dissenters. We rejected tradition, we rejected authority, we rejected the opinions of the past. What happened to you? Why do you conform so blandly?" Wouk gave the older man an answer that I believe is very important for all of us to know. He answered, "You are making a terrible mistake, Mr. Asch. You seem to forget that the world we live in is not a paradise of Jewishness. You seem to forget that the world we occupy has become corrupted, assimilated, emptied of all Jewish content. In a world of this sort, one does not have to be a rebel at all in order to ignore the high standards of Judaism. If you violate the Sabbath, if you eat like a pagan, if you submit to the cheap standards of morality of the society in which we live, then you are being a conformist; you are merely allowing your own animal instincts to get the better of you. Today, if I and some of my contemporaries are observing the Jewish tradition, then it is because we are the dissenters, the nein-sagers. For we are the ones who say 'no' to the desecration of the Sabbath, 'no' to the creeping assimilation that ridicules all of Judaism and threatens its very life, 'no' to all the forces that seek to degrade our people and diminish the uniqueness of Israel that is its dignity and its preeminence. You are the conformist."

This is the kind of force, the kind of courage, the kind of conviction that has sustained us throughout the ages. It is that which has given us the power to say "no" to the threats of Haman, the cruelties of Chmielnicki, the genocide of Hitler, as well as the sugarcoated missionizing of more enlightened enemies of Judaism. We demonstrated the image of God when we exercised our freedom and said "no" to all this.

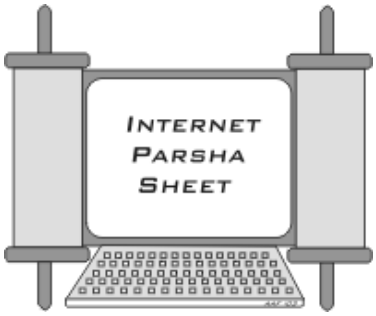
I am not suggesting that we ought to be destructively negative. It is, rather, that when we fully exercise our critical functions and faculties, then the good will come to the fore of itself. It is because I have confidence in the innate powers of the good that I suggest we concentrate on denying evil. "Depart from evil and do good" (Psalms 34:15). If you put all your energies into negating evil, then good will be done of its own accord.

It is this power to say "no" that we must exercise in our relations with our fellow Jews in the State of Israel. For, in addition to all our constructive efforts on behalf of the upbuilding of the land, we must also be able to call a halt to the creeping paganism that plagues it.

When we find that in our own Orthodox community in Israel certain things are done which serve only to desecrate the name of God, we must not be shy. We must rise and as one say "no" to all those forces which would compromise the sanctity of the Torah and the sanctity of the Holy Land.

In our own American Jewish community, we must, here too, be the critics. And when, to mention just a seemingly trivial matter, certain artists and entertainers who are Jewish, and who rely upon the community as such for acceptance of what they have to offer, elect to entertain on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, we must say "no." We must realize that it is no longer the domain of one's own conscience, when the matter is a public demonstration of contempt for American Jewry. "And the preeminence of man over beast is ayin" – we must not sheepishly go along with everything that "famous people" are willing to tell us. We must be men, we must be human beings, we must use the freedom that God gave us when He created us in His image, and learn when to say "no."

I conclude with the statement by one of the greatest teachers of Judaism, a man who indeed showed, in his life, that he knew the value of "no." It was Rabbi Akiba, the man who was able to stand up to the wrath and the might of the whole Roman Empire and say "no" to tyranny and to despotism, who taught us, "Beloved is man that he was created in the image of God" (Avot 3:18). Beloved indeed, and precious and unique and irreplaceable is man when he has the freedom of will that is granted to him by his Creator. And furthermore, "Hiba yeteira noda'at lo shenivra betzelem" – a special love was given to man by God, it is a special gift when man not only has that freedom but when he knows that he has that freedom – and therefore uses it to combat evil and to allow the great, constructive forces of good, innate in himself, to come to the fore so as to make this a better world for all mankind.



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From Internet Parsha Sheet 5757 (1996)
From: jr@sco.COM (**Josh Rapps**) mj ravtorah@shamash.org
Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZT'L on Parshas Breishis
On the passuk "Vayishmu Es Kol Hashem Elokim Mishalech Bagan Leruach Hayom" (3:8) the Rav discussed the word Mishalech based on 3 different interpretations: 1) Rabbeinu Yonah explains that man heard the sound of Hashem while he, man, was walking around in the garden. 2) The Ibn Ezra explains that the word Mishalech is describing the Kol Hashem, that the sound of Hashem was extending and spreading through the garden. 3) The Ramban explains the word Mishalech as indicating accompanying, being present. The Shechina will be ever present no matter where man may go. Adam felt the presence of Hashem in garden.
All three interpretations lead to the same conclusion: there is hope for man no matter how enveloped in wickedness he may be. The empty feeling and frustrations that the wicked derives from his action will drive him back to Hashem. The hopeless realization that his present path in life will not succeed is always there pushing him to repent and return to Hashem. This is what the Passuk means:
"Shalom Shalom Larachok Vlakarov... Vhareshaim Kayam Nigrash Ki Hasheket Lo Yuchal Vayigrishu Miyamav Refesh Vtyt".
There is no peace of mind for the wicked. They are never content with their actions and way of life. This gnawing emptiness can eventually bring him back to the Derech Hashem and Torah. All 3 interpretations are hinting at this fundamental concept.
The sin of eating from the Eitz Hadaas was that Adam thought that he could throw off the yoke of Hashem, that he could write his own Shulchan Aruch, so to speak, so he could follow his own conscience. Man wanted to be Gd like in the knowledge of good and evil.
Rabbeinu Yonah explained that man was walking the way he saw fit, as if he was the master of the garden, showing that he was the master of his destiny. But as he was walking around, he could not escape the sound of Hashem, who he recognized was the true master of everything.
The Ibn Ezra explained that as the Kol Hashem began to spread throughout the garden, bit by bit, man began to realize what he did and the enormity of his actions.
The Ramban explained that Adam could never run away from Hashem, just like the Kol Hashem was always surrounding him. The Shechina never leaves man and it is this constant accompaniment that will bring man completely back to Hashem.
 These summaries are based on notes taken by Dr. Rivkin at the weekly Moriah Shiur given by Moraynu V'Rabbeinu Harav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveichik ZT'L over many years.

From Internet Parsha Sheet 5759 (1998)
From mj ravtorah@shamash.org (**Josh Rapps**)
breishis.98 Shiur **Harav Soloveichik** ZT"L on Parshas Breishis (Shiur date: 10/26/76) "And Elokim called the light day and the darkness He called night, and it was evening, and it was morning, day one (Yom Echad)". The Midrash Rabbah comments that the term Yom Echad refers to Yom Kippur. What is the connection between Yom Echad and Yom Kippur? The Rav explained that in Hebrew, the word Echad has 2 meanings: the number one; and unique (singular or different). For example, Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokaynu Hashem Echad means that He is the one God as well as He is unique and beyond comparison with His creation. Similarly, Yom Kippur is one day yet it is a singular and unique day, different from all other days in the year. The Ramban (1:5) quotes the Ibn Ezra that the beginning of the night is called Erev because all forms are mixed up and confused. Morning is called Boker because in daylight man can distinguish and discriminate between those same forms. Erev means confusion, an indistinguishable mixture that prevents me from discriminating between good and bad, Issur Vheter (as in Hilchos Taaruvos). Likewise, in the evening man has difficulty distinguishing between objects, as their shapes and identifying characteristics tend to blur. The morning, Boker, is when man uses his talents to discriminate and distinguish between similar objects, when he realizes that Ata Chonen L'adam Daas (Hashem graces man with intelligence, as we recite in our daily prayers). Why did Hashem divide time into day and night? Why not leave man in a constant state of Boker, clarity? The Rav answered that if man would remain in a constant state of clarity, Teshuva would be impossible. The basis of Teshuva is that man acts in a state of confusion, it is this confused state that exlains why he acted as he did. Hirhur Teshuva, the contemplation of Teshuva, is the beginning of the long process towards becoming a Baal Teshuva. It represents man's confusion, the shame and pain of the sin, the weight of his actions on his mind, as signified by Erev. The Gemara (Kiddushin 49b) says that one who betrothes a woman on condition that he is a righteous person creates a valid Kiddushin (betrothal) even if he was a wicked person all his life, perhaps he contemplated Teshuva. This initial stirring to repent is the first and most necessary step. At this point, he recognizes that there is a mixing of thought processes between good and sin that he is not yet able to fully sort out, but he knows that he must attempt to make sense of it. Boker represents the rest of the Teshuva process, of Viduy (admission of the sin) and the disassociation from the act of sin in the future. On Yom Kippur, man experiences both of these aspects. On the night of Yom Kippur, he acts out of the confusion brought about by the mass of conflicting thoughts and emotions he feels when contemplating his actions. He undergoes Hirhurei Teshuva. With the clarity that comes with the arrival of the morning of Yom Kippur, the Boker, man can truly distinguish between

good and evil, he can now embark on fulfilling the course of Teshuva. These unique aspects of Yom Kippur and their relationship to Teshuva are why Yom Kippur is referred to as Yom Echad.

From Internet Parsha Sheet 5762 (2001)

From: **RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND** [SMTP: ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Thursday, October 11, 2001 Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Bereshis

"RavFrand" List

The "Ki Tov" (That It Was Good) of Monday Was Delayed Until Tuesday

The third day of Creation [Bereshis 1: 9 13] is the only day in which the expression "G d saw that it was good" is mentioned twice. This expression is mentioned both following the gathering of the waters which divided the seas from the dry land, and following the sprouting of vegetation and seed bearing plants both of which occurred on the third day of Creation.

As a result of the fact that Tuesday had a double portion of "ki tov" [that it was good], Tuesday is considered a particularly fortuitous day of the week. Many people specifically plan their wedding for this day. When moving into a new house, many people plan to move on Tuesday. Many people try to start a new job on Tuesday.

On the other hand, on the second day of Creation, there is no mention at all of the expression "that it was good". Rash"i comments that the reason "ki tov" is not mentioned on the second day is because the creation of the water (i.e. its assignment to the seas) was not completed until the third day. A value judgment of "ki tov" could not be pronounced until the work was complete. Therefore "ki tov" is mentioned twice on Tuesday once in connection with the completion of the water (which was started previously) and once in connection with the vegetation (which was both started and completed on that same day).

This, however, begs for further explanation. G d is all powerful. What does it mean that "he did not complete the job on Monday?" Why not? Clearly, He does not become tired or run out of time. Rather, He purposely did not finish the job on Monday. What is this trying to teach us?

The Shemen HaTov writes that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is teaching us a lesson through the events of Creation that we as human beings must learn. This lesson is that "it's not over, until it's over." Sometimes things occur in life and we do not see the benefit therein. Sometimes we do not understand exactly what is happening.

Sometimes we will be able to understand what the event was really about, on the very next day. Then we will see the benefit of the inexplicable occurrence of the previous day. In the middle of creating the world, the All Powerful went out of His way to leave something undone, to leave something with a question mark at the end of the day, to leave something where the "ki tov" was not immediately apparent. The lesson is that "life" follows the same pattern as the days of Creation. We do not always immediately perceive the "ki tov".

Life would be much easier to live if within 24 hours we would immediately perceive that elusive "ki tov". Sometimes we do not even understand events the following week or year. Sometimes we do not even understand until the next lifetime. But the lesson of the delayed "ki tov" is that we should not expect to always see immediate results and immediate outcomes. Sometimes the good does not come until later.

G d disrupted the order of Creation, leaving something purposely unfinished, in order to teach us this crucial lesson of life.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 300, A Mamzer's Obligation in Mitzvos. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117 0511. Call (410) 358 0416 or e mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http: //www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site http: //www.torah.org/ 17 Warren Road, Suite 2B learn@torah.org Baltimore, MD 21208

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>
to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Oct 15, **2020,** 6:07 PM
subject: Rav Frand - Midrashim Speak to Us in Code
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Parshas Bereishis - Midrashim Speak to Us in Code

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1176 – Chupa: Inside or Outside? In a Shul or Not in A Shul? Good Shabbos!

The Torah says, "And G-d made the two great luminaries, the greater luminary to dominate the day and the lesser luminary to dominate the night; and the stars." [Bereshis 1:16] Rashi quotes the Talmud, which says [Chulin 60b], "Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi raises a contradiction: First it says 'G-d made the two great luminaries' (implying both were great) then it says 'the greater luminary… and the lesser luminary' (implying one was great and one was small)." He resolves the contradiction by explaining that originally both luminaries were the same size until the moon came before the Holy One, Blessed be He, and said "Master of the Universe, can two kings both wear the same crown?" To which G-d responded, "Go make yourself smaller." The moon is in fact much smaller than the sun. This came about because the moon argued, "Two kings cannot simultaneously rule with a single crown."

When we hear such teachings from Chazal—the moon complained, the moon felt bad, etc.—we need to understand what is being taught. The moon is an inanimate object. These are metaphors. The teachings are clearly allegorical. The point of such Midrashim is to teach us lessons. There is a similar Medrash in Parshas Noach, where the raven "complains" to Noach, "You are after my mate!" These are allegorical messages meant to teach us lessons in human nature.

Medrash is a specific mode of Torah expression. Chazal are speaking to us in code. So what is the lesson to be learned here by the "conversation" between the moon and the Ribono shel Olam?

The Tolna Rebbe writes that this story is very indicative of human beings. The moon thought that its claim to fame was its size. "I am as big as the sun." This is my 'thing'—my uniqueness! The truth of the matter is that the moon was wrong from the get go. Rabbeinu Bechaye writes, as do other meforshim, that the moon was never in the same league as the sun. Even when the moon was as big as the sun, it did not have an independent source of light. Even initially, the light of the moon was merely a reflection of the light of the sun. The moon is dark. We can only see it from earth because it reflects the sun's light.

Rabbeinu Bechaye infers this from the expression "…Yehi me'oros b'rekiya ha'Shamayim" (let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven) [Bereshis 1:14]. He points out that "Yehi" is singular. If the intention was to speak about two different lights, the Torah should have written "Yi'heyu me'oros…" in the plural. Thus, says Rabbeinu Bechaye, the moon never had its own light, and on the contrary – the bigger it was, the more light it needed to illuminate its surface! The moon was thus way off base in thinking that its greatness stemmed from its size.

To drive home this error, the Ribono shel Olam, reduced the moon in size: "Go make yourself small." But the reason Klal Yisrael sets their holidays by the moon is precisely because it is smaller. The Ribono shel Olam likes 'small': "…You are the smallest of all the nations." [Devorim 7:7] Klal Yisrael resembles the moon, while the nations of the world resemble the sun (in terms of size and magnitude). Because of its smallness, the moon merited to symbolize Klal Yisrael. In fact, all of our holidays are based on the lunar calendar.

The moon assumed that its uniqueness and talent lay in its large size. Wrong! Just the opposite! "Your uniqueness and your special strength lie in the fact that you are smaller than the sun, not bigger!"

The Tolna Rebbe says this happens to people all the time. They focus in on one area of themselves. They assume that this will be the area where they excel and show their talents to the world. However, in the end, it turns out that they got it all wrong. Sometimes the very area in which a person assumes he is not so good turns out to be the very area where he indeed excels.

This is the lesson Chazal teach with the story of the moon complaining and the Almighty commanding it to reduce in size. Self-misperception can cause a person to be totally off regarding self-realization of his talents and how and where he will be able to make his mark in life. This is a very common problem. People are not good judges of themselves. That is why people need to consult outside opinions—Rebbeim, parents and friends—people who can correct and redirect our misperceptions about ourselves and tell us "This is not where you are going to make it!"

The moon made this mistake and people make this same mistake all the time.

The Tolna Rebbe quotes Ibn Ezra, the classic Chumash commentary. The Tolna Rebbe mentions that the Ibn Ezra was extremely poor and he had no mazal. He once said about himself: "If I would go into the business of making shrouds for the dead, people would stop dying." The Ibn Ezra was also a poet, as many of the Sephardic Rishonim were. He wrote poetically (in Hebrew): "I would go to the wealthy man in town (to request funds) and they would tell me 'he left for work already.' I would come back in the evening (to ask him for a donation) they would tell me 'he already went to sleep.' Woe is to me, a destitute person, I was born without any mazal."

The Tolna Rebbe commented: Here we are almost a thousand years after the time of the Ibn Ezra. You can open any Mikraos Gedolos Chumash and see the Ibn Ezra's commentary. The Ramban quotes him all the time. Who is this "wealthy man" that he spoke about in his poem? That man faded from the map of history. The Ibn Ezra thought he was the unluckiest person in the world. He wrote about himself like he was a schlemiel and a nebech. He considered the 'Gevir' to be a person with great mazal! Not true. Sometimes, only time will tell.

This, the Tolna Rebbe writes, is the same lesson Chazal teach about the moon and the sun.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 http://www.torah.org/ learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

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from: **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** <info@rabbisacks.org>
date: Oct 14, **2020**, 3:17 PM
subject: 🌳 Taking Responsibility (Bereishit 5781)

Taking Responsibility
Bereishit 5781

If leadership is the solution, what is the problem? On this, the Torah could not be more specific. The problem is a failure of responsibility.

The early chapters of Genesis focus on two stories: the first is Adam and Eve; the second, Cain and Abel. Both are about a specific kind of failure. First Adam and Eve. As we know, they sin. Embarrassed and ashamed, they hide, only to discover that one cannot hide from God:

The Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Gen. 3:9-12)

Both insist that it was not their fault. Adam blames the woman. The woman blames the serpent. The result is paradise lost: they are both punished and exiled from the garden of Eden. Why? Because Adam and Eve deny personal responsibility. They say, in effect, "It wasn't me."

The second story is tragic. The first instance of sibling rivalry in the Torah leads to the first murder:

While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground." (Gen. 4:8-10)

Cain does not deny personal responsibility. He does not say, "It was not me," or "It was not my fault." He denies moral responsibility. In effect he asks why he should be concerned with the welfare of anyone but himself. Why should we not do what we want if we have the power to do it? In Plato's Republic, Glaucon argues that justice is whatever is in the interest of the stronger party. Might makes right. If life is a Darwinian struggle to survive, why should we restrain ourselves for the sake of others if we are more powerful than they are? If there is no morality in nature, then I am responsible only to myself. That is the voice of Cain throughout the ages.

These two stories are not just stories. They are an account, at the beginning of the Torah's narrative history of humankind, of a failure, first personal then moral, to take responsibility – and it is this for which leadership is the answer.

There is a fascinating phrase in the story of Moses' early years. He grows up, goes out to his people, the Israelites, and sees them suffering, doing slave labour. He witnesses an Egyptian officer beating one of them. The text then says: "He looked this way and that and saw no one" (vayar ki ein ish Ex. 2:12, or more literally, 'he saw that there was no man').

It is difficult to read this literally. A building site is not a closed location. There must have been many people present. A mere two verses later we discover that there were Israelites who knew exactly what had happened. Therefore, the phrase almost certainly means, "He looked this way and that and saw that there was no one else willing to intervene."

If this is so, then we have here the first instance of what came to be known as the "Genovese syndrome" or "the bystander effect,"[1] so-called after a case in which a woman was attacked in New York in the presence of a large number of people who all knew that she was being assaulted but failed to come to her rescue.

Social scientists have undertaken many experiments to try to determine what happens in situations like this. Some argue that the presence of other bystanders affects an individual's interpretation of what is happening. Since no one else is coming to the rescue, they conclude that what is happening is not an emergency.

Others, though, argue that the key factor is diffusion of responsibility. People assume that since there are many people present someone else will step forward and act. That seems to be the correct interpretation of what was happening in the case of Moses. No one else was prepared to come to the rescue. Who, in any case, was likely to do so? The Egyptians were slave-masters. Why should they bother to take a risk to save an Israelite? And the Israelites were slaves. How could they come to the aid of one of their fellows when, by doing so, they would put their own life at risk?

It took a Moses to act. But that is what makes a leader. A leader is one who takes responsibility. Leadership is born when we become active not passive, when we do not wait for someone else to act because perhaps there is no one else – at least not here, not now. When bad things happen, some avert their eyes. Some wait for others to act. Some blame others for failing to act. Some simply complain. But there are some people who say, "If something is wrong let me try to put it right." They are the leaders. They are the ones who make a difference in their lifetimes. They are the ones who make ours a better world.

Many of the great religions and civilisations are based on acceptance. If there is violence, suffering, poverty and pain in the world, they accept that this is

simply the way of the world. Or, the will of God. Or, that it is the nature of nature itself. They shrug their shoulders, for all will be well in the World to Come.

Judaism was and remains the world's great religion of protest. The heroes of faith did not accept; they protested. They were willing to confront God Himself. Abraham said, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18:25). Moses said, "Why have You done evil to this people?" (Ex. 5:22). Jeremiah said, "Why are the wicked at ease?" (Jer. 12:1). That is how God wants us to respond. Judaism is God's call to human responsibility. The highest achievement is to become God's partner in the work of creation.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God called out "Where are you?" As Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, pointed out, this call was not directed only to the first humans.[2] It echoes in every generation. God gave us freedom, but with freedom comes responsibility. God teaches us what we ought to do but He does not do it for us. With rare exceptions, God does not intervene in history. He acts through us, not to us. His is the voice that tells us, as He told Cain, that we can resist the evil within us as well as the evil that surrounds us.

The responsible life is a life that responds. The Hebrew for responsibility, achrayut, comes from the word acher, meaning "other." Our great Other is God Himself, calling us to use the freedom He gave us, to make the world that is more like the world that ought to be. The great question, the question that the life we lead answers, is: which voice will we listen to? Will we heed the voice of desire, as in the case of Adam and Eve? Will we listen to the voice of anger, as in the case of Cain? Or will we follow the voice of God calling on us to make this a more just and gracious world?

Shabbat Shalom

[1] For a discussion, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Kitty_Genovese.

[2] Noted in Nissan Mindel, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, A Biography (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 1969).[2] Brachot 33b.

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https://www.jpost.com/

October 16, 2020

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of Great Britain, was recently diagnosed with cancer, a spokesperson for his office announced on Thursday.

Rabbi Sacks will be stepping back from his work for a short period of time to focus on his treatment. Rabbi Sacks' office notes that he is looking to get back into the swing of things as soon as possible...

For those who wish include Rabbi Sacks in their prayers, his Hebrew name is **Harav Ya'akov Zvi ben Liba**.

From Internet Parsha Sheet 5764 (2003)

From: Rafael Salasnik [rafi@brijnet.org] Sent: Oct. 22, 2003 To: daf-hashavua@shamash.org

Subject: daf-hashavua Bereishit 5764/2003

U N I T E D S Y N A G O G U E - L O N D O N (O)

...

JEWISH VALUES

by CHIEF RABBI DR JONATHAN SACKS

ON G-D AND GOOD

Today we are delighted to commence a new monthly feature to be written by the Chief Rabbi on Jewish Values, which will appear in the Daf Hashavua every Shabbat Mevarchim

How we live and what we become depends on what or who we worship. Other civilizations in the ancient world built monuments of stone. Israel - our ancestors - were summoned to a quite different task: to build a society out of holy lives and generous deeds. Ethics, along with kedushah, sanctity, stands at the very core of Jewish values. To worship G-d is, for us, not an escape from the world and its challenges but an engagement with the world and its challenges. To honour G-d is to honour His image, mankind.

It is often said that you don't have to be religious to be good. That is true. There were people who, without any particular faith, rescued Jews during the holocaust, fought for justice in South Africa, or dedicated their lives to curing disease, relieving poverty, and giving shelter to the homeless. Implanted within us (part of what makes us G-d's image) are strong instincts of justice and compassion. Without them, homo sapiens would not have survived.

But in the long run, without a nonnegotiable code whose authority transcends all earthly powers, societies have a tendency to lose their way. The moral sense becomes confused. People begin to think less of society than of self, less of duty than desire, more of rights than responsibilities.

Tolstoy gave a powerful analogy: "The instructions of a secular morality that is not based on religious doctrines are exactly what a person ignorant of music might do if he were made a conductor and started to wave his hands in front of musicians well rehearsed in what they are performing. By virtue of its own momentum, and from what previous conductors had taught the musicians, the music might continue for a while, but obviously the gesticulations made with a stick by a person who knows nothing about music would be useless and eventually confuse the musicians and throw the orchestra off course."

That is why, seven times in its first chapter, the Torah repeatedly uses the word "good." Virtually every other account of creation, mythological or scientific, emphasises power and process, the "how" but not the "why." The Torah is remarkably uninterested in the "how." Its entire account of the emergence of the universe takes a mere 34 verses. Its interest is in the "why." Goodness, for Judaism, is the purpose of creation. Morality is not something we invent. It is written into the structure of life itself.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Mecklenburg offered a fascinating interpretation of the phrase, ki tov. Normally we translate this as " [And G-d saw] that it was good." He translated it as "because He is good." Creation was a moral act on the part of G-d. He made the universe because He is good, in order to bestow blessing on His creations. And whenever we bestow blessings on others, we become "G-d's partners in the work of creation."

Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue. Editor: Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis editordaf@brijnet.org Address: Finchley Synagogue, Kinloss Gardens, London N3 3DU Editorial Board: Rabbi Yisroel Fine, Rabbi Philip Ginsbury, Mr Simon Goulden, Rabbi Dr Michael Harris, Rabbi Emanuel Levy, Rebbetzin Sarah Robinson, Rabbi Meir Salasnik, Rabbi Dr Julian Shindler To sponsor Daf Hashavua please contact Anthony Cummings mailto:Anthony.Cummings@unitedsynagogue.org.uk

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from: OU Israel Torah Center <Rliff@ouisrael.org> date: Oct 15, **2020**, subject: Torah Tidbits Parshat B'reishit -Issue 1390

RABBI BARUCH TAUB

Rabbi Emeritus, The BAYT Toronto OU Israel Faculty

Why Did The Torah Not Begin With The Mitzvah Of Sanctifying The New Moon (Kiddush Hachodesh)?

Torah Tidbits is proud to celebrate Rav Taub's new Hebrew sefer on Parshat Hashavua, Kanfei Yonah (see pg. 79). We are honored to share a wonderful dvar Torah here in our pages.The OU Israel family offers our blessings on this momentous occasion: May Rav Taub, shlit'a, continue to be marbitz Torah and inspire Jews across the globe with his exquisite teachings!

In Rashi's first comment on the Torah, he quotes the well-known Midrash which asks why the Torah did not begin with the first Mitzvah given to the Jewish people, Kiddush Hachodesh (the establishment of the Jewish calendar according to the lunar cycle). The basic premise upon which this question is based is that the Torah is not a book designed to record the history of Creation and the Jewish people, but rather a book of conduct instructing us how to live our lives according to God's word. As such, the Torah really should have started with the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people. The Midrash responds by informing us that the Torah began from the story of creation in order to provide a true response to the nations who claim that the Jewish people are a "band of robbers" who stole Eretz

Yisrael from its original inhabitants – an accusation levelled against us to this day. To this we respond, that since God created the world, as detailed in the first chapter of the Torah, He also decides that Eretz Yisrael belongs to whichever nation He chooses.

According to the Torah, God did in fact take the land away from its original inhabitants and gave it to the Jewish people. Oznayim LaTorah elaborates on this Midrash and uses it to resolve other difficulties related to Eretz Yisrael. The Torah tells us in (Devarim 27:3) that God commanded the Jewish people to write the entire Torah on twelve stones. The Talmud (Sotah 7a) understands this to mean that the Torah was to be written and translated into the seventy languages and that these stones be erected subsequently on the mountain of Eival. There are several difficulties regarding these instructions.

The rabbis tell us that when God revealed the contents of the Torah to the nations, He only related the laws of the Torah to them

Firstly, the rabbis have taught us that God offered the Torah to the nations but they declined upon hearing what the Torah demanded of them. It is implausible that the goal in writing the Torah upon entering Eretz Yisrael could have been to influence its inhabitants, or even other nations to accept the Torah. If the nations had already declined the offer from God Himself, why would they be convinced to accept the Torah from the Jews who they actually despise?

Secondly, the mountain of Eival is in the center of the land, surrounded by enemy territory. What is the logic in instructing the Jewish people to enter deep into enemy territory in order to erect the Torahinscribed stones, before retreating to their original lines in Gilgal? Aside from the extreme danger involved, the subsequent retreat would give the impression of a weak and confused nation. This could not have been the impression the Jewish people would have wished to give the inhabitants before having conquered it. What then, was the true meaning of this Mitzvah?

Thirdly, this Mitzvah (of the stones) is seemingly a prerequisite to conquering the land, as it was commanded by God as soon as they arrived at its borders. This is stressed by the verse,: "When you cross, you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah, in order that you may come to the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you; a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, God of your forefathers, has spoken to you." (Devarim 27:3)

There are those who suggest that the land is ours because we conquered it in 1948

Oznayim LaTorah explains, using the Midrash cited by Rashi, that it is true that the nations were not going to be influenced by the Jewish people to accept the Torah. However, precisely because the Jewish people did accept the Torah which prohibits theft and murder, the nations of the world could claim that the Jewish people were not acting in accordance with the Torah that they themselves had accepted, which would be a terrible Chilul Hashem. In order to prevent such a Chilul Hashem, the Jewish people were commanded to publicize the Torah deep inside enemy territory. In this way, the nations could clearly see that the Torah had given the land to us and that by conquering the land we were not taking part in an act of theft, but were acting wholly according to what the Torah had commanded. This is so, since the rabbis tell us that when God revealed the contents of the Torah to the nations, He only related the laws of the Torah to them. The sections of the Torah that describes the creation of the world was not part of this exchange between God and the nations.

We can now understand the meaning of the Mitzvah to write the entire Torah on the twelve stones – including the account of Creation – as a prerequisite to conquering the land. This was done in order to refute the claim that those who accepted the Torah do not actually observe its laws. Since they have now become aware of the story of Creation they will understand that the Jewish people's actions are not to be viewed as a theft but rather as a claim to what belongs to them rightfully, since it was given to them by the Creator Himself.

This idea is very well grounded in the fact, mentioned earlier, that the Mitzvah to write the entire Torah on the twelve stones concludes with the words, "When you cross, you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah, in order that you may come to the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, God of your forefathers, has spoken to you." Without this explanation, one might question as to why the Torah made the entry into the land dependent on the writing of the Torah. However, now that we understand that acceptance of Torah, symbolized by the stones, is the prerequisite of entering the land, the very rejection of Torah by those who would oppose our claim, is that which empowers our rightful claim to Eretz Yisrael.

Let us elaborate on this very important idea that is expressed in the first Rashi in the Torah. There are those who suggest that the land is ours because we conquered it in 1948. This is not the reason the land is ours. True, our military victory was clearly part of the miraculous process of what occurred in 1948, but it is not the reason that it is ours. Others suggest that because of the Holocaust the land belongs to us. This is also not accurate; once again, it was part of the process that brought us here but not the reason that it belongs to us. The reason that Eretz Yisrael is ours is because everything in the physical universe belongs to God, and He decided to give it to the Jewish people.

From the Internet Parsha Sheet 5778 (2013)
from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>
to: weeklydt@torahweb2.org
date: Wed, Sep 25, 2013 at 11:09 AM
Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger
Finding the Words and Maintaining Connections

The brothers, kayin and hevel, were already distanced and Hashem's encouraging words of caution and heartening attention to kayin was to no avail. The mounting tension is now described with intriguing brevity: (4:8) "Kayin said to Hevel, his brother. And it was as they were in the field, Kayin rose up against Hevel his brother and killed him."

What did Kayin say to Hevel? Why is the conversation worthy of record but its substance of little significance? There are many suggestions. Whereas Targum Yonasan details a philosophical debate about G-d, the afterlife, and providence, Rashi says that indeed there was no conversation of substance. According to Rashi, Kayin was merely setting the stage for the murder. A contrived conflict and heated confrontation would provide the pretext for what would follow.

In a not dissimilar approach, Ramban and Ohr Hachayim understand that the conversation was a strategy mean to draw Hevel into the field, have him relax his guard and make him vulnerable.

Ibn Ezra suggests that Kayin related Hashem's message to him. According to Tosafos Kayin sensed some joy in Hevel and that riled Kayin further.

Yet after all the suggestions are studied, the question remains: if the conversation was indeed noteworthy, as Targum Yonasan indicates, why is it not recorded? If the conversation was merely a strategy, then why mention what adds so little to the storyline?

It seems to me that the Torah is alluding to a sad but instructive truth. Two brothers are distanced. It may be that one has suffered a crushing and devastating disappointment and he sees his brother as having a role in that; it may be about finances; it might be about philosophy. Their arguments and confrontations may be very sad and the volume may become deafening, but their brotherhood is still promising because they are still talking.

It is only when they stop talking to one another, when there is no common language or when they simply cannot be bothered to find it...

From Internet Parsha Sheet Bereishis 5757 (1996)
http://www.ucalgary.ca/~akiva/HOJMI/drosho.html
Congregation House of Jacob Mikveh Israel 1613 92nd Ave. SW Calgary, AB, T2V 5C9 Phone:(403) 259 3230/8404 Fax: (403) 259 3240
Dvar Torah: Breishit, 5757

Rabbi Moshe Shulman

NEW IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER

How does the world measure values? How does society judge and select which ideas are good and which are bad? Today, society and its values change so quickly. How do we judge if we are going in the right direction?

Generally speaking, the world judges based on technological advancement. The more advanced a society scientifically, obviosly the more sophisticated is their knowledge, and therefore the more "correct" their values. Today, we divide the world into "Western", and "third world" countries, based on their technological development. Together with that comes an assumption of values. Modernity brings with it culture. With the exception of archeology, THAT WHICH IS NEWER IS BETTER!

That's why so many people, swept up by this mistake, try to "modernise" the Torah, trying to make Judaism "new", and therefore better. But Judaism believes in just the opposite! NEW IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER!

The Torah teaches us to respect our elders, because they know more than we. The Torah teaches us that right and wrong are based on a link of tradition tracing all the way back to Mount Sinai. The Torah teaches us that the oldest values, those in the Torah those written by our prophets, are better, because they come from G d. The Torah teaches us that the most central key to the survival and development of mankind is the oldest concep in history: that the world was created by G d, and man in His image.

Parshat Breishit traces what happens to humanity when they forget this lesson, and is a devastating condemnation of the advancement of society!

Begin with Adam and Eve. In the garden, they had everything they needed. They didn't need to till the soil, or work the land. Their needs were simple, and provided. They had but one task: Recognise the authority of G d who created the world. Understand that you are NOT in charge, that this world, while yours to use, is not yours to dominate!

Their response: What do you mean 'don't eat of that tree'? It's ours! We care for it! We deserve it. This world, if ours to use, IS ours to DOMINATE! They rebelled. And with that rebellion came the response: Now work the soil. Now you are on your own. You have dethroned G d! Now see what you do with your world without Him!

So Cain and Abel developed, modernised "Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. (Gen. 4:2) What did their modernity bring? Sibling rivalry, hatred, jealousy, and ultimately murder. Having dethroned G d, the door was now open to deny creation, deny the Divine Image in which man was created, deny spirituality. Mankind is all their is. Lesson 2 had been learnt: ONCE FREE TO DOMINATE MAN IS FREE TO DESTROY.

The next stage: Cain's son, Chanon, "built a city" (ibid. 17) His children "...learn to handle the lyre and the pipe, and forge sharp instruments in brass and iron." (ibid. 21 22) Man learns to use metal, make tools, develop art, music, science, technology... and in so doing learns how to kill professionally. "I have killed a man for wounding me." (ibid. 23) "Then man began to call by the name of G d," (ibid. 26) as Rashi explains, they would call everything they made "god". Because they had no other god. Idolatry, murder, violence, crime, jealousy all the achievements of "modern G dless societies".

A few generations later, Noach's society had broken down completely. "And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that all the impulse of the thoughts of his heart is evil continually." (ibid. 6:5)

10 generations later, Sedom and Amorah taught the world how to deal with the "guest" and the stranger, how to create the perfect society, void of outsiders, homogonous, all one... "aryanised"!!

Abraham understood this. In his day, even in such modernised and advanced civilisations such as Egypt and Gerar, he realised: "Only the fear of Heaven is missing in this place, so they will kill me on account of my wife." (ibid. 20:11) Murder sanctioned by law is the result of a G dless society. Because without the fear of G d, without the basic tenant of man created in the image of G d, man as steward of this world and not master over it, the basic lessons of creation wihthout these ideas, even the most "modern" of societies will sanction violence, and ultimately destroy itself.

Look at Germany no nation had "developed", modernised, more than she technologically, the greatest scientific advancements, the centre of culture and arts, of music and "all manner of sharp instruments"... And it didn't take Germany very long to literally follow in the footsteps of Sedom and Amora... Our "modern world" almost destroyed itself numerous times in a nuclear arms race. And that threat is by no means over. The names change. But the game is the same.

As "new" and "modern" as the world may be, without the oldest concept in history, without the foundation of belief in G d, and in the immortal spirituality of every human being, there is NOTHING stopping humanity from annihilating itself.

"I created the Evil inclination, and I created the Torah as its cure" (Talmud, Kedushin 30a) Teach our Sages: G d created man, with all his shortcomings, and his preponderance for evil. And he gave him the antidote called Torah. The answer is there it may be "old", cliched, and outdated but it's there. and it is our only hope for a brighter future!

"For the Mitzvah is a candle, the Torah its light" (Prov. 6:23) The Torah is the light of the world. Today, that light is the inheritance of those who accept it, and live by it. But the day will come, when it will be the light of the entire world. The day will come when Redemption will be complete, the Mashiach will arrive, and light of Torah will be understood by every nation in the world.

That's the eternal message of all our prophets: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid..." (Isaiah 11:6) Nations which once were mortal enemies shall live together in peace. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (ibid. 9) In a world where man is created in the Image of G d, everyone understands that violence is a crime. It becomes naturally abhorrent!

That's what the promise of Redemption is all about. The belief, ingrained into the essence of Judaism since Mount Sinai, in the coming of Mashiach, when the whole world will finally learn that NEW IS NOT NECESSARILY BETTER. They will learn that a better world is one based on belief in G d, and His Dominion, like in the Garden of Eden, before we dethroned the Almighty, and learnt how to kill.

In the meantime, until Mashiach comes, we have a small taste of that world, every week. It's called Shabbat. It's one day where we focus on this message of Creation, and understand its implications. Shabbat is a day to cease from dominating the world, to restore G d to the throne of creation, and focus on the Divine Image, the spirituality, of every human being. Shabbat is a day to teach the world what true peace is all about peace with ourselves, peace with nature, peace with society, peace with G d.

Shabbat is called "me'ein olam haba", a miniature of the world to come, a taste of a what it will be like when all of mankind recognises that the oldest book in the world, and oldest belief in the world, is the only true hope for a better world. "May the All Merciful bring us to see that day which will be like a great Shabbat, a day of peace and eternal life." (Grace after meals)

THAT'S THE WORLD WE BELIEVE IN! THAT'S THE WORLD WE HAVE TO BUILD!!

From Internet Parsha Sheet 5768 (2007)

http://www.koltorah.org/ravj/shnayimmikra.htm Parshat Ki Teitzei Vol.10 No.1 Date of issue: 9 Elul 5760 -- September 9, 2000

Shnayim Mikra V'echad Targum

by Rabbi Howard Jachter

Introduction The Gemara (Berachot 8a) teaches, "one should always finish the Parshiot with the community [by studying] Shnayim Mikra V'echad Targum (the Parsha twice and Targum Onkelos once)." The Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 285:2) notes that this is a rabbinical obligation. It seems that women are not obligated to study Shemot (the common acronym for Shnayim Mikra V'echad Targum), since it is a time bound positive obligation. In this issue, we will examine the parameters of this obligation.

Reason for the Obligation In the introduction to the Sefer Hachinuch, the author explains a reason for this obligation in a simple yet beautiful way:

Our sages established that we should read a portion of the Torah every week in the synagogue to inspire us to observe the Torah…The sages also obligated us to study in our home every week the Torah portion that is read in the synagogue to further enhance our understanding of the Torah.

The aforementioned Gemara notes that all those who engage in Shemot "have their days and years lengthened." One may interpret the Gemara as saying that this practice greatly enhances the quality of one's life. Surely, the joy on Simchat Torah of one who has fulfilled his Shemot obligation is exponentially greater than one who has not done so. Moreover, the Shabbat of those who observe this Halacha is immensely enhanced. Indeed, the Tur and Shulchan Aruch present this Halacha in the context of Hilchot Shabbat. Rav Soloveitchik told this author that the primary time for Shemot is Shabbat. This author also heard from Rav Soloveitchik (in a public lecture delivered at Yeshiva University) that every Shabbat is characterized by the Parsha of the week. For instance, the Shabbat on which we read Parshat Ki Teitzei is not simply Shabbat; it is Shabbat Parshat Ki Teitzei. One may argue that while the public reading of the Torah characterizes Shabbat as, for instance, Shabbat Parshat Ki Teitzei, on the communal level, individual Shemot study characterizes the Shabbat as Shabbat Parshat Ki Teitzei for the individual.

Of course, the primary way that Shemot enhances one's life is by promoting fluency in our most basic and holy text, the Torah. The Jew who is not fluent in the Torah certainly does not enjoy a good Jewish quality of life. Accordingly, even women, who are not technically obligated to study Shemot, receive abundant reward for doing so.

A Defense for Those Who Do Not Study Shemot Many individuals do not engage in Shemot for a variety of reasons. There is a "Limud Zechut" (limited Halachic basis) for these people. The Bait Yosef (Orach Chaim 285 s.v. Aval Misham) cites the opinion of the Raavan that Shemot is an obligation only for an individual who has not heard Kriat Hatorah in shul. According to the Raavan, Shemot is merely a substitute for Kriat Hatorah.

However, the Bait Yosef points out that almost all Rishonim reject the view of the Raavan. For example, he cites the Rambam (Hilchot Tefila 13:25) who writes that "although one hears the communal reading of the Torah he must study the Parsha every week Shnayim Mikra V'echad Targum." In fact, the Vilna Gaon (Biur Hagra O.C. 285:1) specifically notes that the Shulchan Aruch rejects the opinion of the Raavan.

Accordingly, those who do not study Shemot are not "sinners." However, it is proper to study Shemot in addition to hearing Kriat Hatorah in shul. All authorities concur, though, that one must study Shemot if he did not hear the communal Torah reading.

When Must We Complete Shemot Study? The Gemara does not specifically state that one must complete Shemot by a specific time. Tosafot (s.v. Yashlim), however, states that it is preferable to complete Shemot before eating on Shabbat. In fact, the Magen Avraham (285:2) cites the Shelah Hakadosh who writes that it is preferable to complete Shemot on Friday after Chatzot (midday). This preference stems from Kabbalistic concerns (Kabbalists attach profound significance to Shemot study - see Baer Heiteiv and Shaarei Teshuva 285:1). Tosafot notes, though, that it is acceptable to complete Shemot study even after the meal. However, Tosafot believes that Shemot must be completed before Shabbat ends. Indeed, the primary opinion presented by the Shulchan Aruch states that one must complete Shemot before Shabbat ends.

Nevertheless, the Shulchan Aruch cites two lenient opinions that appear in the Rishonim. One lenient view allows one to finish Shemot until the Wednesday after Shabbat in which we read the particular Parsha. This view is based on the Gemara (Pesachim 106a) that permits one to recite Havdala until Wednesday if he forgot to do so on Motzei Shabbat. A second, even more lenient view allows one until Simchat Torah to finish Shemot. The Aruch Hashulchan (285:10) writes that this is a viable opinion. The Mishna Berura (285:12) cautions that all authorities concur that it is preferable to complete Shemot before Shabbat ends.

When May We Begin Study of Shemot? Tosafot writes that the earliest time to begin Shemot study of a particular Parsha is after the Mincha on Shabbat afternoon when we begin to read from that Parsha. This opinion is codified by the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 285:3, and see Mishna Berura 285:7).

One may suggest that this opinion of Tosafot reflects their view that Shemot is a weekly obligation (i.e. that we must study Shemot of a particular Parsha within the week in which we publicly read that particular Parsha). However, the lenient opinion that believes that one may complete Shemot until Simchat Torah regards Shemot as a yearly obligation (i.e. that every year one must complete Shemot). It would appear that just as the lenient view permits completing Shemot late, it also permits starting Shemot as early as Parshat Bereishit. Thus, if one finds difficulty in completing Shemot during the course of the year but is able to do so during a vacation period, he should take the opportunity and complete Shemot for the entire year during the vacation period. Rav Efraim Greenblatt and Rav Mordechai Willig told this author that they agree with this analysis.

Rashi or Targum Onkelos The Rosh (Berachot 1:8) and the Tur (O.C. 285) assert that Rashi's commentary to Chumash constitutes an alternative for Targum Onkelos for the study of Shemot. The Bait Yosef (O.C. 285 s.v. V'im Lamad), however, cites the Ri (Rashi's great grandson) as disputing this assertion. He thus rules that a "God fearing individual" should study both Targum Onkelos and Rashi. Similarly, in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 285:3), Rav Karo rules that Rashi serves as a viable alternative to Onkelos, but a "God fearing person" should study both Rashi and Onkelos.

It seems from the Shulchan Aruch that if one had enough time to study either Onkelos or Rashi that one could choose either and that there is no preference between the two. The Mishna Berura and the Aruch Hashulchan also do not seem to indicate a preference between Onkelos and Rashi. It would thus appear that one with limited time is permitted to study either Onkelos or Rashi, according to his own preference. See, however, the Shaarei Teshuva (285:2) who presents a dispute among the Acharonim whether Onkelos or Rashi is preferable for one with limited time.

Alternative Translations Tosafot (s.v. Shnayim) cites an opinion that asserts that any translation of the Chumash into the local vernacular constitutes a viable alternative to Onkelos. Tosafot then rejects this opinion stating that Onkelos is special because Onkelos not only translates the Chumash but also explains many obscure words and passages. Both the Mishna Berura (285:5) and the Aruch Hashulchan (285:12) cite Tosafot's view as normative. However, the Mishna Berura writes that if one cannot comprehend Rashi he may use a Yiddish (or any other language) translation based on Rashi and traditional sources that are rooted in the Talmudic tradition.

Conclusion The study of Shemot is within the grasp of virtually anyone. If one cannot fulfill this obligation at the optimal level, he should nevertheless make every effort to fulfill this Mitzva as best he can. It might be a good idea to carry a small Chumash in one's attache case or car so that one can seize available moments to study Shemot.

From Internet Parsha Sheet 5763 (2002)
http://www.tzemachdovid.org/thepracticaltorah/bereishis.shtml
THE PRACTICAL TORAH
BY **RABBI MICHAEL TAUBES**
Parshas Bereishis:
THE TIME SHABBOS ENDS
No definitive Halacha LeMa'aseh conclusions should be applied to practical situations based on any of these Shiurim.
After describing what Hashem created on the first day of Creation, the Torah indicates that the day came to an end, and uses the phrase "and there was evening and there was morning..." (Bereishis 1:5). This phrase is repeated following the description of the creation which took place on each of the other five days of Creation (Ibid. psukim 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The Mishnah and Gemara in Chulin (83a) understand from his phrase, as explained by Rashi (Bereishis Ibid. s.v. Maaseh), that according to the Torah, the new day begins at night, meaning that in considering the 24 hour day, the night-time precedes the day time. When night begins, then, a new calendar day has

begun as well.
The question is precisely how to define the beginning of night and, consequently, the end of the previous day according to Halacha. This is a question which obviously has ramifications for a great many Mitzvos and Halachos which depend upon the end of the old calendar day or the beginning of the new one, and is the subject of much discussion among Rishonim and Acharonim. For example, regarding the latest time one may daven Minchah in the afternoon, the Mishnah in Berachos (26a) quotes one view that it may be done until evening, that is, until the end of the day. Rashi (Ibid. s.v. Od HaErev) understands this to mean until nightfall, while Rabbeinu Yonah (Ibid. 18a. In the Rif s.v. Tefillas HaMinchah) learns that it means until sunset. The discussions relating to the first topic of Maseches Berachos, focusing on the time for Maariv and the evening Kerias Shema, also touch on this question.
HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik discusses the precise definitions of day and night and their application to various Halachos in an article on this very subject in one of his Seforim (Shiurim L'Zeicher Abba Mari Z"L Vol. 1 from p. 91). He mentions the interesting point there (p. 102) that the Torah itself seems to leave us in doubt as to when the old day ends and the new day begins. In this Parsha, the first Posuk cited above (Ibid. pasuk 5) declares that Hashem called the light "Yom" day, and He called the darkness "Lailah", night. The implications of this Posuk is that the day is defined by the presence of light, and the night by the presence of darkness. Thus, even after the sun has set, the night (and hence the new calendar day) has not yet begun because it's still light out; night begins only once it's dark. However, another Posuk in this Parsha (Ibid. pasuk 16) states that the sun is to be out during the day and the moon during the night. The implication of this Posuk is that the day is defined by the presence of the sun; once the sun has set, the day is over and the night begins, even though it is still light out. In short, the basic questions are what moment defines the end of the old day, whether when the sun sets or when the sky gets dark, and how we treat the time known as "Bein HaShemashos," or twilight, when the sun has already set, but the sky is not yet dark.
Another important question is how to precisely define nightfall. Even if we assume that the new day begins not at sunset but when it gets dark, how exactly can one figure out when that is? How long after sunset is this time? One of the many issues that depends upon this question is the issue of when Shabbos is over. Because of the aforementioned doubt about whether the new day begins at sunset or nightfall, we observe Shabbos (and Yom Tov) on both ends: Shabbos begins at sunset on Friday afternoon, but does not end until it gets dark on Saturday night; the Mishnah Berurah (Orach Chaim Siman 261 Sif Katan 23) and the Kaf HaChaim (Ibid. Ote 1) elaborate on some of the details about this. The question is how long after sunset one must wait.
The Gemara in Pesachim (94a) states that the time from sunset until it gets dark is equivalent to the time it takes to walk four "Mil." Exactly how long that takes is the subject of another dispute among the Poskim, as presented by the Mishnah Berurah (Orach Chaim Siman 459 Sif Katan 15), and elaborated on in the Biur Halacha (Ibid. s.v. Havei). The Vilna Gaon (Biur HaGra Ibid. s.v. V'Shiur) and the Chok Yaakov (Ibid. Sif Katan 10) discuss this matter at length. The most widely accepted view is that one "Mil" can be walked in 18 minutes; the time between sunset and darkness, which is four "Mil", would thus be 72 minutes. The Gemara in Shabbos (35a), however, implies that from sunset to nightfall is only 3/4 of a "Mil", which is only 13 1/2 minutes, as explained in Tosafos there (Ibid. s.v. Trei). To resolve this contradiction, Tosafos there (Ibid.) and in Pesachim (Ibid. s.v. R. Yehudah) quotes Rabbeinu Tam who explains that there are actually two stages to sunset. The first is what people commonly call sunset and what he calls "the beginning of sunset," and actual nightfall takes place four Mil (72 minutes) after this, as the Gemara in Pesachim (Ibid.) indicates. But then there is what he calls "the end of sunset," which takes place 3/4 of a Mil (13 1/2 minutes) before this actual nightfall, and this is the stage which the Gemara in Shabbos (Ibid.) refers to when stating that from sunset to nightfall is 3/4 of a Mil. It seems clear from Tosafos in Menachos (20b s.v. Nifsal), though, that Rabbeinu Tam considers the time until that last 3/4 of a Mil before this actual nightfall (that is, until 58 1/2 minutes after what people commonly call sunset) to be daytime for all Halachos. This is followed by 13 1/2 minutes called Bein HaShemashos, and finally, 72 minutes after what people commonly call sunset, comes nightfall. Consequently, only then, after those 72 minutes, would Shabbos be over.
Although many Poskim accept this view, including the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim Siman 261 sif 2), the Vilna Gaon (Biur HaGra Ibid. s.v. She'Hu) questions it, saying that one can tell by looking outside that darkness falls long before 72 minutes after what people commonly call sunset, and it's difficult to consider the entire period of 58 1/2 minutes after that sunset to be daytime when it's obviously already dark out. He therefore concludes that sunset has only one stage, and when the sun sets, Bein HaShemashos begins immediately and lasts for 3/4 of a Mil, or 13 1/2 minutes, after which comes nightfall, as the Gemara in Shabbos (Ibid.) states. The 4 Mil period of the Gemara in Pesachim (Ibid.) is the time from sunset until a later time at night, when all the stars are visible, which is relevant for other purposes. The Gaon (Ibid.) adds, however, that this 3/4 of a Mil represents Bein HaShemashos only in Eretz Yisrael and Bavel, and only at certain times. In other locations, depending on their latitude and longitude and depending on the time of year, the time between sunset and nightfall would be different, and nightfall can be determined by seeing three small stars in the sky (See Ibid. Biur Halacha s.v. M'Techilas). In the New York area, it is generally assumed that at least with respect to the end of Shabbos, nightfall is about 42 minutes after sunset according to this view, which is commonly followed.
Nonetheless, many people do wait longer to conclude Shabbos, following the view of Rabbeinu Tam. Again, there is much discussion as to what he meant by 72 minutes after sunset, and whether that time too varies with one's location and the time of year, and hence there are different customs. The Mishnah Berurah, while in general accepting the Vilna Gaon's definition of sunset (See Siman 233 Ibid. Sif Katan 14), recommends in the Biur Halacha (to Siman 261 Ibid. s.v. She'Hu) that one should wait 72 minutes after sunset before ending Shabbos, seemingly regardless of location or season, although he quotes other views. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim Cheilek 1 Siman 24) suggests this as well. It should be noted that it is always proper to add a few minutes on to Shabbos both at the beginning and at the end, as indicated by the Gemara in Rosh HaShanah (9a) and implied by the Gemara in Shabbos (118b), and as codified in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim Siman 261 Ibid. and Siman 293 Ibid. Sif 1).

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from: Mordechai Tzion <toratravaviner@gmail.com>
date: Oct 15, **2020**, 2:37 PM
subject: Short & Sweet - Text Message Q&A #326
From the teachings of the Roshe Yeshiva of Ateret Yerushalayim
[**HaRav Shlomo Aviner** shlit"a]
Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:
Renewing Sanhedrin
Q: Can we renew the Sanhedrin in our time?
A: No. We do not have Rabbis on the level of the Sanhedrin. See what Maran Ha-Rav Kook wrote about this in Igrot Ha-Reeiya (Volume 2, p. 59).
Tachanun on Day of Making Aliyah
Q: Does one recite Tachanun on the day he makes Aliyah? What about on the anniversary of making Aliyah?
A: No, since it is a holiday for him, as brought in Sefer Charedim that the Rambam established a holiday for his family on the day he arrived in Eretz Yisrael. But others in the Minyan should recite Tachanun, since this is a novel ruling (Chiddush). This is similar to a Bar Mitzvah in that he does not recite Tachanun but everyone else in the Shul does. See Piskei Teshuvot 131 note #141 (and in Shut Mishneh Halachot 11:101, Ha-Rav Menashe Klein was asked this question by the Admor of Slonim, and he ruled that one does not recite Tachanun based on the Gemara in Ketubot 111a where Rabbi Elazar says: "Anyone who lives in Eretz Yisrael dwells without sin". This is is similar to a groom whose sins are forgiven. And just like a groom does

not say Tachanun, so too someone who makes Aliyah. Rav Klein holds that this applies to all others who Daven with him as well).

Desire to Ascend onto Temple Mount

Q: Should one have a desire to ascend onto the Temple Mount despite that he is unable to because it is forbidden?

A: One also has to do Teshuvah for a desire to perform a transgression.

Holiness of Laptop Computer

Q: It is permissible to put a laptop, which has many Sefarim on its hard-drive within the computer, on top of a Sefer?

A: No. This is not the type of script which the Torah meant when speaking about holiness of Sefarim (Ha-Rav Avigdor Nevenzal, however, allows it if it is for the purpose of learning. In the book "Ohel Yaakov" on the holiness of Sefarim, p. 25).

Losing a Child

Q: My child passed away. Instead of saying: I lost a child, can I say: I returned a child to Hashem?

A: Yes. This is what Rabbi Meir's wife said (Midrash Mishlei, Chapter 31).

Property for Embassy in Eretz Yisrael

Q: Is there a halachic problem in giving property in Eretz Yisrael for a foreign embassy because of the prohibition of transferring parts of Eretz Yisrael to non-Jews?

A: No, since they do not have military sovereignty.

Questions in Emunah

Q: Someone told me that it is not good if one does not have questions in Emunah, but I can't think of questions to ask.

A: This is not true. One is not obligated to ask. But if one has questions, we answer them. And look, you just asked a question!

Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith

Q: Why aren't the Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith, which are printed in the Siddur, included in the Davening itself?

A: The Rambam explains in Moreh Nevuchim that all of the Principles of Faith are found in the Davening, just not in one place.

Torat Eretz Yisrael

Q: What is the definition of Torat Eretz Yisrael?

A: See Orot Ha-Torah of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, Chapter 13.

Standing during Kadish

Q: Do Ashkenazim have to stand for Kadish?

A: Yes. But see Piskei Teshuvot 56:4.

Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet

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From Internet Parsha Sheet Bereishis 5766 (2005)

From Yeshivat Har Etzion Office <office@etzion.org.il>

By **Rav Yaakov Medan**

To: yhe-parsha@etzion.org.il Date sent: 6 Oct 2004

Subject: PARSHA65 -01: Parashat Bereishit

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm)

This parasha series is dedicated in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l.

Dedicated in loving memory of Esther Okon, on the occasion of her yahrzeit.

The Snake's Sin and Its Punishment

By Rav Yaakov Medan

THE SNAKE'S SIN "The snake was the most cunning of all the beasts of the field that the Lord God had created…." (3:1) What was the snake's sin? Rashi (3:14) explains, based upon the Gemara (Sanhedrin 29a), that it is considered a "mesit" - an inciter: "Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: From where do we learn that no arguments are presented for an inciter? From the primeval snake, as Rabbi Salmai taught: The snake had many arguments which it did not present. And why did the Holy One, Blessed be He, not argue for the snake? Because the snake itself did not argue." Tosafot and Chizkuni have difficulty with this explanation, "for no one is called an 'inciter' unless he incites to idolatry." They go on to explain that the transgression of eating from the Tree of Knowledge bordered on idolatry, since the snake told Chava that eating of the tree would turn her and Adam into "gods, knowing good and evil." It is possible that the idolatry of the snake involved not only its comparison between the creature and its Creator, but also its slander against the Creator.[1] The snake accuses God of fearing that man will become as wise as He, knowing good and evil, and therefore forbidding him to eat of the tree. The idea that God "fears" man and therefore tries to curtail his activities is a familiar theme in various mythologies – from the Greek back to the Canaanite. The story of Prometheus, in Greek mythology, is an example. According to legend, life for man was bitter and difficult until Prometheus discovered fire. Since man did not know the secret of fire, he was forced to suffer from cold, he ate raw meat, and was unable to develop any sort of real industry. The secret of fire was known only to the gods, and they kept it to themselves so that man would never have the possibility of elevating himself from his lowly state and endangering their hegemony. Prometheus had mercy on man and violated the prohibition against publicizing the information: he revealed the secret of fire. As a result, he was punished with eternal torture by the chief god. In the snake's view, God is incomparably strong and powerful, but He lacks moral stature. All the pettiness that afflicts man's heart is to be found in God's heart, too. And, just like any evil and petty ruler, with a little cunning he can be overcome. Since the snake passed on these perverted values to Chava, his act is considered incitement to idolatry. Although there is no incitement here to serve a different god, this view treats God Himself as a "different god," as it were – as something other than what He is. This teaches us a general lesson about slander: it always reflects the subjective view and interpretation of the speaker, at the expense of the objective truth.

"IT PLACED ITS CONTAMINATION IN HER" In the Midrash, Chazal stray far from this understanding and conclude that the snake and Chava sinned in an entirely different manner: "For what reason are idolaters contaminated? Because they did not stand at Mt. Sinai. For when the snake conjoined with Chava, he contaminated her. When Israel stood at Mt. Sinai, their contamination ceased. Idolaters, because they did not stand at Mt. Sinai – their contamination did not subside." (Shabbat 145b) The attempt to attribute to the snake the sin of sexual immorality rests upon the results of the sin: "The eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves and made themselves loincloths." (3:7) Commentators with a linguistic bent have noted the connection between the Hebrew words "beged" (garment) and "begida" (infidelity, treason), and between "me'il" (coat, covering) and "me'ila" (duplicity, perfidy). The need to cover the genital area – especially for the woman – is connected to the most despicable of all sins: that of infidelity and adultery. It is from the results that Chazal deduce the sin; since, following the sin, Adam and Chava sewed themselves loincloths, the woman must have committed the sin of adultery, and Adam is likewise guilty of sinful sexual relations, since he does not separate from her despite her adultery with the snake.

Based upon our conception of a snake, it is difficult to conceive of any sort of "adultery" with Chava. Even if we imagine the snake as having legs (before his legs were chopped off and God commanded him, "You shall go about on your belly"), the distance between it and humankind remains enormous, and it is quite unclear how it would have enticed the woman to sexual relations. We are forced to conclude that the change undergone by the snake after the punishment was so drastic that the snake we know today is in no way similar to its primeval ancestor. Unless we attribute to Chava some perverse sexual orientation, we must accept that the snake resembled humankind, at least externally. It is perhaps for this reason that the snake also knows how to express itself so articulately, and perhaps his intellect was not inferior to that of man. But man – and only man – was created in the image of God, and in my opinion, the "image of God" within man is his conscience. Man is created with an inner knowledge of which good traits are desired by God. Man did not need to learn ethics from some outside source, for his conscience – his inner truth, which is the image of God within him – would lead him to them. It is possible that the snake had intelligence, but it certainly lacked conscience, for it was not created in God's image.[2]

"I HAVE ACQUIRED A MAN FROM GOD" There may be something attractive in the snake's determination, in its lack of doubts and pangs of conscience, and Chava is drawn after this temptation. When her first son is born, she derives his name, Kayin, from the expression, "I have acquired a man from God." It is interesting that there is not the slightest hint of the third partner in the child's creation – her husband, Adam. It is possible that she knows the real, hidden reason for this; she knows who Kayin's father really is. Kayin and his descendants – Lemekh and his sons - are intelligent, strong and creative people, but they have no conscience. Concerning Hevel we know almost nothing; only when it comes to Shet does the Torah tell us, "He [Adam] bore in his image, as his likeness." Perhaps this implies that Kayin was not in Adam's image.

Science tends to divide prehistoric man into two species: the strong and violent type - homo erectus, and the weaker, gentler, more thinking type – homo sapiens. This categorization may parallel the division known to us from parashat Bereishit, between the sons of Kayin and the sons of Shet. The vulgar, violent descendants of Kayin ruled the world, as proved by Lemekh's declaration. They are the "children of elo-him" who snatched human women for themselves, and therefore the Holy One decides to wipe them from the face of the earth. But the contamination remains

for many more generations, since Noah's wife, Na'ama, was a descendant of Lemekh (see Bereishit Rabba 23:3). Only among Bnei Yisrael, who stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai and accepted with the promise, "We shall do and we shall hear," the seventh Commandment – "You shall not commit adultery" – did the contamination subside, and they were purified from the source of living waters: "God is the 'mikveh' of Israel."

"WE DO NOT SEARCH FOR THE MERIT OF AN INCITER" "The Lord God called to Adam and He said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said: 'I heard Your voice in the Garden, and I was afraid, for I am naked, and I hid.' And He said: 'Who told you that you naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?' Adam said: 'The woman whom You put with me – she gave me from the tree, and I ate.' The Lord God said to the woman: 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said: 'The snake tempted me, and I ate.' The Lord God said to the snake: 'Because you have done this, you are cursed above all the animals and above all the beasts of the field. You shall go upon your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. And I shall place hatred between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. They shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise their heel.' To the woman He said: 'I shall surely increase your pain in childbearing; in sorrow shall you bring forth children, and you shall desire your husband, and he shall rule over you.' To Adam He said: 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree concerning which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat from it" – cursed be the land because of you; you shall eat from it in sorrow all your life. It shall produce thorns and thistles for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to the earth, for from it you were taken; for you are dust and you shall return to dust.'" (3:9-19) Reviewing the respective punishments of Adam, Chava and the snake, it is difficult not to be struck by the lack of symmetry between God's attitude towards Adam and his wife, who are questioned as to their motives for the sin, and His treatment of the snake, which receives an immediate punishment with no attempt to give him or his motives the benefit of the doubt. As we noted at the outset, Rashi (3:14) explains this on the basis of the Gemara (Sanhedrin 29a), teaching that "We do not make an effort to find merit for an inciter." From Rashi it would appear that we do not make an effort to find merit in the inciter precisely because he has a potential defense – he may claim that the "victim" need not have listened to him: "If the teacher says one thing and the student says another, to whom do we listen?!"[3] Alternatively, it is possible that we do not make an effort to find some defense for the inciter because of the severity of his offense, since he is considered as having "sinned in order to anger [God]." We seek defense only for someone who performed a transgression out of a desire, having been overcome by his evil inclination, but not for someone whose intention was specifically to anger God and to rebel. It would seem that the actual principle according to which we do not make an effort to seek a defense for an inciter may be learned from the language of the text in the parasha dealing with an inciter: "If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife of your bosom or your neighbor who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' – which you have not known, neither you nor your forefathers…" (Devarim 13:7) According to the simple reading of the text, the "victim" – the person who is incited – is the witness. Proof for this conclusion lies in the fact that he is the first commanded to kill the inciter, as the Torah teaches explicitly: "Your hand shall be upon him first to kill him, and the hand of all the nation thereafter" (Devarim 13:10). Witnesses are generally commanded to be the first to put to death the person they have testified against: "The hand of the witnesses shall be upon him first to put him to death, and the hand of all the nation thereafter" (Devarim 17:7). However, this gives rise to a simple question. The Torah tells us that the inciter tried to lead astray someone close to him: "Your brother… or your son or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom…." But a relative is invalid as a witness; he cannot testify that his relative enticed him! [4] From here Chazal learn that "We do not invest effort in finding a defense for an inciter": the reason for the invalidation of a family member for testimony is because of his tendency to try and find justification for his relative's act. Because of this, he is not invalid for testimony as to incitement, for we do not give the inciter the benefit of any doubt. Even a relative is considered a "witness" (at least for the purposes of "the hand of the witnesses shall be upon him first to put him to death"), although a relative is invalid for any other type of testimony in Torah law. We have hereby solved another difficulty posed by the Rishonim: the snake received no prior warning as to the prohibition of and punishment for incitement – so how could it be punished? It would seem that an inciter is punished even if there was no prior warning (as the Rambam writes explicitly – Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim 5:3), because the need for warning prior to the deed is meant for the purposes of easing up on the suspect: perhaps he didn't know, or perhaps he forgot that it was forbidden. No attempt is made to find defense for the inciter – and therefore the snake is punished even though it received no warning. Indeed, it appears that this very point explains the difference between man and the snake. At the beginning of the story of Gan Eden, we are told that God prohibits man from eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and warns him as to his punishment if he should eat: "And from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil – you shall not eat from it, for on the day that you eat of it you will surely die." (2:17) The Gemara (Sanhedrin 40b) tries to derive the requirement of warning a sinner before his act (so that he will be liable if he commits it) from far-fetched sources and forced applications. Perhaps what Chazal viewed as the background to the law of warning was this difference between man and the snake: God forbade man from eating of the Tree of Knowledge and warned him as to what his punishment would be if he did so, while the snake received no explicit warning. From here we learn that an inciter is punished without having received warning, while any other transgressor is punished only after first having been warned.

ONE WHO SINS DELIBERATELY VS. ONE WHO SINS IN ORDER TO ANGER GOD Moreover, the law of warning was implemented by Chazal so as render it all but impossible to mete out punishment: "Both a scholar and an ignoramus need warning, for warning is given in order to distinguish between one who sins inadvertently and one who sins deliberately, in case he was acting inadvertently. How is he to be warned? He is told, 'Desist, or do not do it, for it is a transgression and you will be deserving of death or lashes.' If he desists – he is exempt, and likewise if he was silent or lowered his head – he is exempt. Even if he says, 'I know' – he is exempt, unless he forfeits his life and declares, 'I am doing it because it is forbidden' - then he is put to death. And it is necessary that he performs the deed immediately after the warning, right after speaking; but if he performs it after the amount of time necessary to speak – he need a separate warning." (Rambam, Hilkhot Sanhedrin 12:2) A warning so close to the deed, and accompanied by an explicit declaration that "I am doing it because it is forbidden," seems impossible, and it is quite illogical that this should be the distinction between one who sins inadvertently and one who sins deliberately. It is possible, however, that such a warning serves to clarify whether the person is performing the sin in order to anger God, or out of desire. Halakha does not allow a court to put a person to death unless he has sinned in order to anger God – i.e., only if he says, "I am doing it because it is forbidden," and actually commits the sin as he says these words.[5] Thus a death sentence passed by a Jewish court became a very rare phenomenon, and a Sanhedrin that put a person to death once in seven years (or once in seventy years) was called a "Sanhedrin of Destruction" (Mishna, Makkot 7a) – for most sinners do not transgress in order to anger God. This principle, too, would appear to have its source in the Torah. In all of the Torah there are only two instances of a death sentence being carried out by a court: the person who blasphemed (Vayikra 24), and the one who gathered wood on Shabbat (Bamidbar 15). It is obvious that the former transgressed in order to anger God, and therefore he was put to death.[6] From the context of the parasha, it would seem that the latter, too, sinned with the intention of angering God, since we are told: "A person who acts presumptuously, whether a native citizen or a stranger – he dishonors God, and that soul shall be cut of from among its nation. For he has despised the word of God and has violated His command; that soul shall surely be cut off, his sin is upon him. And Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, and they found a man gathering wood on Shabbat. And those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moshe and Aharon and to all the congregation…" (Bamidbar 15:30-33) The Torah tells us that a person who "acts presumptuously" is considered to "dishonor God," since he is acting knowingly, to anger God. There is some foundation for the theory that the man who gathered wood did so in response to the Divine decree following the sin of the spies. After it was decreed that Am Yisrael would wander in the desert for forty years, the wood-gatherer claimed that the acceptance of the Torah had been solely for the purpose of receiving an inheritance in the land, and if he was not to receive any inheritance – he would not fulfill the Torah. He also tried to lead the whole nation into a rebellion against Moshe; it is no wonder that this narrative is placed directly before the story of Korach. It is possible that Chazal learned from these two parashiot that the essence of the law concerning the death sentence referred only to one who sinned in order to God, whose whole intention is to rebel and to incite. In such a situation, his punishment is the same as that meted out to the primordial snake: there is no need to give him warning, nor is any attempt made to give him the benefit of the doubt.

MAN'S ADVANTAGE Perhaps the lack of attempt to seek merit for the snake can be understood in a different way than the one proposed by Rashi. It would appear that there should be no benefit of the doubt for Adam and Chava, either. They were aware of the command and the prohibition, and they decided to transgress them in following the advice of the snake. How can this be justified? Nevertheless, God addresses Adam with questions: "Where are you?" "Who told you that you are naked?" "Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" God expects an answer (teshuva) from man, but not necessarily the answer to His questions. He expects an act of teshuva (repentance): an admission of guilt, a request for forgiveness, a search for some way of making amends. God opens the door for Adam to say, "I have sinned" – but he does not use the opportunity. Instead

of admitting the sin, he blames his wife. God goes on to question Chava, but she too – instead of admitting her guilt – blames the snake. Thus, the first human act of teshuva failed to happen, and the continued stay in the Garden of Eden and the continued revelation of the Shekhina were consequently curtailed. Adam and his wife acted as did King Shaul, much later on, when confronted by the prophet Shemuel: "Shemuel said: 'What is this sound of sheep in my ears, and the sound of cattle that I hear?' Shaul said: 'They were brought from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the flock and of the cattle in order to sacrifice to the Lord your God; the rest we destroyed.'" (Shemuel I 15:14-15) Shemuel begins with a question so that Shaul may confess, but the first king of Israel chooses to blame the nation instead of accepting responsibility himself, and thus the heroic moment of the first Israelite dynasty was likewise lost. God does not address any questions to the snake. The snake is part of nature, and it is judged with the attribute of strict justice. The rigid laws of nature leave no room for teshuva. Sin brings punishment; there is no third option. Only man, God's friend, created in His image, merits the demonstration of the attribute of mercy – the ability to return to God, to make amends for the sin. Only to man does God extend the opportunity to confess and repair; He knocks on man's door and asks him questions. A similar lesson may be learned from the story of R. Elazar ben Dordaya: "We learn: It was said of R. Elazar ben Dordaya that there was not a single prostitute in the world with whom he had not had relations. Once he heard that there was a certain prostitute over the sea, who demanded a bag of dinarim as payment. He took a bag of dinarim and went, and he crossed seven rivers to reach her. In the midst of their intercourse, she passed gas. She said, 'Just as that air cannot return to its place, so Elazar ben Dordaya will not be accepted as a penitent.' He went and sat between two mountains and hills. He said: 'Mountains and hills, beg for mercy on my behalf!' They said to him: 'Before we ask mercy for you, first we must ask for ourselves, as it is written, "For the mountains shall move, and the hills collapse."' He said: 'Heavens and earth, beg for mercy for me!' They said: 'Before we ask for you, first we must ask for ourselves, as it is written, "The heavens shall vanish like smoke, and the earth shall expire as an old garment."' He said: 'Sun and moon, beg for mercy on my behalf!' They said to him: 'Before asking for you, first we must ask for ourselves, as it is written: "The moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed."' He said, 'Stars and constellations – beg for mercy on my behalf!' They said: 'Before asking for you, we must first ask for ourselves, as it is written, "All the host of the heavens shall rot away."' He said: 'I have no one to rely on but myself.' He placed his head between his knees and wept and sobbed until his soul departed from him. A heavenly voice emerged and said: 'R. Elazar ben Dordaya is invited to Eternal Life.'" (Avoda Zara 17a) There is no repair and no teshuva – not through the heavens and the earth, neither by the agency of the mountains and hills, nor any hope in the sun and moon or the stars and constellations, nor through the snake. Teshuva and repair exist only within man, and we have no one to rely on but ourselves.

Fw From Hamelaket@gmail.com (**2020**)
Drasha - Parshas Bereishis - Opposites Attract
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
The creation of man was no simple feat. In fact, Hashem seems to be disappointed with his less-than-perfect creation. He looks at Adam and declares, “It is not good for man to be alone I will create an ezer k’negdo.” The word ezer means helper, and the word k’negdo takes on various explanations, each defining the role of woman in completing and perfecting creation.
Simply put, the word k’negdo means opposite him. It can even mean against him. Rashi quotes the Talmud that explains that there is no middle ground in relationships. If one merits than the spouse is a helper; and if one does not merit, then the spouse is a k’negdo, against him.
Though the word k’negdo may mean opposite him, it need not mean a negative connotation. Opposite him, however, defines a relationship. One can not be opposite of no one. Why, then, does the Torah define this helper in such intersting terms? Why would it not have sufficed to call the new spouse a helper and leave it at that?
With the baseball playoffs fast approaching, a therapist in our community told me a fascinating story that reflects upon the strange state of affairs in some households.
A couple came to him for counseling in their predicament.
“My husband is only interested in the baseball playoffs! All he’s interested is in that stupid baseball! Yankees, Shmankees! That’s all he wants to do each night. ”
“That problem,” thought the doctor, “is not so unique. It occurs pretty often in households across the country.”
He was expecting to hear the husband defend himself with lines like, “it’s only once a year,” or only when New York is in the playoffs.”
He didn’t. In response the husband put his hands on his hips and faced-off.
“And what about her? All she wants to watch are the evening sitcoms and serials! They are meaningless fantasies! How does she expect me to see real men earning an honest living playing ball, when she wants to watch those silly dramas?”
The therapist pondered this modern-day struggle and offered his suggestion.
“I see that your interests in televised entertainment are quite polarized. But I think there is a simple solution.”
He smiled broadly and with the confidence of responding with Solomonic wisdom he continued. “You are quite an affluent couple, and,” he added, “you have a large home. Why don’t you just buy an additional TV set, and each of you watch your desires in different rooms!”
The therapist’s smile faded as the couple stared at him in horror. “DIFFERENT ROOMS??” they shrieked in unison. “How can we watch in different rooms? That’s the time we spend together!”
Through its contrasting definitions of a spouse’s capacity, the Torah does more than warn us of problems. It explains what the best helper is. The appropriate helper and mate is not one who spends his or her time in a different world with different interests and no concern for the other’s. Rather, it is one who stand opposite the spouse and faces him. The shared enjoyment of each other’s company , the companionship of k’negdo, should outweigh a set of four eyes glued to an event in the distance. The Torah wants two sets of eyes facing each other. Sometimes in agreement, sometimes in disagreement as long as they are k’negdo, opposite the other.
Good Shabbos Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore Drasha

From Internet Parsha Sheet 5756 (1995)
From: "Jeffrey Gross <75310.3454@compuserve.com>" To: "Halachic Topics Related to the Week... Date: 10/17/95 9:20pm Subject: Braishis 5756
To All Our Subscribers, We have a new format for 5756. We hope that you will continue to enjoy it. There was not an issue for Parshas V'zos Habracha.
HALACHA FOR 5756 **SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS BEREISHIS**
By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt
Compiled from the Mishna Berurah and from other contemporary Poskim on a subject that pertains to the parsha of the week. For final Halachic ruling consult your Rav.
SUBJECT: SELECTED SHABBOS HALACHOS
Mincha after Candle Lighting
QUESTION: May a woman Daven Mincha after she has lit candles on Friday night?
DISCUSSION: L'chatchillah, all Poskim agree that one must Daven Mincha before lighting candles. When a woman lights candles she is automatically accepting the Shabbos. This precludes her Davening the previous day's Mincha. If, however, a woman remembers at the last moment before lighting candles that she has not Davened Mincha, the Poskim debate at to what she should do. There are three views:
1) She should go ahead and light anyway. Then, she should Daven Shabbos Maariv twice to compensate for the lost Mincha1. Even though women usually do not Daven Maariv, she may do so in this case in order to make up the lost Mincha2; 2) Before lighting, she should stipulate that she is not accepting the Shabbos until after she has Davened Mincha3. This should not be done on Yom Tov if Shechiyanu is recited at candle lighting4; 3) A

minority view rules that she may Daven Mincha after lighting candles, even if she did not stipulate that she was not accepting Shabbos5.

It should be noted that when men light candles they do not automatically accept the Shabbos upon themselves6. They may Daven Mincha after the lighting.

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Kiddush before Maariv

QUESTION: Can one recite Kiddush before Maariv? This situation may be arise during the summer months, when many people would like to Daven Maariv after nightfall, yet they would also like to eat earlier with their family. A possible solution would be to accept Shabbos after Plag Hamincha, eat the meal with the family, and then Daven Maariv with a later Minyan. Is this permitted?

DISCUSSION: Mishnah Berurah7 rules that there is no objection to reciting Kiddush before Maariv, provided that the meal begins at least one half hour before nightfall. After that time, it is prohibited to begin a full meal before saying Krias Shema and Davening Maariv. According to the Arizal's Kabbalah, however, it is not proper to recite Kiddush before Maariv. It is considered as if one is performing the Mitzvos in the wrong sequence8. Additionally, the Gr"a9 proves from the Talmud (Brachos 27b) that one should not recite Kiddush before Maariv.

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Havdalah Fingernail Inspection

QUESTION: When is the right time to inspect one's fingernails during Havdalah, before the Bracha of Borei Meorei Ha'eish or after?

DISCUSSION: There are two opinions on this matter. Mishnah Berurah10 rules that the inspection should be first, before reciting the Bracha. The reason is that this Bracha is considered a Birchas Ha'shvach, similar to the blessing over thunder and lightning. Obviously, therefore, one needs to first hear or see the phenomenon for which he is going to praise Hashem. Other Poskim11 rule that the Bracha is recited first, and the inspection follows. That is because they consider this Bracha to be a Birchas Ha'nehenin. The general rule governing that type of Bracha is that the Bracha is recited before pleasure is derived from the item. Harav Moshe Feinstein12 rules according to the second view.

FOOTNOTES: 1 This is the view of the Mishnah Berurah 263:43. 2 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43:110) 3 Aishel Avraham 263:10; Kaf Hachaim 263:35. 4 Tzitz Eliezer 10:19 5 5 Several Poskim quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 43:128 6 Mishnah Berurah 263:42. It is still, however, preferable to stipulate that Shabbos is not being accepted (ibid). 7 271:11 quoting the Magen Avraham. 8 Kaf Hachayim 271:22;272:3. 9 Maasei Rav 117. See Peulas Sachir ibid. 10 296:31. All the early sources discussing this Halacha mention the inspection before the blessing. 11 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 96:9; Siddurei Hatanya, Hagra, Yaavetz. 12 Written responsa published in "The Radiance of Shabbos".

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network Peninim on the Torah - Parshas פרשת בראשית תשפ"א

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

ותרא האשה כי טוב העץ למאכל וכי תאוה היא לעינים... ותקח מפריו ותאכל

And the woman perceived that the tree was good for eating and that it was a delight for the eyes… and she took of its fruit and ate. (3:6)

A horrible tragedy occurred in Telshe, Lithuania, during the tenure of *Horav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch, zl,* as *Rosh Yeshivah* and *Rav* (about one hundred years ago). A secular Jewish student with no ties whatsoever to religion rented an attic apartment in town and succumbed to the severe depression that plagued him. Following the incident, the owners of the house in which the deed was done would hear and then see plaster fall from the ceiling. The owner of the house was himself also not an observant Jew, so, at first, he ignored it. (A religious Jew takes nothing at face value. Whatever occurs in his life, he views as a message, however subtle, from which he should learn or gain perspective). At the time, Telshe was going through the pangs of *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment movement, which taught that Torah was archaic and its disseminators deadbeat parasites who refused to come to terms with modernity and a world that was moving progressively forward. The landlord of this house was a card-carrying *Haskalah* member, proudly spewing his misplaced (it was really self-loathing) animus against anything that smacked of religion. After a few weeks of observing his ceiling deteriorate before his very eyes, he finally relented and deferred to the advice offered by his more common-sensical friends: Go see the *Telzer Rav* and ask his sage advice.

The (*Alter*) *Rav* explained to the landlord, "It is quite possible that when the student abruptly ended his life, some of the blood seeped into the wooden floorboards – and these blood droplets want to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Therefore, whenever a drop of blood descends from the ceiling, some plaster also falls down to cover it." The landlord thought that the *Rav* had lost his mind, until he came home and looked beneath the fallen plaster and discovered blood! They buried the blood-soaked floorboard, and everything turned back to normal; no more plaster fell.

Obviously, the incident took the city by storm. The community hummed with conversation; everyone was impressed with the *Rav's* penetrating Torah knowledge. They agreed that the *Rav's* unusual insight was the result of his vast Torah knowledge. A few days later, the *Rav* was "accosted" by one of the city's well-known *kofrim*, heretics, a Jew who had fallen prey to the *Haskalah* rhetoric. The man remarked to the *Rav*, "I refused to enter the house to view the spectacle, because I feared that I would become impressed and influenced to become a believer."

The *Rav* smiled and countered, "You need not worry. Miracles do not impress you. Every day, you see the sun rise in the sky. It nourishes and sustains the world. You look up at the sky and see the wonderful clouds which provide the necessary moisture for vegetation to grow. You are not blind. You see miracles every day. They are miracles, because no human can possibly replicate what they are doing. You observe how an infant picks up words and, over time, begins to speak and become proficient in a language. Yet, you have remained a heretic. This proves that you want to disbelieve. The miracle in the house would not impress you because you refuse to be impressed. You know the truth, but you refuse to concede to it."

A similar incident happened concerning Chavah. Imagine *Gan Eden*. We have before us every luscious fruit; all sorts of vegetation; the nourishment that anything we could consume would be beyond comprehension; and, the best part is, it is all ours for the picking. There is one slight catch: one tree, the Tree of Knowledge; its fruit is off limits. In fact, to eat it brings about death. No problem. It is not as if we have nothing else to eat. We can have everything, but – one fruit. It should not be a major challenge.

Everything was fine until the *nachash ha'kadmoni*, ancient serpent, entered onto the scene and commenced with his awesome salesmanship. He succeeded in swaying Chavah. She ate; she was a good wife and fed her husband, and the result was banishment from *Gan Eden*, death, difficulty in earning a livelihood and all of the adversity with which we have lived from the beginning of time. How did this happen? They had it all, but one fruit. How did Chavah fall for the serpent's blandishments? What was her misstep? The Torah relates the sequence of her downfall. "She perceived that the tree was good for eating. And that it was a delight for the eyes." What does taste have to do with it? The snake never mentioned food/taste. He talked about opening up her eyes, knowing the difference between good and bad. How did food enter into the equation?

Rav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita, explains this with a story. A student in one of the mainstream *yeshivos* was not holding his own in learning. While he had not been dealt a large helping of acumen, he did not

even bother to make the attempt. Slowly, his learning followed and, soon afterwards, his commitment dwindled away to just about nothing. He left the *yeshivah* and joined the world of fun and misery, becoming totally alienated from Torah and *mitzvos*. Years passed, and one day he was walking down the street when he confronted his *Rosh Yeshivah*. Having nowhere to hide, he dug in and said, "*Shalom*." The contrast between the *Rosh Yeshivah*, long beard, dressed in the black regalia of a distinguished Torah scholar, and the young man with a long ponytail, tee-shirt and jeans, was palpable.

"Where did you go?" the *Rosh Yeshivah* asked. "One day, I looked around, and you were gone. No good-bye, nothing. I thought I deserved better than that."

"*Rebbe*, I had questions and doubts. Finally, I decided that this way of life was just not for me," the young man replied.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* smiled, "Trust me, if you had questions, I had answers. I do not think that this was the sequence you followed. You decided that you would like to try to live a life of abandon, to see what it was like not to learn, not to *daven*, not to observe *Shabbos* and *kashrus*. You tried it, and it felt good. Now you needed an excuse to justify reneging the Torah. 'Suddenly,' now you have questions. Veritably, you have no questions because then I could give you answers. You have all the answers. I have no answers to your answers!"

This is what the Torah is teaching us. Chavah saw, and Chavah smelled. Chavah had an implacable desire to eat. Once she ate, she blamed it on the serpent's presentation of a life of greater knowledge, of good and evil. Truthfully, it was not about intellectual pursuits. It was about eating a tasty fruit. And we are still paying for her experience.

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from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com> via em.secureserver.net
Date: Oct 14, 2020, 4:31 PM
subject: Aish.com Parsha - Bereishit

Seal of God is Truth

Bereishit (Genesis 1:1-6:8)
Sep 29, 2020
by **Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski**

In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth... God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it He abstained from all His work which God created to make

These two verses encompass all of Creation. The opening three words end in the letters taf, aleph, mem, which spell emet – truth, and the closing three words end in aleph, mem, taf, which again spell emet. Rabbi Simchah Bunim of P'shis'che cites the Talmudic statement, "The seal of God is emet", and comments, "It is customary for an author to place his name in the opening of his book. God placed His Name emet – truth, in the opening chapter of the Torah. Emet thus envelops all of creation, a testimony to God as the Creator."

Divrei Shaul notes that all traits can be a matter of degree. There can be greater beauty and lesser beauty, greater wisdom and lesser wisdom, greater strength and lesser strength, etc. Only one trait cannot be more or less: truth. There is no such thing as greater truth and lesser truth. Something is either true or it is not true.

God is identified with truth. Just as truth can never be altered, because altered truth is no longer truth, there can be no change in God. (Malachi,2:6). The Talmud says that emet is broad-based, consisting of the first letter of the alphabet, aleph, the middle letter, mem, and the last letter, taf (Shabbos 55a). Truth therefore,has stability and durability. Falsehood, on the other hand, is the Hebrew sheker, consisting of three letters near the end of the alphabet. Sheker is top-heavy and cannot endure.

To the extent that a person lives with truth is the extent one identifies with God. Any falsehood distances a person from God.

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THE TANACH STUDY CENTER mail.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for Self Study - by Menachem Leibtag

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SEFER BREISHIT - Intro

There's a big difference between simply **reading** the Bible, and **studying** it. To help encourage and facilitate the **study** of Chumash, each week the Tanach **Study** Center provides a battery of questions on the weekly Torah reading in addition to [and in preparation for] several shiurim [lectures] that discuss its theme and content.

Our introductory set of questions will begin with a short explanation of why it makes sense that Chumash (& Navi) should be 'studied' (and not just read), followed by a discussion of the methodology that we employ in our shiurim, which also forms the backbone of the weekly questions for self study.

NOT JUST A 'STORY BOOK'

Before opening a book of any sort, the reader will usually have certain expectations in regard to what he will find. For example, the reader of a history book expects to find historical information; while the reader of a science book expects to find scientific facts; and certainly someone who picks up a novel expects to find drama, etc.

So what should we expect when we open a Chumash? Is it a 'history book' - the story of the Jewish people? Is it a book of 'halacha' - laws that govern Jewish life? Is it book of philosophy that discusses the relationship between man and God?

Our study begins with the assumption that Chumash is a book of "nevu'a" [prophecy]. Hence, we assume that it was written not only to provide the reader with historical information, but more so - to provide the reader with a prophetic message.

Therefore, to get a better idea of what to look for when we study Chumash- we must first discuss the meaning of the Hebrew word "nevu'a".

WHAT IS "NEVU'A"

The popular translation of nevu'a - prophecy - is often misleading, for it is usually understood as the ability to see (or predict) the future. However, in Tanach, 'predicting the future' is rarely the primary mission of the prophet.

In Hebrew the word "niv" [nun.yud. bet] means a saying (or technically speaking - the movement of lips). For example, in Yeshayahu chapter 57, God is described as 'borei niv sefatayim' - He who created [or performs acts of Creation] with the movement of His lips. [See Yeshayahu 57:19 and its context, see also Mal'achi 1:12.]

Therefore, technically speaking, the word nevu'a relates to speech, and hence the Bible uses the word "navi" in reference to a spokesman on behalf of any god.

Hence, a "navi Hashem" delivers God's message to Am Yisrael, while a "navi Ba'al" - refers to a spokesman for the Ba'al god (see Melachim Aleph 18:22).

Similarly, a "navi sheker" is a prophet who **claims** to be speaking in the name the one God, but instead - he makes up his own prophecy, claiming 'falsely' that God spoke to him (see Yirmiyahu 27:14-15!)

This understanding will help us appreciate the job of the "navi Hashem" in our study of Tanach, for his primary purpose will not be 'to predict' history, but rather 'to shape it'!

AHARON - the 'NAVI' of MOSHE

To clarify (and prove) this point, let's bring an example from a very interesting usage of the word "navi", found at the beginning of chapter seven in Sefer Shmot.

Recall from the story of the 'burning bush' (see chapters 3 thru 6)) how God had commanded Moshe to deliver His message to Pharaoh. After failing his first mission (in chapter five), God commands him to confront Pharaoh once again:

> "And God said to Moshe, I am God - **go** speak to Pharaoh King of Egypt **everything that I speak to you**." (Shmot 6:29)

In other words, God has charged Moshe with the job of begin His 'spokesperson'. Then note how Moshe explains why he thinks that he is not fit for this job:

> "But Moshe appealed saying: 'hen ani aral sefatayim' - Behold I am of uncircumcised lips [i.e. impeded speech], and how shall Pharaoh listen [or understand me]?" (see Shmot 6:29-30).

To solve Moshe's problem, God provides Moshe with a solution, where Aharon will becomes Moshe 'spokesman'! Note how the Torah uses the word **navi** in this description:

> "And God responded to Moshe, see - I have appointed you as Elokim to Pharaoh, but Aharon your brother will be your **navi**" [i.e. Aharon will become Moshe's navi!] You will say [to Aharon] everything that I command you, and Aharon your brother will speak unto Pharoah…" (see 7:1-2).

Because of Moshe's [legitimate] complaint, God offers a very logical solution. Moshe will remain God's spokesman, but now due to his 'speech problems', Moshe himself needs a spokesman! Towards that purpose, God appoints Aharon to become Moshe's **navi**, i.e. he will speak to Pharaoh on behalf of Moshe.

In the usual case of nevu'a - God has a message that must be delivered to the people, and hence need a navi as His spokesperson to deliver that message. Now, Moshe himself needs a 'spokesman' to deliver his words to Pharaoh, hence he will be like 'Elokim' and Aharon will be his **navi**.

In summary, the word nevu'a implies a message from God to man, and the navi becomes the person who delivers that message. Hence, a sefer of nevu'a must be a book that delivers a message from God to man, delivered by His spokesperson - the navi.

Therefore, when we study a book of nevu'a, we should expect it to contain a message from God to man.

However, when we read Chumash, that message is often not very explicit. Instead, we often find that Chumash delivers its message in a more implicit manner, through a set of stories - and not necessarily through an explicit set of commands.

The problem then becomes: how do we decipher that message from those stories, and how can we be sure that our interpretation is correct!

Through the centuries, it has been the goal of the Rabbis and the great commentators to attempt to the best of their ability to decipher God's message. Even though there have been many approaches, and wide variances of opinions, most all commentators began their study and base their commentary on a critical reading of the text (while taking into consideration the commentaries of the previous generations, sometimes agreeing and sometimes arguing).

Our contention is that to best appreciate the works of those commentators, and to be able to the best of our ability to understand God's message, we too must first undertake a critical reading of Chumash. By sharing the same experience of carefully reading every story, and attempting to understand the flow of topic and the underlying theme that unfolds, we increase our chances of properly comprehending the commentaries of previous generations, and hopefully can reach a better understanding of God's message to us via His "nviim" [prophets].

For example, as we study Sefer Breishit, we must assume that purpose of the Torah's presentation of the story of Creation and all of its subsequent stories, must relate (in one form or other) to a message that God wishes to convey to man.

The goal of our questions for self study will be to raise certain points that may facilitate that study, and enhance the appreciation of the interpretations suggested by the classical commentators.

We conclude our introduction with an explanation of a methodology of study that relates to 'parshiot'.

THE IMPORTANCE OF 'PARSHIOT"

One of the most significant - but often overlooked - ways that

Chumash conveys messages is through its division into parshiot.

First of all, don't let the word parshia (small 'p') confuse you with the name Parshat Ha-shavu'a (capital 'P')!

In our shiurim, we use the word "parshia" in reference to the 'paragraph' like divisions of the text that are found in the Sefer Torah. In contrast, the word Parsha [with a capital 'P'] is used in reference to the weekly shabbat Torah portion, e.g., Noach, Lech Lecha, Vayera, etc., through which we complete the entire Torah once a year.

From a thematic perspective, the parshia divisions are very important, for they were given by God to Moshe Rabbeinu together with the Torah! Therefore, if God found it necessary to provide us with parshia breaks to aid us in our study of His Torah, it only makes sense that we should pay careful attention to them when we study. In fact, in his opening commentary to the book of Vayikra, Rashi himself provides us with a very similar insight:

> These short breaks were given [together with the Torah by God] to allow Moshe Rabbeinu the opportunity to contemplate from one parshia to the next, [in order] to understand the flow from one topic to the next, [and if this was necessary for Moshe Rabbeinu] then even more so - we who study Chumash must pay attention to these breaks!
>
> (see Rashi's commentary to Vayikra,1:1).

In contrast, the 'Parshat Ha-shavu'a" division of Chumash - i.e. the weekly sedra (technically speaking, Sedra is the proper name for what we call Parsha) - reflects a tradition that began during the Babylonian exile, over a thousand years after the Torah was first given.

With this in mind, it's important to clarify an important point. Should one speak of the 'theme' of a certain Parsha, (e.g., the theme of Parshat Noach), this statement can be misleading, for God never composed Parshat Noach (or Parshat Lech Lecha etc.) by itself. Instead God gave an entire Sefer (book) to Moshe Rabbeinu. Hence, when someone speaks of the theme of a certain Sedra, he is simply explaining why Chazal chose to group together a certain set of psukim together (over others) to compose that weekly Torah reading.

On the other hand, when we speak of the theme of a Sefer (e.g., the theme of Sefer Breishit, Shmot, etc.), we attempt to uncover God's underlying message in that Sefer. In other words, that fact that God chose to include all of the stories in Sefer Breishit into one complete book implies that it should carry one basic underlying theme. In fact, many commentators (e.g. Ramban and Seforno in their introductions to each Sefer) attempt to uncover that theme.

This assumption is important for it provides the basis for the methodology that we employ in our weekly shiurim. Our analysis of parshiot will be helpful in our attempt to uncover the primary theme (or themes) of each Sefer; and in turn we will use those themes to help appreciate the detail of its various stories (and/or mitzvot).

Ptuchot & Stumot

As you are probably familiar, there are two types of parshia divisions

1. 'ptuchot' = open.

   Indicated by a gap of blank spaces until the end of a line; the next parshia begins at the start of the next line. See board

2. 'stumot' = closed

   Indicated by a gap of at least nine spaces; the next parshia can begin on that very same line. See board 2

As a rule of thumb, a parshia ptucha usually indicates a major change of topic, while a parshia stuma indicates a more subtle one. As we will see, however, there are many exceptions.

These parshia breaks are so important that a Sefer Torah without them is 'pasul' (not valid). In this regard, I recommend that you read chapter eight in Rambam's Hilchot Sefer Torah where he not only explains the importance of these parshia breaks, but even lists each and every one of them to make sure that sofrim [scribes] will write their Sifrei Torah properly!

So what are the chapter divisions that we are so familiar with?

To the surprise of many students, even though just about every Chumash in print today uses a chapter/verse system, this division of Chumash into chapters is not a Jewish tradition. It is, however, a very useful convention, as this system has been used by just about every publisher of the Bible (regardless of religion or language) since the invention of the printing press (15th century). Therefore, as we study Chumash, its division into chapters is a very useful convention, and a helpful reference that reflects how other people may have understood (or misunderstood!) its topics, but it certainly does not carry any prophetic significance.

In contrast, the division of Chumash into Seforim [books] and parshiot is of paramount prophetic significance. Hence, their consideration will often be a primary focus in our shiurim. `

Tanach Koren

To easily identify these important parshia breaks when studying Chumash, it is very useful to use either a 'Tanach Koren', or (what is known as) 'Rav Breuer's Tanach'.

The Tanach Koren (named for its beautiful Hebrew font designed for that publication) was first published in the sixties, and is probably the most widely used Tanach in Israel today, both in schools and shuls. More recently Mossad ha-Rav Kook also published a complete Tanach based on the famous manuscript of the Keter Aram Tzova, and edited after exhaustive research by Rav Mordechai Breuer, one of Israel's most renowned Bible scholars. Both publications provide the reader with a very accurate and clear printing. [Which Tanach is 'better' has become a 'hot topic' in the Yeshiva world, and therefore, I refrain from taking a stand.]

It is difficult to explain why, but rest assured that once you become accustomed to studying with this style of Tanach, you will quickly find how useful a tool it becomes for analytical study of Chumash, especially in regard to appreciating parshiot.

In some Chumashim, and quite often in Mikra'ot Gedolot versions, the parshia divisions are noted by letters instead of spaces. Usually the Hebrew letter 'peyh' notes where a parsha ptucha should be (see board 3), and the Hebrew letter 'samech' notes where a parsha stuma should be (see board 4).

Long parshiot and short ones!

Even though we have noted that parshiot act more or less like paragraph breaks, we find numerous exceptions - that are thematically very significant. We will demonstrate this by undertaking a quick analysis of the parshiot found in the first five chapters of Sefer Breishit.

Using a Tanach Koren, take a quick glance at the story of Creation in chapter one. Note how each day of Creation forms a single 'parshia'. This reflects a very logical 'paragraph like' division.

Next, take a look at what happens in chapter two! A new parshia begins with the story of Gan Eden in 2:4 and continues for some forty psukim - all the way until 3:15, and there we find parsha stuma!

Then, we find another parsha stuma, but this one (to our surprise) is only one pasuk long! The next parshia is also stuma and continues for five psukim until 3:21.

At first glance, this division seems to be rather absurd! Why should some forty psukim continue without any parshia break, even though there are plenty of spots in between that would easily qualify for a paragraph break? Then, immediately afterward we find a mere pasuk that becomes its own parshia (i.e. 3:16).

Clearly, these examples prove that a parshia break is not always the equivalent of a paragraph break. Instead, sometimes the Torah will intentionally group numerous psukim together without any parshia break to emphasize a certain point, and sometimes, the Torah will intentionally provide a parshia break at a spot that does not necessarily require one. However, when the

Torah does this, we should assume that it carries some thematic significance.

Let's return now to this example and attempt to understand why. Note that the lengthy parshia (2:4-3:15) contains not only the story of God's creation of man in Gan Eden (i.e. 2:4-25, and hence the chapter break at 2:25), but also the story of the 'nachash' and man's sin (3:1-15).

The lack of a parshia break between these two stories already alludes to the intrinsic connection between them, i.e. between the story of man's sin in Gan Eden (chapter 3), and the very creation of Gan Eden (in chapter 2).

Immediately afterward we find a one line parshia that describes Eve's punishment, and then another very short parshia that describes Adam's punishment, and then yet another parshia that describes mankind's punishment (i.e. the banishment from Gan Eden in (3:22-24)!

Clearly, the fact that the Torah delimits each form of punishment with its own parshia break alludes to the thematic importance of aschar va-onesh' [Divine retribution] in Chumash - the concept that God holds man responsible for his deeds. As we should expect, this will emerge as a primary Biblical theme, and these short parshia breaks help emphasize its importance.

Let's return now to Parshat Breishit. Note that chapter four - the story of Cain and Abel - forms its own parshia. Then in chapter five, we find a separate parshia for each one of the ten generations from Adam to Noach. Note, however, that all of these parshiot from man's exile from Gan Eden (see 3:22) until the story of Flood (see 6:5) are parshiot stumot (see board 11)! As we shall see, this too will be thematically significant.

We will return to these topics in our shiur on Parshat Breishit, but to help you prepare for that shiur (and for all the remaining shiurim on Sefer Breishit), we conclude with some pointers for self-study that will apply what we have discussed thus far, and as usual, some more questions for preparation.

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QUESTIONS FOR SELF STUDY - Intro:
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Finding the Theme of Sefer Breishit: A self-study guide

With this background in mind, I'd like to introduce you to a methodology that I have found very useful when teaching. For the most basic level of preparation for class, I ask the students to scan through an entire Sefer (or at least one section at a time), noting its division into parshiot. Then, we take a sheet of blank paper, and along the left margin, we prepare a long list of short blank lines.

Then, after reading (or scanning) each parshia, we attempt to summarize its primary topic in four words or less! For some parshiot this is very easy, for others it is quite difficult (but try your best). As we proceed, you'll understand why it is so important to be concise.

Then, we record that brief (one phrase) summary on the blanks lines on the sheet that we prepared; one line for each parshia.

Ideally, we should do this list for the entire Sefer, but usually this is not very practical, so we choose instead one unit within the Sefer at a time. For example, in Sefer Breishit, we begin with the first twelve chapters.

After our listing of the parshiot is complete, we contemplate the list, looking to group together only the most obvious units. For example, when studying Parshat Breishit, the seven parshiot of the seven days of creation form a distinct sub-unit. Similarly, the nine parshiot of toladot in chapter five also form a distinct unit. To indicate these grouping on our list, we mark these units with 'greater than' signs. At the end of that sign, we write a short phrase that describes that group.

The following example will illustrate this, as it shows the results of this method for the first three chapters of Sefer Breishit .

```
day one       \
day two        \
day three       \
day four          --- 7 days of Creation
day five       /
day six       /
day seven    /

Man in Gan Eden     \
Eve's punishment     \__ Gan Eden
Adam's punishment    /
Expulsion           /
```

Usually, you will quickly see how several parshiot immediately group together, while many others stand alone. Again, be careful to group parshiot together only according to the most obvious groupings. If it's not obvious, then don't group it.

For example, the parshia of the Cain & Abel story (chapter four) would stand alone, since it's not part of the Gan Eden narrative, nor is it part of the toladot in chapter five.

Upon completing this process for the entire list, we reach the second level, for a new list has now formed towards the right, reflecting the summaries of the most obvious sub-units from level one.

Now we treat the new level in the same way that we treated the first level. We analyze our new list, again looking to group together the most obvious units. When we finish level two, we proceed to level three, etc.; and slowly, our list begins to look like a tournament. However, as we proceed from level to level, we need to apply a bit more creative thinking when grouping into sub-units, for the connection from one unit to the next will not always be so obvious.

In essence, we begin by constructing a table of contents for the book, and slowly (by taking theme into consideration) we attempt to turn this table of contents into a structured [and titled] outline.

In case you didn't catch on yet, our assumption is that if we continue this process, sooner or later there will be a 'winner' (on the right margin) - i.e. a short phrase that identifies a common theme for all of the sub-units of the entire Sefer - and that 'winner' is none other than the primary theme of the Sefer.

This methodology is far from an 'exact science', and it gets complicated at times (and doesn't always work so smoothly); but it certainly helps the student follow the thematic flow of a Sefer.

As we will see in future shiurim, it becomes an excellent tool to help appreciate not only what the various commentaries say, but also to understand why they argue.

As preparation for our shiurim over the next three weeks, try to complete this style of analysis for all of Sefer Breishit, or at least for the first twelve chapters. Don't expect for everything to be easy, and don't expect to find simple answers all of the time, but try your best. As you study, be sure to relate to the questions for self study that will follow in the next email.

b'hatzlacha,
menachem

PARSHAT BREISHIT

How many stories of Creation are there in Parshat Breishit, ONE or TWO? Although this question is often discussed more by Bible critics than yeshiva students, its resolution may carry a significant spiritual message.

In this week's shiur, we discuss the structure of Parshat Breishit, in an attempt to better understand the meaning of the Torah's presentation of the story of Creation. Our analysis will also

'set the stage' for our discussion of the overall theme of Sefer Breishit in the shiurim to follow.

INTRODUCTION

From a literary perspective, it is quite easy to differentiate between two distinct sections in the Torah's account of the story of Creation:

SECTION I - THE CREATION IN SEVEN DAYS /1:1->2:3
SECTION II - MAN IN GAN EDEN / 2:4 ->3:24

In our shiur, we will first explain what makes each section unique. Afterward we will discuss how they complement one another.

PEREK ALEPH

SECTION I, better known as PEREK ALEPH, is easily discerned because of its rigid structure, i.e. every day of creation follows a very standard pattern. Each day:

* Begins with the phrase: "VA'YOMER ELOKIM...", heralding a new stage of creation (see 1:3,6,9,14,20,24);
* Continues with "VA'YAR ELOKIM… KI TOV" (see 1:4,10,12,18,21,31);
* Concludes with "VAYHI EREV VAYHI BOKER, YOM..." (see 1:5,8,13,19,23,31).

In fact, one could construct a 'blank form' that would fit just about any day of Creation, that would look something like this:

"**va'yomer Elokim**" - And God said... _____
[followed by some act of Creaton.]
"**va'yhi chen**" - And so it was
[often followed by some naming process: like "va'yikra.Elokim... , or some divine 'comment']
"**va'yar Elokim... ki tov**" - And God saw it was good
"**va'yhi erev va;yhi boker, yom __#__"**

Even though certain days may vary from this basic format, certainly each day begins with the phrase "va'yomer Elokim...".

This observation allows us to identify the first two psukim of this unit (1:1-2) as its header, for Day One must begin with the first "va'yomer Elokim" (in the third pasuk/ see 1:3 and Rashi on the meaning of the word "Breishit" in his interpretation to 1:1).

We reach a similar conclusion in regard to the 'Seventh Day' (i.e. 2:1-3). Since these psukim describe 'Day Seven', they must be part of this overall Story of Creation; yet because they begin with "va'ychulu..." - and not with "va'yomer Elokim" - they form the conclusion of this unit.

To verify this, note the beautiful parallel between these two 'bookends' (i..e 1:1-2 and 2:1-3, noting the phrase "shamayim v'aretz" and the verb "bara"!), and how Day Seven 'concludes' that which was introduced in 1:1.

This introduction and conclusion define for us the primary topic of this entire unit - - "briyat ha'shamayim v'ha'aretz" - God's Creation of the Heavens and the Earth. This topic is presented through a daily progression of God's creations that span over six days.

With this general framework defined, we can now begin our analysis of the progression of Creation from one day to the next. We will pay attention to how each day either follows, or slightly varies from the standard format discussed above. [For example, the fact that day two does not include the phrase "va'yar Elokim ki tov " should be significant.]

A DAILY "CHIDUSH"

As we mentioned above, within this unit, the phrase "va'yomer Elokim" begins each day, and is always followed by an act God's Creation - or at least some type of "chidush" [i.e. something new, that didn't exist the day before].

After the execution each act of Creation, we may find 'peripheral' comments such as God giving names or duties to what He just created. However, we will show how the next "chidush" of Creation doesn't take place without an additional "va'yomer Elokim"!

We should also point out that in Days Three and Six we find our basic form repeated twice, i.e. the phrase "va'yomer Elokim" appears twice on each of these days, and each time followed by a distinct act of Creation, followed by the evaluation of - "va'yar Elokim ki tov". This suggests that each of these days will contain two acts of Creation. [The deeper meaning of this will be discussed as we continue.]

Therefore, .our analysis begins by identifying what was the precise "chidush" of each day. Then, we will discuss the 'peripheral comments' of each day, showing how they relate to that "chidush".

DAY ONE (1:3- 5)

God's first act of creation (i.e. what follows the first "va'yomer Elokim") was making "OR" - or what we call 'light'.

This creation is followed by a 'naming process' where God calls the light - 'Day', and the darkness (the lack of light) is called 'Night'.

DAY TWO (1:6-8)

God makes the "rakiya" - whose function is to divide between the 'water above' and the 'water below'.

Then, God names these 'waters above' - "shamayim" [Heavens]. Note that the 'waters below' are not named until Day Three. Note as well that this is only time when God's creation is not followed by the phrase "va'yar Elokim ki tov". Hence, it appears that something on this day is either 'not so good' or at least incomplete. [We'll return to this observation later in the shiur.]

DAY THREE (1:9-12)

*** Stage One**: (i.e. the first "va'yomer Elokim").

Gods makes the "yabasha" [dry land].
Then God names this 'dry land - ARETZ [Earth?] and the remaining "mayim" - YAMIM [Seas].
Followed by God's positive evaluation: "va'yar Elokim ki tov"

*** Stage Two** (i.e. the second "va'yomer Elokim" / 1:11-12)

God creates what we call 'vegetation', i.e. all the various species of vegetables and fruit trees. Note how these psukim emphasize precisely what makes the 'plant kingdom' unique - i.e. how these species contain seeds that will produce the next generation - e.g. "esev mazria zera" and "etz pri oseh pri".

Note that God no longer gives 'names' to what He created. However, we still find the standard positive evaluation "va'yar Elokim ki tov". [You were probably aware that "ki tov" is mentioned twice in Day Three, but you probably weren't aware that it was because it contains two "va'yomer Elokim's"!]

A QUANTUM LEAP

Note the 'quantum leap' that takes place in stage Two on Day Three. Up until Stage Two, everything that God had created was 'inanimate' (non-living). From this point on, livings things are created. [Keep this in mind, as we will uncover a similar 'quantum leap' when we discuss the progression from Stage One to Two in Day Six!, i.e. when we jump from animal to man.]

This may explain why Stage One of Day Three is the last time that we find God giving names. It seems as though God gave names only to His 'non-living' creations.

[In chapter two, we will see how it becomes man's job to give names to other livings things (see 2:19), and maybe even to God Himself! (see 4:26)!]

Furthermore, note the 'separation process' that emerges as God created "shamayim v'aretz". In the introduction, we find "mayim" - with "ruach Elokim" [God's spirit?] hovering over it (see 1:2). Then, in Day Two, God takes this "mayim" 'solution' and separates it ["va'yavdel"] between the "mayim" 'above' and 'below' the "rakiya". The 'water above' becomes "SHAMAYIM", but the 'water below' needs further separation, which only takes places on Day Three - when the remaining 'solution' separates between the "ARETZ" [Land] and the "YAMIM" [Seas].

Technically speaking, this is how God created "shamayim v'aretz". [The creation of the remaining "v'kol tzvaam" - and all their hosts (see 2:1) - takes place from this point and onward.]

DAY FOUR (1:14-19)

God creates the "meorot", i.e. the sun, moon and stars.

This time however, note how God explains the function of His new creations (instead of giving names). For example, "va'hayu l'otot u'moadim " - and they shall be for signs and appointed times; and later - " l'ha'ir al ha'aretz" - to give light on the land (see 1:14-15). And finally: "l'mshol ba'yom u'va'layala" - to rule over day and night (1:18). [Note as well how this day relates back to Day One.]

DAY FIVE (1:20-23)

On this day, we find yet another 'quantum leap', as God begins His creation of the 'animal kingdom' (i.e. in contrast to the 'vegetation' created on day three). God creates all livings things that creep in the water or fly in the sky (i.e. fish and fowl).

Even though this day follows the standard 'form' (discussed above), we do find two very important additions.

1. The verb "bara" is used to describe how God creates this animal kingdom: "va'yivrah Elokim et ha'taninim ha'gedolim v'et kol nefesh ha'chaya..." (1:21). Note how this is the first usage of this verb since the first pasuk of "breishit bara..." (1:1)! The Torah's use of the verb "bara" specifically at this point may reflect this 'quantum leap' to the animal kingdom in this critical stage of the Creation.
2. A 'blessing' is given (for the first time) to these fish and fowl after their creation: "va'yvarech otam Elokim laymor - pru ur'vu..." - that they should be fruitful and multiply and fill the seas and skies. Note how this blessing relates to the very essence of the difference between the 'plant kingdom' and the 'animal kingdom'. Whereas self produced seeds allow vegetation to reproduce itself, the animal kingdom requires mating for reproduction to take place, and hence the need for God's blessing of "pru u'vru" to keep each species alive.

DAY SIX (1:24-31)

Here again, like in Day Three, we find two stages of Creation, each beginning with the phrase "va'yomer Elokim, with yet another 'quantum leap' in between:

*** Stage One** (1:24-25)

God creates the living things that roam on the land, i.e. the animals. There is really nothing special about this stage, other than the fact that God found it necessary to create them 'independently' on the first stage of Day Six, instead of including them with His creation of the rest of the of the animal kingdom (i.e. with the fish and the fowl) in Day Five.

In fact, we find an interesting parallel between both days that contain two stages (i.e. days Three and Six). Just as Stage One of Day Three (separating the Earth from the 'water below') completed a process that God had begun in Day Two, so too Stage One of Day Six (the animals) completed a process that God began in Day Five!

*** Stage Two** (1:26-31)

God creates MAN - "btzelem Elokim"!

Note how many special words and phrases (many of which we encountered before) accompany God's creation of man:

First of all, we find once again the use of the verb "bara" to describe this act of creation, suggesting that the progression from animal to man may be considered no less a 'quantum leap' than the progression from vegetation to animal.

Secondly, God appears to 'consult' with others (even though it is not clear who they are) before creating man ("naaseh adam b'tzalmeinu…").

Here again, we find not only an act of creation, but also a 'statement the purpose' for this creation – i.e. to be master over all of God's earlier creations:

"v'yirdu b'dgat ha'yam u'b'of ha'shamayim…" – Be fruitful and multiply and be master over the fish of the seas and the fowl in the heavens and the animals and all the land, and everything that creeps on the land." (see 1:26).

Thus, it appears that man is not only God's last Creation, but also His most sophisticated creation, responsible to rule over all other creations 'below the heavens'.

This explains we find yet another blessing (following this act of creation / similar to the blessing on Day Five). This blessing to man includes not only fertility, but also relates to his potential to exert dominion over all that Elokim had created. ["pru u'rvu v'kivshuha, u'rdu b'dgat ha'yam…" / see 1:28, compare with 1:26)

It should be noted that we find one final section, that also begins with the phrase "va'yomer Elokim" (see 1:29), but quite different than all the earlier ones, as this statement does not introduce an act of Creation, but rather the administration of food. In a nutshell, in these psukim God allows the animal kingdom to consume the plant kingdom. The green grass is given for the animals (to graze upon), while man receives the 'added privilege' of eating the fruit of the trees (see 1:29-30).

SOMETHING SPECIAL

As you surely must have realized, all of these 'variances' from the 'standard format' in regard to God's creation of man emphasize that there must be something very special about man's creation, and hence his purpose. But this should not surprise us, for that is precisely what we should expect from a book of prophecy, a divine message to man to help him understand his relationship with God, and the purpose for his existence.

All of these special points about man's creation should be important, but before we discuss their significance, we must take into consideration one more observation concerning the progression of Creation during these six days.

A PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Let's summarize our conclusions thus far concerning what was created on each day (and each statement of "va'yomer Elokim…"):

DAY	**GOD CREATED...**
I.	"OR" = LIGHT
II.	"RAKIYA" - separating:
	A. the MAYIM above [=SHAMAYIM], and
	B. the MAYIM below [=YAMIM].
IIIa.	"YABASHA", called the ARETZ (the Land) -
IIIb.	Vegetation (on that ARETZ)
	A. seed-bearing plants / "esev mazria zera"
	B. fruit-bearing trees / "etz pri oseh pri"
IV.	LIGHTS in the SHAMAYIM (sun, moon, stars etc.)
V.	LIVING CREATURES:
	A. birds in the sky [=RAKIYA SHAMAYIM]
	B. fish in the sea [=MAYIM]
VIa.	LIVING CREATURES who live on the ARETZ (land)
	animals - all forms
VIb.	MAN - b'tzelem Elokim, blessed by God
	to dominate all other living creatures
Then, God assigns the appropriate food for these living creatures:	
	1. Man - can eat vegetation and fruit (see 1:29)
	2. Animals - can eat only vegetation/grass - (see 1:30)
VII.	SHABBAT - God rested, as His Creation was complete.

Now, let's turn our list into a table.

If we line up the first three days against the last three days, we find a rather amazing parallel:

DAYS 1-3	**DAYS 4-6**
I. LIGHT	IV. LIGHTS in the heavens
II. RAKIYA - divding:	V.Living things:
SHAMAYIM (above)	Birds in the SHAMAYIM
MAYIM (below the sea)	Fish in MAYIM
III. ARETZ (land)	VI. Animals & Man on the ARETZ
Seed bearing plants	Plants to be eaten by the Animals
Fruit bearing trees	Fruit of trees, to be eaten by Man

Note how this parallel reflects our discussion above concerning

the internal progression of these six days of Creation; and our observation that from Day Four and onward, God not only creates, but He also states the purpose of His creations.

It also shows how the last three days 'fill in' the potential for what God created in the first three days. Basically, from day four and onward, nature 'goes into motion', as we find 'movement' both in the Heavens above and in the Earth below.

In summary, when these six days are complete, what we call 'nature' has gone into motion.

DIVINE EVOLUTION

If we understand the phrase “tohu va’vahu” in the introductory section (see 1:2) as total chaos, then from this primordial state - six days later, we find a beautifully structured universe containing all of the various forms of life that we are familiar with; including plants, animals, and man.

Note that the Torah emphasizes that each form of life is created in a manner that guarantees its survival, i.e. its ability to reproduce:

a. plants: "esev mazria zera" - seed-bearing vegetation
"etz pri oseh pri" - fruit-bearing trees (1:11-12)
b. fish and fowl: "pru u'rvu"- be fruitful & multiply (1:22)
c. Man: "pru u'rvu..." - be fruitful & multiply (1:28)

One could summarize and simply state that the end result of this creation process is what we call NATURE - in other words - the exact opposite of TOHU VA'VAHU.

In this manner, PEREK ALEPH describes God's creation of nature, i.e. the entire material universe and its phenomena.

Even though 'nature' itself remains dynamic, with living things constantly changing and reproducing, its basic framework remains constant - for after "va'ychulu" (2:1), nothing 'new' will be created, and certainly, nothing more advanced or sophisticated as man.

This established, we must now ask ourselves the more fundamental question, which is - what can we learn from the unique manner by which the Torah tells over the story of Creation? Is it recorded for the sake of our curiosity, simply to let us know 'how it all happened' - or does it carry a prophetic message - for any human being contemplating the purpose of the world that surrounds him!

ONE GOD, OR MANY?

Certainly, one primary message that emerges from this presentation is that the creation of nature, with all its complexities and wonders, was a willful act of GOD. Hence, by keeping Shabbat, resting on the seventh day, as God did, we assert our belief that God is the power the created nature (and continues to oversee it).

This analysis can also help us appreciate why the Torah uses the name -Elokim - to describe God throughout this entire chapter. As Ramban explains (toward the end of his commentary on 1:1), the Hebrew word "el" implies someone with power (or strength) and in control. Therefore, "shem ELOKIM" implies the master of **all** of the many forces of nature.

[This can explain why God's Name is in the plural form- for He is all of the powers / see also Rav Yehuda ha'Levi, in Sefer Kuzari, beginning of Book Four.]

This understanding can also help us appreciate the Torah's use of the verb "bara" in PEREK ALEPH. Note how the THREE active uses of the verb "bara" in PEREK ALEPH reflect each level of sophistication in Creation, i.e. "tzomeyach" [plant kingdom], "chai" [animal kingdom] and "m'daber" [man]. This also reflects the three ‘quantum leaps’ that we discussed in the evolutionary development of nature during these six days.

* **STEP ONE** - All matter and plants -
"Breishit BARA Elokim et ha'SHAMAYIM v'et ha'ARETZ" (1:1)
This includes everything in the SHAMAYIM and on the ARETZ, i.e. the creation of all "domem" (inanimate objects) and "tzomeyach" (plants). Note that this takes place during the first FOUR days of Creation.

* **STEP TWO** - The animal kingdom
"va'YIVRA Elokim - and God created the TANINIM and all living creatures... by their species"(1:21)
This includes the birds, fish, animals, and beasts etc. which are created on the fifth and sixth days.

* **STEP THREE** - Man
"va'YIVRA Elokim et ha'ADAM..." (1:27)
The creation of man b'tzelem Elokim, in God's image.

Now we must ponder what may be the Torah's message in telling man that the creation of nature was a willful act of God?

In his daily life, man constantly encounters a relationship with nature, i.e. with his surroundings and environment. Man does not need the Torah to inform him that nature exists; it stares him in the face every day. As man cannot avoid nature, he must constantly contemplate it, and struggle with it.

Without the Torah's message, one could easily conclude that nature is the manifestation of many gods - a rain god, a sun god, a fertility god, war gods, etc. - as ancient man believed. Nature was attributed to a pantheon of gods, often warring with one another.

In contrast, modern man usually arrives at quite the opposite conclusion -- that nature just exists, and doesn't relate to any form of god at all.

One could suggest that Chumash begins with story of Creation, for man's relationship with God is based on his recognition that nature is indeed the act of one God. He created the universe for a purpose, and continues to oversee it.

But how does this relate to man himself?

MAN - IN PEREK ALEPH

In Perek Aleph, man emerges not only as the climax of the creation process, but also as its MASTER:

"And God blessed man saying: Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and MASTER it, and RULE the fish of the sea, and the birds in the sky, and the living things that creep on the earth..." (1:28).

Note that this is God's BLESSING to man, and NOT a commandment! One could consider this 'blessing' almost as a definition of man's very nature. Just as it is 'natural' for vegetation to grow ["esev mazria zera"], and for all living things to reproduce ["pru u'rvu"], it is also 'natural' for man to dominate his environment; it becomes his natural instinct.

The Torah's use of the verb "bara" at each major stage of creation, and then in its description of God's creation of man - may shed light on this topic. When contemplating nature and his relationship with the animal kingdom, man might easily conclude that he is simply just another part of the animal kingdom. He may be more advanced or developed than the 'average monkey', but biologically he is no different. The Torah's use of the verb "bara" to describe God's creation of man informs us that man is a completely new category of creation. He is created "b'tzelem Elokim", in the image of God, i.e. he possesses a spiritual potential, unlike any other form of nature.

[See the Rambam in the very beginning of Moreh N'vuchim (I.1), where he defines "tzelem Elokim" as the characteristic of man that differentiates him from animal.]

In other words, man's creation in a separate stage of Day Six, and the use of the verb "bara", and his special blessing etc. all come to impress upon man that he is indeed a 'quantum leap' above all other creations. He should not view himself as just the most sophisticated animal of the universe, but rather as a Godly creation.

Perek Aleph teaches man to recognize that his very nature to dominate all other living things is also an act of God's creation.

However, man must also ask himself, "Towards what purpose?" Did God simply create man, or does He continue to have a relationship with His creation? Does the fate of mankind remain in God's control; does there remain a connection between man's deeds and God's "hashgacha" (providence) over him?

The answer to this question begins in PEREK BET - the story of Gan Eden, and will continue through the rest of Chumash!

PEREK BET (2:4-3:24)

PEREK BET presents what appears to be conflicting account of the story of Creation. As your review chapter two, note how:

1) Nothing can grow before God creates man (see 2:5), therefore:
2) God creates man FIRST (2:6-7), then:
3) God plants a garden for man, vegetation develops (2:8-14);
4) God gives man the job to work and guard this garden (2:15);
5) God commands man re: what he can/cannot eat (2:16-17);
6) God creates animals for the sake of man (2:18-20)
7) God creates a wife for man, from his own rib (2:21-25).

Clearly, the **order** of creation is very different. In PEREK BET we find that man is created FIRST, and everything afterward (i.e. the plants and the animals) are created FOR him. In contrast to perek Aleph where man was God's final Creation - the most sophisticated - and blessed to exert his dominion over the entire animal kingdom; in Perek Bet we see how man is simply a servant of God, tending to His Garden (see 2:15-16), and searching for companionship (see 2:18-25). In perek Aleph, he emerged as 'ruler', almost like a god himself ("b'tzelem Elokim"); in perek Bet he is a servant.

In addition, there are several other obvious differences between these two sections:

* Throughout this section, God's Name is no longer simply ELOKIM, rather the name HASHEM ELOKIM (better known as "shem Havaya").
* In contrast to the consistent use of verb "bara" (creation from nothing) in Perek Aleph, Perek Bet uses the verb "ya'tzar" (creation from something'/ see 2:7,19).

Although it is possible to reconcile these apparent contradictions (as many commentators do), the question remains - Why does the Torah present these two accounts in a manner that (at least) appears to be conflicting?

We obviously cannot accept the claim of the Bible critics that these two sections reflect two conflicting ancient traditions. Our belief is that the entire Torah was given by God at Har Sinai - and hence stems from one source. Therefore, we must conclude that this special manner of presentation is intentional and should carry a prophetic message. For this reason, our study of Sefer Breishit will focus more so on how the Torah's 'stories' of Creation explain the nature of man's relationship with God, and less so on how to resolve the 'technical' problems to determine what events actually took place and when.

Two renowned Torah scholars of the 20th century have discussed this issue of the two creations stories at length. The analytical aspect, the approach of "shtei bechinot" (two perspectives), has been exhausted by Rabbi Mordechei Breuer in his book Pirkei Breishit. The philosophical implications have been discussed by Rav Soloveichik ZT"L in his article 'The Lonely Man of Faith' (re: Adam I & Adam II).

It is beyond the scope of this shiur to summarize these two approaches (it is recommended that you read them). Instead, we will simply conduct a basic analysis of PEREK ALEPH & PEREK BET and offer some thoughts with regard to its significance. Hopefully it will provide a elementary background for those who wish to pursue this topic in greater depth.

With this in mind, we begin our analysis in an attempt to find the primary message of each of these two sections. We begin with a review of our conclusions regarding Perek Aleph.

PEREK ALEPH - THE CREATION OF NATURE

Nature - the entire material universe and its phenomena ["ha'shamayim v'haretz v'chol tzvaam"] - was the end result of the Seven Days of Creation. Without the Torah's message, man may logically conclude that the universe that surrounds him is controlled by various different powers, each controlling their own realm (or what ancient man understood as a pantheon of gods).

Chumash begins by informing us that nature itself, with all its complexities and wonders, was a willful act of the 'one God' - who continues to oversee His creations. [Hence the name -Elokim - (plural) all of the powers of nature.]

However, if there is one phenomenon in nature that appears to contradict this conclusion of unity, it is the very existence of "shamayim" [Heaven] and "aretz" [Earth]. Two totally different realms, with almost not contact between them, separated by the "rakiaya"! This observation may explain why there was 'nothing good' about Day Two, when God made the "rakiya", for it was this very first division that leaves us with the impression that there must be 'many gods', and not one.

This may also explain why the entire story of Creation begins with the statement that Elokim made [both] "shamayim v'aretz" (see 1:1), and concludes with a very similar statement (see 2:1 & 2:4).

[Note as well See Breishit 14:19-22 & 24:3. Note as well Devarim 31:28 & 32:1. See also Ibn Ezra on Devarim 30:19 (his second pirush on that pasuk)!]

One could suggest that this may be one the primary messages of the Torah's opening story of Creation - that the apparent 'duality' of "shamayim v'aretz" is indeed the act of one God. Hence, the only aspect of Creation that could not be defined a 'good' was the creation of the "rakiya" which divides them. Later on, it will becomes man's challenge to find the connection between "shamayim v'aretz"!

PEREK BET - MAN IN GAN EDEN

Perek Bet presents the story of creation from a totally different perspective. Although it opens with a pasuk that connects these two stories (2:4), it continues by describing man in an environment that is totally different than that of Perek Aleph. Note how man is the focal point of the entire creation process in Perek Bet, as almost every act taken by God is for the sake of man:

* No vegetation can grow before man is created (2:5)
* God plants a special garden for man to live in (2:8)
* God 'employs' man to 'work in his garden' (2:15)
* God creates the animals in an attempt to find him a companion (2:19/ compare with 2:7!)
* God creates a wife for man (2:21-23)

In contrast to Perek Aleph, where man's job is to be dominant over God's creation, in Perek Bet man must be obedient and work for God, taking care of the Garden:

"And God took man and placed him in Gan Eden - L'OVDAH u'l'SHOMRAH - to work in it and guard it." (2:15)

Most significantly, in PEREK BET man enters into a relationship with God that contains REWARD and PUNISHMENT, i.e. he is now responsible for his actions. For the first time in Chumash, we find that God COMMANDS man:

"And Hashem Elokim commanded man saying: From all the trees of the Garden YOU MAY EAT, but from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad YOU MAY NOT EAT, for on the day you eat from it YOU WILL SURELY DIE... " (2:16-17)

This special relationship between man and God in Gan Eden, is paradigmatic of other relationships between man and God found later on in Chumash (e.g. in the Mishkan).

God's Name in perek Bet - HASHEM ELOKIM (better known as "shem HAVAYA") - reflects this very concept. The shem HAVAYA comes from the shoresh (root) - "l'hiyot" (to be, i.e. to be present). This Name stresses that Gan Eden is an environment in which man can recognize God's **presence**, thus enabling the possibility of a relationship.

Should man obey God, he can remain in the Garden, enjoying a close relationship with God. However, should he disobey, he is to die. In the next chapter, this 'death sentence' is translated into man's banishment from Gan Eden. In biblical terms, becoming distanced from God is tantamount to death. [See Devarim 30:15-20.]

In the Gan Eden environment, man is confronted with a conflict between his "taava" (desire) and his obligation to obey God. The "nachash" [serpent], recognizing this weakness, challenges man to question the very existence of this Divine relationship (3:1-4). When man succumbs to his desires and disobeys God, he is banished from the Garden.

Whether or not man can return to this ideal environment will later emerge as an important biblical theme.

A DUAL EXISTENCE

From PEREK ALEPH, we learn that God is indeed the Creator of nature, yet that recognition does not necessarily imply that man can develop a personal relationship with Him. The environment detailed in PEREK BET, although described in physical terms, is of a more spiritual nature - for God has created everything specifically for man. However, in return he must obey God in order to enjoy this special relationship. In this environment, the fate of man is a direct function of his deeds.

So which story of Creation is 'correct', PEREK ALEPH or PEREK BET? As you probably have guessed - both, for in daily life man finds himself involved in both a physical and spiritual environment.

Man definitely exists in a physical world in which he must confront nature and find his purpose within its framework (PEREK ALEPH). There, he must struggle with nature in order to survive; yet he must realize that God Himself is the master over all of these Creations. However, at the same time, man also exists in a spiritual environment that allows him to develop a relationship with his Creator (PEREK BET). In it, he can find spiritual life by following God's commandments while striving towards perfection. Should he not recognize the existence of this potential, he defaults to 'spiritual death' - man's greatest punishment.

Why does the Torah begin with this 'double' story of Creation? We need only to quote the Ramban (in response to this question, which is raised by the first Rashi of Chumash):

> "There is a great need to begin the Torah with the story of Creation, for it is the "shoresh ha'emunah", the very root of our belief in God."

Understanding man's potential to develop a relationship with God on the spiritual level, while recognizing the purpose of his placement in a physical world as well, should be the first topic of Sefer Breishit, for it will emerge as a primary theme of the entire Torah.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

Parshat Bereshit: Eat Your Vegetables

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

"Tzelem Elokim": Eat Your Vegetables!

Parashat Bereshit recounts not only the creation of humanity and the rest of the world, but also supplies our most basic ideas about the nature and mission of humanity. Humanity is created with special capabilities and commanded to develop and actualize them in specific ways. The whole world is fresh, totally unspoiled; all potentials await fulfillment. The infant world sparkles with innocence and energy, with the wonder of Creation.

But Creation is really not the only theme of our parasha. Creation is only the beginning; the genesis of the world shares the stage with the genesis and evolution of the relationship between Hashem and humanity.

A BACKGROUND OF FAILURES:

Since we cannot take a detailed look at every event of the parasha, let's just make brief mention of one important event we're not going to look at this time: the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, which forever changes the way people live -- and die. Already moving beyond the theme of Creation, we encounter Hashem as commander ("Thou shalt not eat") and humanity as servant. Without much delay, humanity creates something Hashem had not created: failure. Blighting the beautifully ordered description of the construction of the cosmos, Adam and Eve's sin is humanity's first failure and Hashem's first disappointment (see Bereshit 6:6). This failure changes humanity and changes the world, as the "first family" is ejected from the garden and forced to struggle through life in the more difficult world outside. As this disappointment is the first of many disappointments for Hashem, this failure is the first of many failures for humanity. Many of the stories in the first few parshiot of the Torah are not about Creation, but about disappointment and failure and how they change the course of history by changing Hashem's plan for humanity.

IMAGES OF GOD:

The specific topic we're going to look at this time is the theme of "tzelem Elokim," the idea that humankind is created in the image of Hashem. Our close look at this theme, and the conclusions we draw, should help us understand not only the events of our parasha, but also the development of the theme of all of Sefer Bereshit (Genesis).

"Tzelem Elokim" itself simply means an image or form of Hashem. What is this usually understood to mean? In what way are humans God-like? Some interpretations by mefarshim (traditional commentators):

1) Like Hashem, humans have intelligence (Rashi, Rashbam, Radak, Seforno).

2) Like Hashem, humans have free will (Seforno).

3) As Hashem is a "spiritual" Being, humans have a soul (Ibn Ezra, Radak, Ramban, Seforno).

4) As Hashem rules over the universe, humans rule over the lower world (R. Sa'adya Gaon, Hizkuni).

5) Like Hashem, humans have the faculty of judgment (Hizkuni).

6) Like Hashem, humans have an inherent holiness and dignity (a more modern perspective).

MISSION STATEMENT I:

Although it is always important to see how mefarshim define terms which appear in the Torah, we can often gain additional understanding or a different perspective by examining the Torah directly and sensitively to see if the Torah itself defines the term.

The first time we find the term "tzelem Elokim" is just before the first humans are created:

BERESHIT 1:26-27 --
Hashem said, 'Let us make Man in our image [be-tzalmeinu], in our form; they shall rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, the animal, and all the land, and all that crawls on the land.' Hashem created the man in His image; in the image of Hashem [be-tzelem Elokim] He created him; male and female He created them.

What we have next is a short section with a very clear theme: humanity's mission:

BERESHIT 1:28-30 --
Hashem blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the land and conquer it; rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, and all animals which crawl on land.' Hashem said, 'I have given to you all grasses which produce seeds on the face of the land, and all the trees which produce fruit with seeds -- it is for you to eat, and for the animal of the land, for the bird of the sky, and for that which crawls on the land which has a living soul; all the grassy plants are to eat.' And it was so.

What we have read so far begins with Hashem's plan to create a being in the image of Hashem and ends with this "mission statement," communicated to the being which has been created. The mission contains three charges:

1) Emulate Hashem's creativity by procreating.

2) Emulate Hashem's mastery of the universe by "conquering" the world and extending mastery over the lower creatures.

3) Emulate Hashem by eating the grasses, fruits, and seeds!

The last element of humanity's mission seems fundamentally different than the previous two elements ("One of these things is not like the other one . . ."): What does eating vegetation have to do with the lofty destiny of humanity? And since Hashem obviously does not eat vegetables, how does one emulate Hashem by doing so? For now, let us hold this question; we will return to it later to see how it adds to the tzelem Elokim mission.

In any case, one thing should be clear about tzelem Elokim which may not have been clear before: tzelem Elokim is not a *description* of humanity, it is a *goal* for humanity. We usually think of tzelem Elokim as a description of humanity's basic nature, which entitles humanity to certain privileges ("We hold these truths to be self-evident . . . .") and expresses certain capabilities. But the Torah implies that tzelem Elokim is more than simply a description, it is a mission, a command: humanity must *live up to* tzelem Elokim! People are created with the potential to reflect God by achieving the tzelem Elokim missions -- procreation, mastery of the world, and, well, eating vegetables(!) -- but each person must *become* a tzelem Elokim by actualizing this potential.

If tzelem Elokim is a mission, of course, it can be achieved or failed. How well humanity fares in achieving this mission is the major subtext of the Torah from the creation of Adam until the selection of Avraham in Parashat Lekh Lekha.

We will now follow the history of the tzelem Elokim idea through the first generations of humanity's existence to see whether humanity lives up to the mission or not and whether the mission changes over time.

THE FIRST MURDER:

Our first look at how tzelem Elokim plays out in history brings us to the story of the first siblings, Kayyin and Hevel (Cain and Abel). Hevel offers to Hashem a sacrifice of his finest animals; Kayyin offers his finest fruits. Hashem is happy with Hevel's offering but unsatisfied with Kayyin's. The Torah reports that Kayyin is deeply upset and angry at being rejected. Shortly thereafter, man creates again, as Kayyin invents murder by killing his brother Hevel, whose offering had been accepted. Kayyin then attempts to hide the evidence but soon learns that Hashem doesn't miss much:

BERESHIT 4:3-9 --
It happened, after awhile, that Kayyin brought an offering to Hashem from the fruits of the ground. Hevel also brought from the firstborn of his sheep and from their fattest; Hashem turned to Hevel and his offering, but to Kayyin and his offering He did not turn. Kayyin became very angry, and his face fell . . . . It happened, when they were in the field, that Kayyin rose up to Hevel his brother and killed him. Hashem said to Kayyin, 'Where is Hevel, your brother? . . . Now, you are cursed from the ground . . . you shall be a wanderer and drifter in the land.'

Kayyin's response to his punishment:

BERESHIT 4:13-15 --
Kayyin said to Hashem, 'My sin is too great to bear! You have driven me today from the face of the land, and I will be hidden from Your face, a wanderer and drifter in the land; anyone who finds me will kill me!' Hashem said to him, 'Therefore, anyone who kills Kayyin will suffer seven times' vengeance.' And Hashem gave Kayyin a sign so that whoever found him would not kill him . . . .

MURDER, A FAMILY TRADITION:

We will now look at the continuation of what we've been reading about Kayyin. If you're not paying very careful attention, it seems like a collection of "random" events -- the Torah appears to be reporting "trivia" about Kayyin's post-punishment life. But there is much more here than there might seem at first. Our observations should shed light on the development of the tzelem Elokim theme.

BERESHIT 4:17-19--
Kayyin 'knew' his wife; she conceived and bore Hanokh . . . and to Hanokh was born Eerod; Eerod bore Mehuyael, Mehuyael bore Metushael, Metushael bore Lemekh. Lemekh took two wives, one named Ada and the other named Tzila . . . .

Kayyin has had children, and we hear about his descendants. A nice family story, but what is the Torah trying to tell us?

BERESHIT 4:23-24 --
Lemekh said to his wives, 'Ada and Tzila, hear my voice; wives of Lemekh, hear my speech; for a man I have killed for my wound, and a child for my injury. For Kayyin will be avenged seven-fold, and Lemekh seventy-seven.'

Apparently -- as all of the mefarshim explain -- Lemekh has killed someone. As he recounts the murder to his wives, he implies that although he expects to suffer punishment, as his great-grandfather Kayyin suffered for murder, he prays that Hashem will take seventy-fold revenge on anyone who kills him. He explicitly refers to the murder committed by his forebear Kayyin and to the protection extended by Hashem to Kayyin.

What the Torah tells us next is absolutely crucial:

BERESHIT 4:25-5:1-3 --
Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son; she called his name Shet, 'For Hashem has sent to me another child to replace Hevel, for Kayyin killed him' . . . This is the book of the descendants of Adam. When Hashem created Adam, in the image of Hashem He made him . . . Adam lived thirty and a hundred years, and bore in his image, like his form, and he called his name 'Shet.'

Certainly, the order of this story -- Kayyin's murder of Hevel, then Kayyin's punishment, then Lemekh's murder, then the birth of another son to Adam and Hava -- is not at all random. What connections is the Torah trying to make?

Lemekh the murderer is a descendant of Kayyin, the first murderer. Not only is Lemekh a direct descendant of Kayyin, he even makes explicit reference to his great-grandfather's murderous behavior and hopes that he will benefit from the same protection as (or greater protection than) Kayyin received, despite the punishment he expects. What the Torah may be hinting is that Kayyin and his family do not sufficiently value human life. Kayyin kills his brother Hevel in frustration and jealousy; Lemekh kills an unnamed person in retaliation for a "wound and injury." For Kayyin, murder is an acceptable solution to problems or frustrations, and he passes his values on to his children. Lemekh's murder and his reference to Kayyin's similar crime manifest the moral failure of this family. One generation's failure to

understand the value of human life plants murder in the heart of the next generation.

BEGINNING FROM THE BEGINNING AGAIN:

The Torah next tells us that Adam and Hava have another child "because Kayyin killed Hevel." Actually, Adam and Hava are replacing not only Hevel, but both of their sons -- Hevel, because he is dead, and Kayyin, because his murder and his descendants' similar action shows that his behavior was not a freak incident, but a deficiency in values. By having another child, Adam and Hava begin again, attempting to produce an individual who really understands the mission of humanity as achieving the status of tzelem Elokim. By murdering his brother, Kayyin fails this mission (as we will explain). Lemekh's action shows that Kayyin has not learned from his mistake and has not successfully taught his children to respect human life.

This is why the Torah begins the story of humanity's creation "anew" with the birth of Shet, telling the story as if Adam and Hava had had no children until now:

BERESHIT 5:1-3--
This is the book of the descendants of Adam. When Hashem created Adam, in the image of Hashem He made him . . . Adam lived thirty and a hundred years, and bore IN HIS IMAGE, LIKE HIS FORM, and he called his name 'Shet.'

The Torah is trying to communicate that humanity is starting over, beginning from scratch. The first attempt, the one which produced a murderer and his victim, has come to a tragic close with another murder (Lemekh's). Adam and Hava realize that they must start anew, and the Torah makes this explicit by placing the literary structure of a "beginning" at the birth of Shet. The real "descendants" of Adam are only those who maintain "his image . . . his form", the image and form of tzelem Elokim.

But how has Kayyin failed as a tzelem Elokim? Has he not excelled as a conqueror of the earth, a tiller of the ground who brings fruits to Hashem as an offering? Has he not "been fruitful and multiplied," producing descendants to fill the earth? Have his descendants not exercised creativity like that of the Creator, inventing tools and instruments? True, Kayyin has murdered, and true, his great-grandson Lemekh has as well, but how is this a failure as a tzelem Elokim?

MISSION II:

To answer this question, we must look to next week's parasha, where we again (and for the last time) find the term "tzelem Elokim." As the generations pass, humanity sinks deep into evil, filling Hashem's young world with corruption. Disappointed again, Hashem floods the world and drowns His creatures -- all except Noah and those aboard the ark with him. As the Flood ends and Noah and his family emerge from the ark to establish the world once again, Hashem delivers a message to Noah and his family at this point of renewal: a "new" mission statement for humanity. Comparing it to the first mission statement (1:28-30), which was addressed to Adam and Hava, shows that the two statements are very similar. But there are a few very important differences.

BERESHIT 9:1-2 --
Hashem blessed Noah and his children and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land. Fear of you and fright of you shall be upon all the beasts of the field, and all the birds of the sky, with whatever the ground crawls, and all the fish of the sea; in your hands they are given.

So far, nothing seems new -- humanity once again is blessed/commanded to procreate and is informed that the animals of the world are given to humanity to rule. But as Hashem continues, the picture of humanity's responsibilities and privileges changes radically:

BERESHIT 9:3-4 --
All crawling things which live, they are for you to eat, as the grassy plants; I have given to you everything. But flesh with the soul -- blood -- do not eat.

Although previously, humanity had been given permission to eat only vegetable matter, now Hashem permits humans to eat animals as well, as long as they do not eat the "soul" -- the blood. But is that all? Can it be that the main difference between the first mission and the second mission is vegetarianism versus omnivorism? When humanity failed as vegetarians and filled the world with corruption and evil, Hashem decided to fix everything by allowing the eating of meat? Certainly not. As we read on, the picture becomes clearer:

BERESHIT 9:3-6 --
All crawling things which live, they are for you to eat, like the grassy plants; I have given to you everything, EXCEPT the flesh with the soul -- blood -- you shall not eat; and EXCEPT that your blood, for your souls, will I demand; from the hand of any beast I will demand it, and from the hand of Man; from the hand of EACH MAN'S BROTHER will I demand the soul of Man. He who spills the blood of Man, by Man will his blood be spilled, for *IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE MADE MAN.*

The animals are promised that Hashem will punish them for killing people, and humanity is warned that people will be punished by execution for killing other people -- since people are created be-tzelem Elokim.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL:

What is the theme of this new mission?

Originally, humanity had been charged with the mission of reflecting Hashem's characteristics. That mission included three different elements:

1) Creativity: humanity was to emulate Hashem as Creator by having children. This mandate of creativity may have also included creativity in general, not merely procreation, but it focused most specifically on procreation.

2) Conquering: humanity was to emulate Hashem as Ruler of Creation by extending control over nature, and over the animals in particular.

3) Eating vegetative matter. The point of this command was not that eating vegetables somehow is an essential part of imitatio Dei

(emulating Hashem), but that eating vegetables means *not* killing for food.

This third element -- not killing for food -- was an oblique way of expressing the prohibition of murder. If even animals could not be killed for the 'constructive' purpose of eating, humans certainly could not be killed. Kayyin either never understood this element of the mission or found himself unable to meet its demands. But as a murderer, he renounced his status as tzelem Elokim, for the third element of the mission of tzelem Elokim is to emulate Hashem as a moral being. And the most basic expression of morality is the prohibition of murder.

Eventually, even Shet's descendants fall prey to the same weakness, filling the world with evil and violence, and Hashem decides that the entire world must be destroyed. The fact that immorality is the area of their failure is hinted not only by the Torah's explicit formulations ("For the world is full of violence before them," 6:11 and 6:13), but also by the way the Torah formulates the new mission commanded to Noah and his family as they re-establish the world after the Flood:

BERESHIT 9:5 --
. . . from the hand of each man's *brother,* will I demand the soul of Man . . . .

This is clearly a hint to the first murder, that of Hevel by his brother, and a hint as well that the failure of those destroyed by the Flood was in interpersonal morality, since this mission is delivered to those about to re-found the world on better foundations.

This new mission, which makes the prohibition of murder explicit, is a more clear version of the first mission, which merely hinted at the prohibition. But it is much more than a repetition/elaboration. It also expresses implicit disappointment in humanity: before, humanity had been forbidden to kill even animals; now, animals may be killed for food. Hashem recognizes that humanity cannot maintain the very high moral standards originally set, and so He compromises, permitting killing of some creatures (animals) for some purposes (food). But the prohibition of eating the blood of these animals seeks to limit humanity's permission to kill; blood represents the life-force, the "soul" (the blood-soul equation is one the Torah makes explicit several times later on), and humanity must respect the sanctity of life and recognize its Maker by not consuming the symbol of that life-force. In other words, humanity has permission to take life for food, but this permission comes along with a blood-prohibition, a reminder that even life that can be taken for some purposes is sacred and must be respected.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT:

Next, this new mission asserts that animals and people will be punished for killing people. The penalty for murder is death. Why? The Torah itself supplies the reason: because man is created be-tzelem Elokim. Usually, we understand this to mean that since humans are created in the image of Hashem, it is a particularly terrible thing to destroy human life. This crime is of such enormity that an animal or person who murders a person must be punished with death.

But perhaps the reason there is a death penalty for humans who kill is not only because the *victim* is created in Hashem's image, and destroying an image of Hashem is a terrible act, but also because the *murderer* is created in Hashem's image! Murder merits the death penalty because it destroys two tzelem Elokims: the victim and the perpetrator. The murderer was charged with the mission of tzelem Elokim, emulating Hashem in excercising moral judgment, but he has failed and renounced that mission. And the mission is not an "optional" one -- it is the entire purpose of humanity's existence, the whole reason people were created, as Hashem makes clear in discussing His plans to create humanity. The punishment for rejecting this mission of tzelem Elokim is therefore death, because Hashem grants Hashem-like potential to humans only on condition that they attempt to reflect His qualities. Humanity does not have two options, one being accepting the mission and the other being rejecting it and becoming an animal. A person who rejects the mission of emulating Hashem cannot continue to exist and profane the image of Hashem.

Tzelem Elokim mandates our becoming creators and conquerors, but it also mandates our behaving morally. It means that we have the potential, unlike animals, to create, to rule, and to be moral. But it does not guarantee that we will develop that potential. Tzelem Elokim is something we can *become,* not something into which we are born.

Shabbat shalom

Parshas Bereishis: Two Versions of the Truth

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION...

Since we are beginning a new cycle of learning, back to the "beginning", it seems appropriate to introduce this shiur with a short statement about the perspective of this series of shiurim and their place within the constellation of Torah study.

In the first story of Man's creation (see below), God declares: "Let us (?) make Man in our (?) Image" (B'resheet 1:26). Besides the theological problems raised by the use of the plural (for instance, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Tanakh generated in the Alexandrian community in the first century BCE, renders this in the singular due to the significant problems raised by "our Image"; see also Rashi ibid; note also the fascinating comment of Ramban here), there is a more "anthropological" issue here - what does it mean to be created in the Image of God? Indeed, not only in Chapter 1, but again at the beginning of the "begats" (Chapter 5), the Torah declares that God created Man in His Image. How do we understand this description?

Rashi explains that "image" here refers to the ability to reason. Rav Soloveitchik z"l expands on this theme, building on the context of creation, and defines Man's "Divine Image" as the creative spark; that uniquely human ability to enter an environment, whether intellectual or social, and to devise an innovative way to overcome obstacles which prevent that environment from flourishing. In the intellectual arena, this means the innovative mode of thought known, in circles of Torah study, as "Hiddush". A Hiddush is an explanation which resolves contradictions in the text, which clarifies the conceptual background of various sides of a dispute - in short, a Hiddush is "digging well below the surface" of study in order to unearth the principle which drives the idea of that particular text. The difficulty inherent in any Hiddush is that there is, ultimately, no way to be certain if the Hiddush is "valid"; the ring of truth may be a hollow one, resonating only in the ears of the innovator.

It is our hope that the Hiddushim shared in this shiur, week after week, will resonate with our readership and that they will clarify more than they confound.

I. B'RESHEET - THE "GENESIS" OF A PROBLEM

Following the Torah's recounting - how long did Creation take? When (in that sequence) was Man created? When were the animals created? Where does the creation of Woman fit within this matrix?

Although most people would give singular answers to each of these questions (Creation took six or seven days, depending if you reckon Shabbat; Man was created on the sixth day; the animals were created just before that; Woman was created from Man's rib [sic]), the reality of the Torah's narrative is far more complex.

Not only are there two different stories of Creation (the first story continues from 1:1 until the middle of 2:4; the second continues from there); but, from a purely text-driven read of the information, the accounts are contradictory! In the first story, creation takes six or seven days, Man is created as a complete (single male-female) being at the apex of Creation. In the second story, Creation takes one day, Man is created as a lonely being at the beginning of the process. Woman is formed from Man - and is his "completion" - at the end of this "Creation process". Among the most pronounced differences between the two stories is the Name for God; in the first story, God is exclusively referred to as the generic "Elohim"; whereas in the second story, He is consistently called "Hashem (Y-H-V-H) Elohim".

These differences are among the stronger "arguments" marshalled by the school of "Bible Criticism", which, for the past 300 years, has been at the forefront of secular (and non-Orthodox) study of Tanakh. This school of thought (which is really many different schools, each with its own variation) maintains that the Torah is not the unified Word of Hashem; rather they see it as a patchwork of narratives, legal texts and prophecy/poetry, each produced by a different community of priests and scholars during the 10th-6th centuries BCE, which were woven into the Torah as we know it - sometime around the era of Ezra's leadership (5th c. BCE).

The Bible critics maintain that each of these communities had a different "version" of Creation, a different Name for God etc. - thus explaining the many apparent discrepancies and stylistic variations within the text.

For a myriad of reasons both in the areas of creed and scholarship, we absolutely reject this "Documentary Hypothesis". Our belief is that the entire Torah was given by God to Mosheh (ignoring for a moment the problem of the last 8 verses) and that the authorship is not only singular, it is exclusively Divine. These two statements of belief - whether or not they can be reasonably demonstrated (and there is much literature, both medieval and contemporary, coming down on both sides of this question) - are two of the 13 principles enumerated by the Rambam.

Because both intellectual honesty and religious tenet prevent us from positing that the Divine Author presents inconsistent information, how can we explain the "multiple versions" - and apparent contradictions within the text?

II. TWO BASIC APPROACHES

From the perspective of tradition there are several ways to resolve these apparent contradictions. Most of them can be categorized into one of two basic approaches.

APPROACH #1: EACH VERSION COMPLETES THE OTHER

Fundamentally (no pun intended), we could try to "meld" the stories together. Rashi adopts this approach; for instance, in his commentary on the first verse in the Torah, Rashi notes that the first version of Creation uses the name "Elohim" for God - denoting strict justice (a court of law is also called Elohim - see Sh'mot 21:6), whereas the second version includes both the name "Hashem" and "Elohim" - indicating that although God's original intention was to create a world that would operate according to strict justice, He saw that that world could not last, so He integrated compassion (indicated by "Hashem" - see Sh'mot 34:6) into the process.

[We will temporarily suspend discussion of the theological difficulties raised by claiming that God "changed His mind"].

The Gemara in Ketubot (8a) takes a similar approach to the two versions of the creation of Woman - "originally God intended to create them as one being, but in the end He created them as separate individuals".

There are many examples of this approach, which is a distinct thread of exegesis in Rabbinic and medieval commentary. The upshot of this approach is that each version tells "part of the story" - and the "alternate version" completes the picture.

This approach has been adopted by some contemporary authors who attempt to "reconcile" science and Torah (why this attempt may not be necessary and may, indeed, be misleading and harmful, will be addressed in next week's shiur). The thinking goes as follows: Since each version provides only "part" of the information, it stands to reason that we may "synthesize" the versions together in various ways - including those which appear compatible with modern scientific theories about the origin of the universe, age of the earth and origin of the species.

In any case, this approach is both well-known and ubiquitously applied throughout Rabbinic exegesis regarding the Creation story (stories).

For purposes of our discussion, we will introduce another approach, which has its roots in Rabbinic literature and which was adopted by several Rishonim and more recent commentators, including Rabbi Yosef Dov haLevi Soloveitchik zt"l.

APPROACH #2: CHANGING THE FRAME OF REFERENCE

Both the problem - and the various solutions proposed by the proponents of the first approach - are predicated on an understanding of the role of the Torah which is not the only valid one.

III. TWO TYPES OF TRUTH

A brief segue on the nature of "Truth" is in order here:

There are statements which fall under the category of "Mathematical Truth"; for instance, that 7 times 9 equals 63 is not only an uncontested statement; it is also the only acceptable one. In other words, 7 times 9 MUST equal 63; if it equals anything else, something is wrong with the computation. Mathematical Truth is not only consistent, it is also exclusive.

If we maintain that the Torah is speaking the language of "Mathematical Truth", we have no recourse but to satisfy the two sides of the contradiction and either demonstrate that there is no contradiction at all - or to "weave" the information together (as demonstrated above).

There is, however, another type of statement which does not admit to "Mathematical Truth"; we will refer to it as "Ontological Truth" - (the reality about living, growing and dynamic beings). For instance, whereas it would be accurate to say that a certain boy loves to play baseball - that does not tell the full story of the boy. He is also afraid of spiders, excited about his upcoming trip to Washington and has great aptitude in science. Whereas 7 times 9 cannot equal anything but 63, the boy can simultaneously be a baseball fan, a science whiz and arachnaphobic.

As many commentators have pointed out (e.g. see S'forno's introduction to B'resheet, Shadal's introduction to his commentary on the Torah; note also Rashi's second comment on B'resheet), the goal of the Torah is not to present "Mathematical Truths" in the realms of biology, mathematics or "the origin of Man"; rather the Torah is geared to teaching us basic principles of faith, shaping proper attitudes towards the world around us, towards God and fellow humans. In addition - and most critically, the Torah's aim is to build a holy nation that will ultimately teach the basic truths and ethics of the Torah (note D'varim 4:6) to the entire world.

That being the case, we may certainly understand the various versions of creation as relating to different aspects of the world and of Man - and, notably, of Man's relationship with both the world around him and with the Creator.

We can then look at each story not as a "mathematical statement" which is either true or false - and is vulnerable to contradiction from another, equally valid source (such as the next chapter!); rather, we look at each version as a series of "ontological statements", geared to teaching us significant and focal perspectives about who we are and how we should act.

IV. TWO STORIES: HEAVEN AND EARTH; EARTH AND HEAVEN

We may find a clue into the "dual" nature of the Creation narrative via a careful look at the point where the two stories "meet" - immediately after the Shabbat narrative:

"These are the products of the heaven and earth when they were created, On the day when Hashem God made the earth and the heaven"

Note that the first half of this verse is a perfect conclusion to the "first version"; it utilizes the common "Eleh" (these...) concluding formula. Note also that just as the first story began with the creation of "Shamayim va'Aretz" - (Heaven and earth); this half-verse seems to conclude that creation.

The second half begins a new "story" - or another perspective of the same story. "On the day when Hashem God made the EARTH and HEAVEN". Note that the order is reversed - this is a deliberate move on the part of the text to shift the emphasis and the perspective of the story.

Now let's see what the two stories are - which two perspectives of Creation are being presented here.

[Much of this material based on the "Adam I & Adam II" theory of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l - the interested reader is directed to his opus: The Lonely Man of Faith].

V. VERSION #1: THE STORY OF THE WORLD

The first version is, indeed, the story of the creation of the heaven and the earth - in other words, it is the story of the creation of the world from a Divine perspective. It begins with the Heavens, presenting an orderly world structured in an hierarchical manner in which every manner of life has its place (note the refrain of "according to its species" in the third, fifth and sixth days). Man is created as the final, crowning touch of this glorious labor - and is formed "in God's image" in order to be His "agent", as it were, on earth: "...fill the earth and subdue it, having dominion over the fish of the sea..." (1:28). Man is complete, Man is a master over his world and Man needs for nothing. Man here is also not commanded - God blesses him with fertility, but there is no direct relationship between Man and God in this version.

This is truly the story of the world; an orderly world created by God in which Man can be His partner, His agent - but not His "servant". The Name for God which denotes compassion - Hashem - is totally missing from this account, since there is no need for Divine compassion where there is no Divine command and no Divine worship.

VI. VERSION #2: THE STORY OF MAN

There is another side to the story - the story of "the earth and the heavens" - the story from the perspective of Man (God is still "telling" the story - but from Man's point of view).

From the human perspective, everything created serves a human purpose; even the animals can serve as Man's companions (and thus are "created" after him) - but Man is not nearly as complete as the "detached" view would have it. Man is lonely, Man seeks out God as he seeks out meaning in this world of alienation and discord. This is a world where nothing grows because "there is no man to work the land" (2:5). God forms Man and then, around him and for his sake, creates a beautiful world of orchards and rivers. Immediately, the most crucial point in their relationship is realized - God commands Man! Man is no longer lonely, on one level, because he is in relationship with God. From a different perspective, however, he is lonely - because there is no one with whom to share this new life. Unlike the first - "detached" - story, in which everything is assessed as "good" (and, ultimately, "very good"), the first "non-good" thing is introduced - loneliness (2:18). As we follow "Adam II" through his bouts with temptation, guilt, cowardice, etc., we learn more about who he is - and who we are.

The Torah is not telling us two conflicting versions about creation; rather, we are seeing two sides of the same coin. The world is, indeed, an orderly place of hierarchical systems, where Man is the ultimate creature; yet, the world is also a place where Man feels alien and distant, seeking out companionship and meaning in his relationships with fellow humans, with a mate, and with God.

How the Torah Broke with Ancient Political Thought[1]

by Joshua Berman*

For some, the proposition that the Torah needs to be understood in its ancient context seems to diminish from the sacredness and divinity of the text. However, it is precisely through appreciating the Torah in its ancient context that we can arrive at a set of illuminating insights into how the Torah stands out from that context and reveals its divinity, particularly in its approach to political thought.

In ways that were astonishingly new and counterintuitive, and in ways that served the purposes of no known interest group, the political philosophy of the Torah rose like a phoenix out of the intellectual landscape of the ancient Near East. Throughout the ancient world the truth was self-evident: All men were not created equal. It is in the five books of the Torah that we find the birthplace of egalitarian thought. When seen against the backdrop of ancient norms, the social blueprint espoused by the Torah represents a series of quantum leaps in a sophisticated and interconnected matrix of theology, politics, and economics.

Equality: A Brief History

To appreciate the claim that the Torah represents the dawn of egalitarian thought, let us set the idea in historical perspective. It is only in the European revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that we find the rejection of the privileges of rank and nobility that resulted in the delegitimation of entrenched caste, feudal, and slave systems. Greece and Rome had known their respective reformers, yet nowhere in the classical world do we find a struggle to do away with class distinctions. Nor do we find this articulated as a desideratum by any of the ancient authors in their ideal systems. “From the hour of their birth,” wrote Aristotle, “some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.”[2] It was assumed that some would be rich and that many, many more would be poor—not simply because that was the way things were, but because that was the way things were actually supposed to be. Justice, for Aristotle, meant that equals would be treated as equals and unequals as unequals. The Greeks and Romans possessed an overwhelming belief in the harmony of various classes.

The medieval mindset, too, believed that an ordered society was one in which each socioeconomic class performed its tasks for the common good. Social stratification was likewise endemic to the empires and lands of the ancient Near East. Nowhere in the region is there articulated the ideal of a society without class divisions founded on the control of economic, military, and political power. It is not merely that the notion of social mobility was unknown to the ancient world; it would have been unthinkable. These cultures believed that the only way that a society could function was if everyone knew his or her station in life. The modern ideas of free choice and equal opportunity would have struck them as surefire recipes for anarchy and chaos. It is in the books of the Torah that we find the world’s first blueprint for a social and religious order that seeks to lessen stratification and hierarchy and to place an unprecedented emphasis on the well-being and status of the common person.

Religion and Class in the Ancient World

The Torah’s revolution of political thought begins with its theology. The attempt to treat things political as distinct from things religious is a thoroughly modern notion; in not a single culture in the ancient Near East is there a word for “religion” as distinct from “state.” To appreciate the ancient mindset and the conceptual default settings that it supplied, imagine that we are archaeologists digging up an ancient culture called “America.” Deciphering its religious texts, we discover that the paramount god of the pantheon bore the title “Commander in Chief,” resided in a heavenly palace called “White House,” and would traverse the heavens in his vehicle, “Chariot One.” We further discover that Commander in Chief had a consort known as “First Lady”—herself a goddess of apparently meager powers, yet assumed by some to be a barometer of desirable values and fashionable dress. In the heavens was another palace, this one domed and populated by 535 lesser, regional deities, who routinely schemed and coalesced into partisan

groupings, and who were known, on occasion, to have been able to depose the Commander in Chief. Put differently, what we would discover is that the institutional order “down below” manifests the divine order of the cosmos “up above.” This phenomenon, wherein the political structure of the heavens mirrored that of the earthly realm, was widespread in the ancient world, and it is easy to see why. Political regimes are, by definition, artificial, constructed, and therefore tenuous. Always implicit is the question: Why should he reign? The imposed institutional order can receive immeasurable legitimation, however, if the masses underfoot believe that it is rooted in ultimate reality and unchanging truth, that the significance of the political order is located in a cosmic and sacred frame of reference. Ancient religion is the self-interested distortion that masks the human construction and exercise of power.

For example, we find that Enlil, the chief god of the Mesopotamian pantheon, utterly resembles his earthly counterpart, the king. Enlil, like his earthly counterpart, rules by delegating responsibilities to lesser dignitaries and functionaries. Like his earthly counterpart, he presides over a large assembly. He resides in a palace with his wives, children, and extended “house.” Generally speaking, the gods struggled to achieve a carefree existence and enjoyed large banquets in their honor. Like kings, gods needed a palace, or what we would call a temple, where they, too, could reside in splendor in separation from the masses, with subjects caring for them in a host of earthly matters.

If a god wanted something—say a temple repaired, or the borders expanded—he communicated through various agents with the king, and the king was his focus. The gods never spoke to the masses, nor imparted instruction to them. Within ancient cosmologies, the masses served a single purpose: to toil and offer tribute. They were servants, at the lowest rung of the metaphysical hierarchy. The gods were interested in the masses to the extent that a baron or feudal lord would have interest in ensuring the well-being of the serfs that run the estate and supply its needs. Servants, no doubt, play a vital role in any monarchical order, but it is an instrumental role. From an existential perspective, it is a decidedly diminished and undignified role.

Religion and Class in the Torah

By contrast, the Torah’s central accounts—the Exodus and the Revelation at Sinai—preempt claims of election and immanent hierarchy within the Israelite nation. The Exodus story effectively meant that no member of the children of Israel could lay claim to elevated status. All emanate from the Exodus—a common, seminal, liberating, but most importantly equalizing event. Although we normally think of the Revelation at Sinai in religious terms, its political implications are no less dramatic, and constitute the bedrock of the Torah’s egalitarian theology. Elsewhere, the gods communicated only to the kings, and had no interest in the masses. But at Sinai, God spoke only to the masses, without delineating any role whatever for kings and their attendant hierarchies. The ancients had no problem believing that the gods could split the seas, or descend on a mountaintop in a storm of fire. Nevertheless, the stories of the Exodus and Sinai necessitated an enormous stretch of the imagination, because they required listeners to believe in political events that were without precedent and utterly improbable, even in mythological terms. Slaves had never been known to overthrow their masters. Gods had never been known to speak to an entire people.

The pact or covenant between God and Israel displays many common elements with what are known in biblical studies as ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties, which were formed between a great king and a weaker one. In these treaties, we typically find that the more powerful king acts on behalf of a weaker, neighboring king; sensing an opportunity to foster a loyal ally, he may send food during a famine, or soldiers to break a siege. In return, the lesser king demonstrates his appreciation to the powerful one by agreeing to a series of steps that express his gratitude and fealty. In these treaties the vassal king retains his autonomy and is treated like royalty when he visits the palace of the powerful king. Having been saved from Egypt by God, the children of Israel sign on at Sinai to a vassal treaty as sign of fealty, becoming junior partners to the sovereign king, God. The theological breakthrough of the Torah was the transformation of the metaphysical status of the masses, of the common person, to a new height, and the vitiation of nobles, royalty, and the like. The common man, in short, received an upgrade from king’s

servant to servant king.

Yet no less significant is the Torah's call that these stories should be promulgated among the people as their history. The point requires a note of context for us as moderns. Although there are over one million inscriptions in our possession from the ancient Near East, there is nowhere evidence of a national narrative that a people tells itself about its collective, national life, of moments of achievement or of despair, recorded for posterity. Stories abound in the ancient Near East—but they revolve around the exploits of individual gods, kings, and nobles. The most important audience of these materials was the gods themselves—as witnessed by the fact that these texts were often discovered in temple libraries, buried, or in other inaccessible locations. Myths were recited to remind the gods of their responsibilities. Details of a king's achievements on the battlefield were to constitute a report to a deity about the king's activities on his or her behalf; they were not composed for the masses. The Kadesh Inscriptions of Rameses II were the exception that proves the rule: Those inscriptions were not only textual, but pictorial; and they were not only carved on stone, but copied and disseminated via papyri. However, most inscriptions of royal activity in ancient times were limited to monumental structures in writing that was inaccessible to the common person.

We may take a page from the history of technology of communication to understand the implication of the Torah's call to promulgate the accounts of Israel's early history. The distribution of printed texts in the early modern period is said to have occasioned the birth of modern citizenship within the nation-state. The vernacular languages that were now fashioned and standardized led to the creation of newspapers and novels designed for a mass readership comprised of people who were in disparate locales but could now envision themselves as a public sharing a common heritage, destiny, and range of interests—religious, social, and political. People could now imagine themselves as a political collective, and thus was born the political "we."

It is in the Torah that we see for the first time the realization that the identity of a people may be formed around an awareness of its past. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible is the first work of literature before the Hellenistic period that may be termed a national history. Moreover, the Torah displays an attitude toward the dissemination of texts among the populace that is in sharp contrast to the relationship between texts and society that we find elsewhere in the ancient Near East. It is a contrast, further, that is a reflection of the egalitarian agenda that the Torah seeks to pursue, over against the entrenchment of class distinctions. In an age and place such as our own, where literacy is nearly ubiquitous, access to texts of many kinds and the knowledge they bear is unfettered and, in theory, available to all. But in the ancient world physical access to written texts and the skills necessary to read them were everywhere highly restricted. Indeed, in the cultures of the ancient Near East as well as of ancient Greece, the production and use of texts was inextricably bound up with the formation of class distinctions: Those who possessed the capacity to read and write were members of a trained scribal class who worked in the service of the ruling order.

Writing in the ancient Near East was originally a component of bureaucratic activity. Systems of writing were essential for the administration of large states. Indeed, the elite in these cultures had a vested interest in the status quo, which prevented others from gaining control of an important means of communication. Far from being interested in its simplification, scribes often chose to proliferate signs and values. The texts produced in Mesopotamia were composed exclusively by scribes and exclusively for scribal use—administrative or cultic—or for the training of yet other scribes.

The Cambridge anthropologist Jack Goody notes that a culture's willingness to disseminate its religious literature inevitably reflects an emphasis on the individual within that culture.[3] The comment sheds light on the Torah's agenda to establish an ennobled egalitarian citizenry, as we are witness to an impetus within the biblical vision to share the divine word with the people of Israel. Moses reads the divine word to the people at Sinai (Ex. 24:1–8). Periodically, the people are to gather at the Temple and hear public readings of the Torah (Deut. 31:10–13). It is telling that the Tanakh never depicts kohanim or scribes as jealous or protective of their writing skills, as is found in neighboring cultures.

In sum, we have seen something remarkable about the most basic, familiar aspects of the Torah. The idea of covenant; the story of the Exodus; the fact that the Torah is a written, publicized text—these are as significant politically as they are religiously. They each point to the equal and high standing of the common person in Israel.

The Torah's Radical Conception of Political Office

Turning from theology, we see that the Torah radically revamped regnant notions of political office and the exercise of power. What is most striking about the Torah's statements on political office are two radical ideas about how these offices are to be governed. First, we are witness here to the transition from the law of rule to the rule of law. Elsewhere in the ancient world, the kings composed and promulgated law, but were above it, not subject to it. Before the thinkers of Athens came along, the Torah arrived at the notion of equality before the law. All public institutions in the Torah—the judiciary, the priesthood, the monarchy, the institution of prophecy—are subordinated to the law. Moreover, the law is a public text whose dictates are meant to be widely known, thus making abuse of power more obvious and safeguarding the common citizenry.

Second, we may see that the most important body of authority in the polity envisioned by the Torah is none other than the people themselves. The Torah addresses the fraternal and egalitarian citizenry in the second person, "you," and charges them with appointing a king—if they desire one—and appointing judges. Put differently, the Torah specifies no nominating body for appointing leaders or representatives. Rather, the collective "you"—the common citizenry—bears ultimate responsibility to choose a king and to appoint judges. From American history we know how unthinkable it was only a few generations ago for many to contemplate the notion that persons of color or women should play a role in choosing who rules. For the royal monarchies of the ancient Near East, the notion that the masses—who elsewhere were serfs and servants—would hold any sway over those that ruled them was equally unfathomable.

If the people did elect to have a king, the Torah was determined that he should be but a shadow of what a king was elsewhere. Elsewhere kings played central roles in the cult. In the Torah he plays none. Elsewhere, the king aims to build a strong army. The Torah calls for him to have a limited treasury and to forgo a cavalry (Deut. 17:16–17), limitations that would leave him commanding only a small army. Moreover, were a royal chariot force to serve as the backbone of the nation's defense, it would inevitably emerge as an elite military class. The great jurist of Athens, Solon, extended preferred status to the members of the cavalry over other citizens. But what confers status in the Torah is citizenship in the covenantal community, and this is shared by all. Elsewhere, the king would consolidate his power through a network of political marriages. The Torah forbids the king from taking a large number of wives (Deut. 17:17).

Finally, we see in the Torah a page in the history of constitutional thought, one that would not be written again until the American founding. It pertains to a highly advanced notion of the separation of powers. Classical Greek political thought had already understood that in the absence of a strong center in the figure of a monarch or a tyrant, factionalism threatened the stability of the polity. It was inevitable that the population would contain rich and poor, nobles and commoners. The absence of homogeneity led classical theorists to balance power by ensuring that each faction within society would receive a share of the rule. Yet, the balance of power was not a balance of institutions of government, as we are accustomed to today. Rather, the balance was achieved by allowing each of the socioeconomic factions a functioning role within each seat of government. Thus, in Roman jurist Polybius' conception, the legislative branch of government in the republic was to consist of two bodies—the senate for the nobles and the assembly for the commoners—with each institution permanently enshrined in law.

The notion that the effective division of power was predicated upon its distribution across preexisting societal seats of power was one that would hold sway throughout most of the history of republican thought, from Roman theorists through early modern thinkers. It is central even to the thinking of

Montesquieu, the father of modern constitutional theory, who is credited with proposing the separation of powers into three branches—executive, legislative, and judiciary—in his 1748 work, The Spirit of the Laws. Looking at the English model of his day, Montesquieu held that the legislative power should consist of a body of hereditary nobles and of a body of commoners. He saw hereditary nobility not as a necessary evil, nor even as an immutable fact of life, but rather as a boon to effective government. The nobility, with its inherent wealth and power, would serve as a moderating force within government against the abuses of the monarch. Moreover, the fact that the nobility's strength was derived from its own resources would endow its members with a sense of independence. This, together with developed education and time for reflection, would enable the nobles to contribute to effective government in a way that members of the lower classes could not. Montesquieu could not conceive of a classless society and a regime in which the division of powers was purely institutional and instrumental, where the eligibility to hold office was independent of class.

Here the Torah stands distinct. For the first time in history we see the articulation of a division of at least some powers along lines of institution and instrument rather than of class and kinship, where office legitimizes preexisting societal seats of power. Anyone who is "among your brethren" (Deut. 17:15) is eligible to be appointed king. Moreover, the king is appointed by the collective "you" that we mentioned before. How that selection occurs, apparently, is an issue that the Torah deliberately left open so as to imply that there is no body that a priori has a greater divine imprimatur than any other. In this sense, the Torah's notion of offices that are entirely institutional and instrumental is an idea that would again appear only with the American Founding Fathers.

The same is true with regard to the judiciary, as outlined in the book of Deuteronomy. Anyone may be appointed judge, and no less importantly, anyone, in theory, is eligible to participate in the process of appointing judges (Deut. 16:17). One could have thought of any number of bodies that could have been charged with appointing judges: the king, the prophets, the kohanim, or other judges. But the Torah insists: "Judges and officers you shall appoint for yourself" (16:18). The appointment of judges is mandated with the sole purpose of achieving the execution of justice, rather than the assignment of office to perpetuate the standing of a noble class. As Montesquieu noted in the eighteenth century, it is critical that the people appoint judges, so that they have faith in the justice that is meted out. The only source prior to Montesquieu to arrive at this insight was the Torah.

God the Economist

The Torah understood that in order to create an egalitarian order, it would also need to re-envision the economic structure of society, for without equity, there is no equality. What the Torah proposes is the Western tradition's first prescription for an economic order that seeks to minimize the distinctions of class based on wealth, and instead to ensure the economic benefit of the common citizen.

A ubiquitous feature of the socioeconomic landscape of the ancient Near East was the threat faced by the common person of falling into irreversible insolvency. Social stratification would emerge as the common people would have to sell off their farm animals, their land, and even their own freedom to repay debts. Famine, drought, or war could lead to precisely the kind of economic landscape we witness in the account of Egypt under Joseph, in Genesis 47. The Torah sought to remedy this through radical legislation on several fronts. Elsewhere, the norm was that land was owned by the palace and by the temple. The Torah, in contrast, knows of no land holding for either king or cult. Instead, nearly the entire land is given to the people themselves, in an association of free farmers and herdsmen, subsumed within a single social class. The idea that wide tracts of available land should be divided among the commoners was unprecedented. Perhaps the most famous example of such an initiative from modern times is the American Homestead Act of 1862. With the Great Plains open to mass settlement, nearly any person 21 years of age or older could acquire, at virtually no cost, a tract of 160 acres that would become his after five years of residence and farming. For millions of new arrivals and other landless Americans, the Homestead Act was an opportunity to acquire assets and to bring equality of economic standing in line with equality before the law.

The Torah also took specific aim at the institution of taxation. Elsewhere, taxes to the state and to the cult were deeply integrated. In the Torah, no taxes are specified for the state. Of course, no regime would be able to function without taxing its populace—but the Torah apparently envisioned that taxes would be levied without sacral sanction, as was so prevalent elsewhere. God would not be invoked as the tax collector. Moreover, far less surplus is demanded from the people of Israel for the Temple than was customary in the imperial cults of the ancient Near East.

Whereas elsewhere cultic personnel controlled vast tracts of land, the Torah balances the status that these groups maintain in the cult by denying them arable lands of their own. They are dependent upon the people they represent for their subsistence, and in some passages are even grouped together with other categories of the underprivileged. The Torah further legislates that one type of tax—the ma'aser ani—should not be paid to the Temple at all, but rather distributed to the needy—the first known program of taxation legislated for a social purpose (Deut. 14:28–29).

What is most remarkable about the Torah's economic reforms is the manner in which the new economy is incorporated into a new measure of time. Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, the calendar was based upon readily perceptible astronomical rhythms: The counting of days stems from observing the rising and setting of the sun; of months, from observations of the waxing and waning of the moon; of years, from observing the seasons and position of the sun. The ancient Near East, however, knows no calendar that incorporates the notion of a week. The week is the invention of the Torah, and is rooted, of course, in the Torah's account of Creation, in which God worked for six days and rested on the seventh. The result is that throughout the Torah the Shabbat principle determines the schedule of the laws of social welfare, and serves as a great equalizing force between haves and have-nots. Shabbat day is a day of rest for all. In the seventh year—the Sabbatical year—the field lies fallow and is available for all to enjoy, and debt release is enacted. Time itself is marshaled in the establishment of the egalitarian agenda.

A Revolutionary Document

What power interest could have been served by this program? We have already seen that it was a program that favored neither the king, nor the rich, nor the priesthood. Prophets are hardly mentioned in the Torah, and the criteria set out for validating an individual as a prophet are exacting in the extreme. Sages or philosophers are nowhere mentioned at all. No immediate candidate jumps out of the pages of the Torah as the interested party in the formulation of this new egalitarian order.

Throughout the ancient world, the truth was self-evident: All men were not created equal. They saw the world they had created and, behold, it was good. It was good, they deemed, because it was ordered around a rigid hierarchy, where everyone knew his station in life, each according to his class. For the first time in history, the Torah presented a vision to the masses in which the gods were something other than their own selves writ large, a vision with a radically different understanding of God and humanity. It introduced new understandings of the law, of political office, of military power, of taxation, of social welfare. It conceived in radically new ways the importance of national narrative, of technologies of communication, and of a culture's calibration of time. What we find in the Torah is a platform for social order marked with the imprint of divinity. Within the annals of political thought it is difficult to think of another document that revolutionized so much in such anonymity, and with so little precedent to inspire it.

Of course, these notions of equality are but early precursors of our more developed notions of equality today. Yet, the Torah instructs us with the implicit understanding that society changes, and with it, the form in which we fulfill God's will. We can marvel at how utterly removed the Torah's political thought was from the prevailing spirit about such things in ancient times. And, at the same time, we can appreciate that without believing that we are limited to the notion of equality as it had been expressed in those ancient times. Rather, the Torah serves as an inspiration for the further elaboration of those ideas as times change and events warrant so doing.

[1] This chapter is a concise presentation of the arguments I make in my monograph, Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[2] Aristotle, Politics BK1 1254a20, translation by Benjamin Jowett, available at http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.1.one.html.

[3] Jack Goody, The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

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