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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 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his 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. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!

Those of us who grew up in the years following World War II could understand (looking back) why many Jewish adults of that period turned away from traditional Judaism. The Nazis murdered six million of our people, often with the help of the people among whom our fellow Jews had lived for many generations. America closed its doors to most of the Jews fleeing the Nazis, and Jews who lived in our country faced strict quotas to be accepted into top schools and professional programs, let alone into social clubs. Where was God, and why did He permit such evil?

When I attended college, my professors demonstrated that one could not prove the existence of God, and this demonstration was consistent with a feeling that a caring God could not have permitted the horrors of the Nazi period in what had previously been the most advanced country in the world in many fields, such as music, art, and literature.

Advances in science in recent decades have greatly diminished the "proof" that one cannot prove the existence of God. Rabbi David Fohrman has summarized much of the relevant new scientific evidence in his video, "Finding God in Science." Consider the "big bang" theory of the creation of the universe. Cosmologists have diagnosed the "flatness problem." If the subatomic particles from a big bang sped away too fast, gravity would not bring them together. If the particles moved too slowly, gravity would have stopped their acceleration. The estimated margin of error in speed is 1 in 10 to the 54th power. Next, the "smoothness problem" evaluates the conditions necessary for the particles to create clouds. If the particles were too large, the hydrogen clouds would be so large that they would collapse into black holes. If the particles were too smooth, gravity would not have brought them into clouds. British mathematician Roger Penrose estimated the margin for error at 1 in 10 to the 10,123rd power! Gravity, electromagnetism, nuclear weak force, and nuclear strong force all needed to be in precise balance for a big bang to have been able to create a universe. It would be a huge stretch of the imagination for all these conditions, each of minute probability, to take place simultaneously to create a universe – even before the conditions required for such a universe to create life. It becomes much easier to believe that an intelligent force, which we call God, created our world.

The miracles in nature extend beyond creation. Rabbi Marc Angel has posted two articles on miracles of the human body. Dr. Morris A. Shamah, an ophthalmologist, discusses the incredible miracle of the human eye. Dr. Evan Fisher, a leading nephrologist (and my son), discusses the miracle of the human kidney in connection with the bracha Asher Yatzar (said after using the bathroom) and Rashi's discussion connecting the bracha to Midrash. Again, thoughtful scientists looking at miracles in life find a path to Orthodox Judaism.

When I was young and had recently completed college and graduate school, I asked my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, how one answers those who claim that it is impossible to prove the existence of God. Where can one find a proof or belief? Rabbi Cahan told me to look around at the perfection in nature and beauty in the world. How could these wonders have arisen by chance rather than from some supreme intelligent mind? His response half a century ago started my awakening, and scientific advances since then have demonstrated that the likelihood of our world having been created by chance is so remote that it is beyond belief. I wonder what university philosophy professors are teaching today about the existence of God. I know that I would not be teaching what I learned when I was in college!

As we read through the Torah, our task is to interpret each parsha to discern what message God is presenting to us. The Torah is not merely history. A history book would not present 2000 years of history in eleven brief chapters while devoting three parashot (in Bemidbar) to a single week and an entire sefer to Moshe's final five weeks on earth. The Torah is nevuah (prophecy), a message from God. What message does God want us to learn from what we read each week? Watch for situations or unusual words that return later in the Torah, because these textual hints open up layers of messages. For example, after Adam and Chava eat from God's special tree, they hide from God's presence. God asks Adam, "Ayeka" – where are you? This word returns at the beginning of Sefer Devarim as "Eicha" – Moshe's expression of woe, the theme of Tisha B'Av, the day of numerous tragedies in Jewish history. When we try to hide from God, in turn God hides His face and his protection from us. Fortunately, God always keeps His promises to our Patriarchs, and He keeps open a path to teshuvah and ultimate redemption. Can science provide a path to human redemption? Can a history book provide a message that God is always open to forgive and receive us? The Torah demonstrates repeatedly that we have a caring, loving God who wants a personal relationship with all of us. This message is absent from the philosophy courses that I studied in college when my professor, who later was the first candidate for President of the United States for the Libertarian party, proved that one could never prove the existence of God. Science, history, or nevuah – decide for yourself which path to truth is most convincing and which provides a better path to directing human life.

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.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Bereishis: Dealing with the Enemy

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

There are few descriptive verses in the Torah that defines the evil-inclination. Many of them appear in Sefer Braishis. After all, if Hashem created man with a Yetzer Horah (evil-inclination) then man ought to have the formula to defeat it. In fact, after Kayin fails by offering an inferior sacrifice, Hashem guides him by revealing something about the enemy – the Yetzer Horah. "Surely, if you improve you can carry him (the Yetzer Horah), and if you do not improve, he crouches at your door and his desire is toward you. But you can rule over him!" (Genesis 4:7)

The two sides seem to lack a study in contrast. If you improve you will carry him, but if not he will wait for you, he will desire to get you -but you will rule over him! It seems that the Yetzer Horah is defeated both ways. Even if you are not able to carry him and he crouches in ambush, you still can overrule him. Shouldn't the negative have stated, "and if you do not improve, he crouches at your door, his desire is toward you and he will rule over you"? In a recent volume about

the life of Rabbi Ahron Moshe Stern, the Mashgiach of the Kaminetz (not related to Kamenetzky) Yeshiva in Jerusalem, I saw an amazing story about Reb Naftali Trop, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim's Yeshiva in Radin.

There was an itinerant Jew who had visited Radin and had earned a reputation as a thief. This particular individual had stolen from the very people who had invited him in as a guest in their homes. Word got out that he had stolen, and the next time he came to Radin, no one invited him into their homes – except Reb Naftali Trop.

Upon hearing of the offer of hospitality, some of the prominent members of the community approached Reb Naftali. "The man you invited is a thief! Last time he was here he walked off with some of his hosts valuables. You mustn't have him sleep in your home!"

Reb Naftali did not react. "The Torah tells us that a thief must pay a fine for his actions. It does not tell us that a thief should not be invited to eat or sleep. I have a responsibility to invite guests. If I am afraid that they may steal, well, that's my problem. I guess I must arrange to make sure that all my valuables are guarded. However, my fears can in no way relieve me of my responsibility to shelter my fellow Jew."

The Torah's message to Kayin is twofold. You can get the Yetzer Horah out of your way completely. You can carry him. You can place him out of your path and lift him out of sight. But that may not work for all of us. Those who cannot rise to that level and have the Yetzer Horah in our doorways constantly still may not give up hope. He may be lying in ambush but we can not ignore him. We must deal with him. If it means channeling your anger against evil – so be it. If it means steering an improper stinginess, channel that attribute to those times when splurging unnecessarily is uncalled for.

The Torah is telling us that when the Yetzer Horah is part of our lives we must deal with him. We never have an excuse by saying that the desires were too great and insurmountable. If we let him in the door we have to make sure that we are able to fulfill the mitzvos in spite of his presence.

The mussar luminaries used to comment: The Talmud tells us that our matriarch Rachel warned Yaakov about the deceptive shenanigans that her father Lavan was wont to perform. Yaakov responded by saying, "I am his equal in the ability to deceive."

The question that was raised is simple. "Where did Yaakov learn to be so crafty?" The answer that they gave was that when dealing with a Yetzer Horah, one must be wily too. Yaakov learned from the trials of life how to deal with the most clever and cunning of men.

If you tame the beast correctly, he may crouch and wait for you. But you will rule over him. And you will learn to use his resources for your gain.

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5756-netzavim/

What Will You Create?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

The Torah opens with God creating the world during the Six Days of Creation. Then follows Shabbat: va'yakhulu haShamayim, "And the Heavens and Earth, and all their hosts were completed." Every Friday night, we open kiddush by reciting this verse and the verses that follow. And we end with one word: la'asot, "to do." "For on that day, God rested from all his work which God created la'asot, to do" (Gen. 2:3).

What is the meaning of that phrase "to do"? What does it mean in this context, and what does it add to the verse? Why did the text not just end one word earlier?

The Netziv, Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, offers an answer in his introduction to his commentary on the Torah. The verse, he explains, is telling us that the creation of the world did not end after those first six days. At the end of those six days, God stopped creating. Now, it is we who must continue that task.

The world was created la'asot, with much left to be done. Our task is not just–as an earlier verse says–to have "dominion" over the world. Our task is to delve into the secrets of Nature, to understand its powers of sun, heat, and of water; of wind and of storms; and of its forces–gravity, electromagnetic, and strong and weak nuclear forces–and to bring these forces and this infinite potential into their fullest and best realization.

These forces can be used destructively, to damage and destroy human and animal life, society, and even the world. It is our job, our Divine mandate, to instead use them la'asot: to continue to create, to partner with God in a creation that sustains life and that nurtures growth of us as individuals and as a species. This, says Natziv, is what brings the greatest honor and glory to God.

This mandate of la'asot connects more to havdalah, our entry into the week, than it does to Shabbat, the time of rest. It connects particularly to the blessing borei me-orei ha-aish, "Who creates the lights of fire," which we recite over the havdalah candle. We make this blessing not, as is often believed, to recognize that we could not use fire on Shabbat (or certainly not only for that reason). Rather, it is to commemorate that fire was the first act of human creation. As the Gemara (Pesachim 54a) relates:

At the conclusion of Shabbat, God granted Adam intellect similar to what exists Above, and he brought two rocks and rubbed them against each other, and fire emerged.

Fire is the greatest human discovery. It is the foundation of civilization. It provides heat and light. It makes cooking possible and allows us to bend and shape metal. It is so powerful that ancient myths speak about how Prometheus had to steal fire from the gods and bring it to humans to give them the ability to found civilization. Indeed, there is something divine-like about fire's very creation. It is a creation yesh me'ayin, of something out of nothing. A person starts with two stones, and creates not little stones and not a stone tower, but something completely new, different, and of enormous power: fire.

For us, fire was not something that needed to be stolen. Fire was the gift that God gave us. Or rather, and more to the point, fire was the creation that we as humans, with the divine creative intellect that God had given us, brought to the world. And we did so in partnership with God, using our God-given powers to continue God's work and to bring the world from its initial creation to its fullest realization.

I would ask us to think about this mandate of la'asot as we make havdalah and are about to begin the week. When havdalah concludes, let's take a moment before we run to check our emails. Let's not immediately start worrying about our endless to-do lists and the tasks that still need to get done. Instead, let's take a moment to reflect–perhaps even go around and have each person share–what we want our la'asot to be this week. What will be the vision that frames and propels our six days of creation? Let's begin the week with knowing what is that one thing that we want to do to bring our intellect, our creative powers, into the world, to partner with God in bringing this world one step closer to its greatest realization.

Shabbat Shalom.

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/09/what-will-you-create/

Great Discoveries

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2016

One of the most startling stories ever is the story that occurred just after creation, the story of mankind eating from the fruit of the forbidden tree. The key-being-givenTorah relates (Bireishis 2:25) that, before the sin, mankind saw nothing wrong with going unclothed. After the sin, man says, "I was afraid, because I was unclothed." What exactly does it mean that before the sin man did not appreciate that he was unclothed?

The commentaries explain that, before the sin, man did not appreciate the reality of sinful behavior. The souls of mankind radiated a powerful spiritual light throughout their bodies, all the way to their outer skin, so sinful behavior was not something that they personally considered. Once the forbidden fruit was introduced into their essence they made a great

discovery. They discovered the possibility of sinful behavior and realized the improper potential of their bodies. Suddenly they had an immediate and compelling reason to cover their bodies. As man says, “I was afraid” when I realized with my newfound understanding the ramifications of being unclothed. Now that man has discovered the potential for wrongdoing he must take steps to protect himself.

Later in the Parsha, we encounter Kayin, who also makes a great discovery. After killing his brother Hevel in passion and jealousy, Kayin becomes obsessed with the word, “Chanoch” which means education. He calls his child “Chanoch,” and likewise calls the city that he builds, “Chanoch.” The Ha’Kisav V’ha’Kabbala commentary explains that, as Kayin reflected on his terribly destructive deed, he made a great discovery. Kayin came to recognize his personal drives of passion and jealousy and wished that he had received a proper “education.” By calling his son and the city by the name “Chanoch,” Kayin was declaring that, as he saw it, the success of humanity would hinge on proper education. We are not referring to scholastic education or apprenticeship type training. Rather we refer to education for life, how to deal with one’s emotions and how to conduct oneself in interpersonal relationships. Kayin declares: Had I received a proper upbringing, this tragedy would never have happened. Alas, Kayin was born to the first man and woman as a grown man and never had the benefit of an emotional education.

Imagine a newcomer to our society who was simply handed keys to a car, without any commentary. He would be unaware of the enormous blessing that a car could be, and he would also be unaware of the enormous havoc that a car could wreak. The great self-discovery of what a human being is, and what he or she is capable of, is the discovery of first man as well as the discovery of Kayin. Both physically and emotionally the human being is a powerhouse. Only with proper controls and training will he succeed.

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org

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Dust to Dust: Thoughts for Parashat Bereishith

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

“And the Lord God fashioned Adam from the dust of the earth” (Bereishith 2:7).

Rashi quotes two opinions, drawn from Midrashic teachings, as to the nature of this dust that was used to create Adam i.e. humanity. One opinion suggests that God gathered dust from the four corners of the earth in order to fashion Adam. The other opinion has it that God took the dust from one spot, the site of the future holy Temple in Jerusalem.

What is this rabbinic debate all about? Surely, the rabbis had no evidence as to what dust God actually used to create Adam. Neither side argued that it had an ancient tradition to bolster its viewpoint. These rabbinic opinions are not dealing with establishing a historic fact but are concerned with something fundamental about the essence and nature of humanity.

God created Adam from dust drawn from the four corners of the earth. Rashi notes that this was done so that no matter where a human being would die, the earth would receive his/her remains. In other words, a human being is “at home” everywhere on earth.

The broader lesson is that a person belongs to the entire world. Nothing human is alien to him/her. A human being — because he/she is composed from dust taken from throughout the earth — is part and parcel of all humanity, of all that transpires on earth. Thus, a person needs to have a grand vision of his/her place in this world. A human being should feel a sense of relationship with all other human beings — where ever they live. A human’s mind should transcend the concerns of his/her own immediate place and should aspire to grasp universal human wisdom and experience.

God created Adam from the dust from one spot, the site of the future holy Temple in Jerusalem. A human being is rooted in one place, in the holiest place in the world. A person must be rooted in his/her tradition, must be focused on his/her particularity. Knowing that his/her life originates in the sacred dust of Jerusalem, a person can deepen his/her connection with God and with his/her direct and personal relationship with God.

So which opinion is true?

The answer is: both are true. This is not a rabbinic debate of opposing views, but an expression of complementary ideas about the nature of humanity.

A person must be both universal and unique. He/she must recognize an innate kinship with all humanity in the four corners of the earth, and also recognize his/her particular rootedness in a family/tradition/society. A person who is only "universal" will ultimately be deracinated from his/her own uniqueness. A person who is only "particular" will ultimately be disconnected from humanity as a whole, and will become increasingly narrow in outlook. In either case, one's full humanity will be compromised and diminished.

Humans were created from dust and will return to dust. This is a humbling fact. But during the interim when we live on earth, we should strive to lead lives of wisdom, sensitivity and fulfillment. We should fully develop our uniqueness while at the same time fostering our universality.

We were, after all, created from dust from the four corners of the earth and from the dust of the holy Temple in Jerusalem. This is our blessing…and our challenge.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/dust-dust-thoughts-parashat-bereishith

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Observations of an Observant Ophthalmologist

By Dr. Morris A. Shamah *

In 1969, a very precise and intelligent law student approached me in a rather confused state of mind. He had just studied the proofs for the existence of God as presented by Maimonides in the Guide for the Perplexed. These proofs were disappointing to him, as they said little to his practical twentieth-century Western mind. Did I read them, he asked. Yes, I answered, but they also said little that resonated with my way of thinking. At least all but one (the proof from design) lacked the punch that one expects from such "proofs."

Both of us were young and saw ourselves as scientific, accepting only what was clearly proven to us. My confession allowed him to ask, rather sheepishly, that if I found the proofs generally so meaningless, why was I an observant and practicing Jew.

My answer surprised even me: "I believe because I just completed as part of my ophthalmology residency training a full time six-month course in the anatomy, physiology and pathology of the eye". He eyed me at first with a skeptical tilt, but I explained.

The eye is one of the most beautiful creations that I know. It is a wonder and a marvel, dwarfing even our most sophisticated human inventions. You would probably agree with the above, but with the in-depth study that I had just completed, I found that this sensory organ was indeed most awe-inspiring. I saw that every part of its anatomy and function were nothing short of astounding—and this even though we know but few of its inner secrets.

Basics: the eye is a one-inch sphere that is bombarded with electromagnetic light rays from a radiant object. The cornea and lens focus the image, which is then projected on the retina where it is converted into an electrical signal and this electrical wave is transmitted a few inches to the occiput, the rear of the brain. We then "see" an object in all its beauty, with the color, perspective, depth, relationship to other sights and a lot more. Other parts of a brain then incorporate this into our past memories and give this electromagnetic signal a full world of relationships.

Sounds easy! Well it is not.

Every step in the process, and there are many steps, screams loudly of the work of a Creator. Please follow closely as we explore just a small sample of some of the wonders of the eye and see how they attest to the glory of the Almighty Creator.

First, the external anatomy: the eye is protected on five sides by a bony pocket in the skull. These bones are in turn surrounded in many areas by air-filled sinus cavities. Further, the eye sits in a cushioning bed of soft fat, a shock absorber. A bony protruding front rim protects the front of the eye from large projectiles.

The front surface of the eye is indeed exposed, but the complicated eyelid protects it. You take this lid for granted. Do not, for even small lid problems can cause major ocular problems. The lid has multiple muscles and tendons as well as a full moistening and draining lacrimal system. In the lids are several types of glands that secrete the many components of the tears. Brushes on the lids, the lashes, function to avoid excess light and foreign bodies. The tear drainage systems with its glands, drainage, nerves, arteries, even the chemistry of the tears are all a shocking wonder.

In addition, the tears are not just a layer of water. Several sets of glands produce a highly complex thin layer. In this later are found antibodies and electrolytes. One can indeed spend a lifetime just studying the chemistry of the tears.

Do not think that the tears afford just an added bit of comfort. Not at all. Very many people are actually blinded by tear deficiencies.

And I can go on and on. The eye muscles, the miracle of the cornea, the very complex fluids inside the eye, the amazing lens, the miraculous retina, optic nerve and the visual components of the brain. The six muscles around each eye that are in constant coordination with each other. The biochemical, immunologic, and regenerating systems, the color and depth perception abilities, dark adaptation and so very much more. The sub-cellular components, the enzymes, proteins and nucleic acids, the electrical systems and the anti-microbial systems.

Each of these components has been researched ad infinitim. Book after book is available on every micro component of the eye. Moreover, every day I read of a new discovery, a new enzyme, new cellular components, and new genetic controls.

Ma rabu maasekha Hashem. How awesome are your creations, God.

There are those who peer into deepest space to see the glories of creation. But I find that we do not need a Hubbell Telescope to see God's creation, rather, a microscope will do just fine. There is a whole world in each of us that can serve as witness to Creation. Lo Bashamayim Hi, it is not in heaven.

But wait, what silliness is this? How many science teachers have we had who did everything that they could, either openly or by innuendo, to convince us that religion, or more specifically, that the whole God concept is primitive nonsense? How many times have we read that the concept of Intelligent Design is just plain wrong, that the theory of evolution can prove it all, and I mean all of it. How many of us get cold sweats when we read a Times article "proving" that our most basic religious concepts are silly? How many high school and college students fall into obsessive doubt, even depression, when they study evolution and learn that the Torah is wrong in describing Creation, that the whole thing is but a myth?

Yes, the study of evolution, both macro and micro, anatomic and physiologic, cellular and sub cellular can argue quite convincingly that it all just came about by itself. No God, no Creator, all just spontaneous development over fourteen billion years.

Nevertheless, the message that I am conveying is that if one looks through the microscope, studies and observes, one becomes overwhelmed and convinced that the Proof from Design is indeed correct. There was a Creator. Many scholarly books have been written, some by evolutionary scientists, that stress that science "proves" that there is a God. We should not be on the defensive. Science is really the clergyman's best ally.

However, you complain, "science is just not Jewish." After all, we know all about dinosaurs and evolution, a non-geocentric universe, and concept after concept that disagrees with our talmudic and rabbinic literature.

I say,“NO.” Science is not religious or irreligious, not Jewish, not Buddhist, no. Science describes. And from careful observation, it allows for accurate prediction. It can measure the speed of an electron, what effect penicillin has on a bacterium, or how my anatomy compares to that of a monkey. But as far as the why of nature, science has no way of knowing if God guided the evolution and development of the universe over the billions of years, or if human’s evolution was spontaneous, by random chance. It is for you and me to look at the world, to study in depth both the astronomical universe and the sub-microscopic particle and after unprejudiced thought to decide if we think that this all just came about. And for me, with the bits of knowledge that I have, particularly from my ophthalmic studies, the answer is heavily on the side of a planned and guided Creation.

In traditional Jewish circles one often hears adherents complaining that many of our modern findings contradict the science of the Torah, of the Talmud, and of the rabbis of the past, some of them who were outstanding scientists in their times. But I say that if you believe these sages who had no microscopes and no telescopes, no spectrophotometers and no cyclotrons, if you believe that if they were here today and had our knowledge, that they would still accept that the sun circles the earth, and that the world is less than 6,000 years old, then you insult these intellectuals to the core. No, I think that if Hazal were here today they would rejoice over our new knowledge of the Almighty’s handiwork. They would of course correct what they wrote in error about Nature.

Maimonides writes: “And what is the way that one comes to love and to be in awe of Him? At the time that the individual studies His amazing creations and His large creatures he will at once apprehend from them His wisdom, which is unappraisable and endless—immediately he loves and extols and praises and craves a great craving to know the great Almighty (MT HYT 2:2).

Imagine if our sages of old, if Maimonides, the talmudic rabbis, even the rabbis of the last century, could experience our world today. How very appreciative they would be of today’s scientific discoveries. They would write and modify their philosophies utilizing our new knowledge.

As we know, national prophecy ceased before the second Temple was destroyed. But I wonder if it really did; I wonder if the exponential growth of the knowledge of nature that has come about in the past decades is not in fact a new form of prophecy. Are these recent discoveries of the last years really God’s prophesying to us an additional canon, a canon of His blueprints, a canon that aids us to more love and revere Him?

Go to an operating room, witness an ophthalmic surgery; you would be stunned to see what man hath wrought. Instruments, chemicals
, computers—all were unknown but a few years ago yet today are our basic surgical tools. To me these are not just human discoveries and inventions; to me these speak of the presence of God in an ascending spiral toward His showing us His being, if not essence.

We can now do angiograms of the eye’s finest vessels, and we can open the eye and correct these vessels. We can use a concentrated light beam, a laser to repair retinal problems without opening the eye. We can even thread a catheter in from an artery in the groin and guide it into the finest brain vessels and when in the desired vessel, we can cause a clot or we can expand the vessel—all without ever opening the skull. Indeed a few years ago, I was involved in such a case and I must say that I never felt God’s presence as I did during the course of that patient’s cure.

Yes, humans have done wonders, but it is Almighty God that has guided them, given them the abilities and aided them in seeing the presence of the Creator.

Open up the books of science if you really want to see Ma’aseh Bereshith.

***** Practicing general ophthalmologist in Manhattan,NY, with a subspecialty in glaucoma. This article appears in issue 6 of *Conversations,* the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/observations-observant-ophthalmologist

The Blessing Asher Yatzar and the Miracle of the Human Kidney

By Dr. Evan I. Fisher *

Generations of elementary day schoolers have colloquially called the Asher Yatzar blessing “the bathroom Berakha.” As a nephrologist and director of a hemodialysis unit, I am intimately familiar with the terrible medical issues that arise when one is no longer able to make adequate urine because of a loss of kidney function. When looking at this Berakha through an understanding of modern science and medicine, its ancient wisdom truly shines.

The 4th century Amorah (Babylonian Talmudic scholar) Abayei listed this blessing along with other blessings one is expected to make after waking each morning (Berakhot 60b). Asher Yatzar opens with “Blessed is He who has formed man in wisdom.” I often pondered these words when reciting them while in college cellular biology or biochemistry classes and later in medical school.

The entirety of the human body is nothing short of astounding. Looking at every individual organ system shows an unbelievable functional design down to the smallest and most intricate details. There are more than 3 BILLION DNA base pairs in the human genome in each nucleated cell of the human body, and sometimes the smallest change in just one of those nucleotides can lead to horrifying effects. There are fatal errors in metabolic pathways that some may be born with, such as Tay-Sach disease. Later in life, if a single cell loses its ability to stop replicating, that cell may develop into a life-threatening cancer. After learning about how many mechanisms have to function to maintain normal health on a microscopic level, many young students during their first few years in medical school will come down with the so-called “medical student syndrome,” a tongue in cheek expression for the acute form of hypochondriasis associated with learning about all the ways the human body can fail. These students attribute symptoms from common conditions to life-threatening but exceedingly unlikely diseases about which they have recently learned.

In reference to the opening verse of Asher Yatzar, I have found great insight in Rashi’s explanation. Rashi cites a Midrash that states the “wisdom” (from the first verse of the blessing) and “wonder” (from the last verse) of human creation refer to the body’s ability to maintain its contents despite all of its openings and pores. In biology, we call this ability of an organism to keep the outside out and its inside in while still interacting with its surrounding environment “homeostasis.” Rashi’s remark on the human body marvels at the will and effort that the human body expresses when it eliminates waste while retaining its necessities in its never ending quest for maintenance of homeostasis.

Let us look at the function of the kidney in the light of Rashi’s explanation of “wisdom” and “wonder.” The kidney is a remarkable organ that functions as the body’s filter for the blood, removing not only excess water, but also excess salts as well as the toxins the body produces in the process of breaking down our foods. Kidneys are so active, in fact, that despite weighing only about 1 pound each, they receive about one quarter of the body’s blood flow – that is to say that every time the heart beats to pump blood, a quarter of that blood will go to the kidneys. The filter is only the very first part of the kidney’s job, however. An individual with normal kidney function may be able to pass more than 100 milliliters of water from the blood through the filter each minute. If there were no fluid reclamation process, then with 60 minutes in each hour and 24 hours in a day, a human would have to drink nearly 40 gallons (144 liters) of water each day to replace the fluid filtered and then lost through the kidney. Not only water is filtered, but a large component of our blood is sodium, at about 3.2 grams (140 millimoles) in each liter of blood. A person filtering 144 liters of blood daily would need to eat more than 1 pound (464 grams) of sodium each day to replace what the kidneys filter out. This is, obviously, not what we do, and in fact drinking even half of that much water or taking in half that much sodium in a single day is enough for an individual to poison himself. So, to prevent overwhelming dehydration or salt loss, the kidney has a remarkable system of tubes, one after each filter, that reabsorbs the vast majority of our filtered water and electrolytes while allowing excesses of each as well as our water-soluble toxins to leave our bodies.

Prior to 1967, kidney failure was a death sentence. Now, we have a remarkable medical procedure known as dialysis. With even a moment to reflect about dialysis, one realizes that the kidney is the only organ in the body that is absolutely essential for life, but, due to modern technology, a person can live without any function of said organ… indefinitely. This is beyond remarkable and has yet to be replicated for any other organ system. If someone loses his or her heart, lungs, liver, gastrointestinal tract, skin, or brain, that person has an extremely short life expectancy (minutes to days depending on the organ lost). Not so with the loss of the kidneys.

However, even with our remarkable modern technology, we still have yet to fully replicate the kidney’s function other than with complete replacement through transplantation. We are able to cleanse the body of toxins, but there are still many

aspects of this process we have yet to fix. For example, for a variety of reasons, people on dialysis build up plaque in their arteries much quicker than their non-dialysis bound peers. Even under ideal circumstances, with the very best care and the very best patient adherence to the tremendous diet and lifestyle adjustments a dialysis patient must make, he or she has a much higher likelihood of dying from a heart attack than a non-dialysis bound individual. In fact, even a modest reduction in kidney function that does not require dialysis comes with an increased risk for heart disease. When considered from this standpoint, I marvel that 1700 years ago, Abayei wrote of the closing of necessary openings when discussing urine output, because constriction and closure of the coronary arteries, the small arteries that supply the heart's blood supply, is the main cause for mortality in individuals with kidney disease.
Let me close with a story I first heard almost 20 years ago, when I was a Yeshiva student. The author is Dr. Kenneth Prager, an internal medicine physician and professor of medicine at Columbia University. He recounted the story of a young Yeshiva graduate, Josh, who, at age 19, sustained a terrible injury to the cervical vertebrae and spinal cord of his neck. After initially being paralyzed for months, Josh slowly regained use of his arms and legs, going from a tetraplegic to a hemiplegic (able to fully control only half of his body) and eventually being able to walk with the help of a leg brace and a cane. Despite the almost miraculous return of some of Josh's extremity function, he still required self-catheterizations for neurogenic bladder, a condition where one is unable to empty the bladder as the nerves leading to it are no longer functioning. An individual with this condition will have to deal with life-long bladder infections, urinary obstructions, and, if persistent, can eventually lead to complete renal failure and need for dialysis. In an individual as young as Josh, all of these complications were almost a certainty. His physicians had never seen neurogenic bladder from this degree of trauma recover before.

Dr. Prager ended his story as follows: "Then the impossible happened. I was there the day Josh no longer required a urinary catheter. I thought of Abayei's Asher Yatzar prayer. Pointing out that I could not imagine a more meaningful scenario for its recitation, I suggested to Josh, who was also a yeshiva graduate, that he say the prayer. He agreed. As he recited the ancient Berakha, tears welled in my eyes." At the end of the story, Dr. Prager revealed that this patient was indeed his son, Joshua Prager, who would go on to become an award-winning writer for the Wall Street Journal, author, and speaker. I strongly recommend that you watch his TED Talk.

"Blessed are You Lord our God, Ruler of the universe. In wisdom You have formed humans, creating within them channels innumerable. In Your sublimity, You know that were they rent or obstructed, we could not subsist even a short while. Blessed are You, Lord, Who heals all flesh and does wondrously."

* Chief of Nephrology, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, OH. Graduate of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington, University of Maryland, and University of Alabama Medical School.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/blessing-asher-yatzar-and-miracle-human-kidney

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Parshat Bereishis

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

[Because of fimily issues, Rabbi Singer's Dvar Torah is late this week. Watch for his column in future weeks.]

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Tax Season for Rabbis

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

[Rabbi Rube's Dvar Torah is delayed this week. Watch for his Devrei Torah in this place in future weeks.]

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah
Bereishit: Be Fruitful and Multiply

Immediately after creating man and woman, God commanded them, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the land and conquer it" (Gen. 1:28).

One might think that the very first mitzvah in the Torah should be some central precept — not worshipping idols, for example, or belief in one God. What is so important about procreation, that this was God's first command to humanity? And why was it necessary for God to command that which comes naturally to humans?

Foundation for Morality

The fact that pru u'revu (procreation) is a mitzvah is central to Judaism's worldview. This means that this activity is rooted in absolute holiness and goodness. Indeed, recognizing the holiness in procreation is the very basis for an ethical outlook.

If one is unable to perceive the absolute good that comes from the continued survival of the human race, then life itself is merely the lamentable triumph of our natural drives over the desire for good. Such a pessimistic view is the root of all negative traits and immoral behavior. The ultimate conclusion of such an outlook is that "Might makes right," that the strong and the fit deserve to rule over the weak.

However, when procreation is revealed to us as a holy obligation, then we must acknowledge that our inner drive for the formation of life is not a blind biological instinct, but an expression of innate Divine goodness. This knowledge should impress upon us the inner goodness to be found in all aspects of life.

Advancing the World

Nonetheless, we know that life is not easy. Life in this world is full of pain and suffering. The Sages concluded that it would better for the soul not to have been born (Eiruvin 13b). How can we bring children into such a world?

Just as this mitzvah reinforces our natural aspirations for goodness, so, too, it elevates our thoughts to recognize an underlying unity over time. The past, present, and future are all bound together. It is not for the flawed world of the present, nor the cruel world of the past, that we bear and raise children. Rather, we bring new souls into the world to advance the universe towards the infinitely bountiful world of the future.

Through the mitzvah of pru u'rvu, we actively participate in the world's gradual progression. We help advance the universe to attain the lofty state when life will be revealed in its noblest form — when cognizant, sentient living beings will attain a state of incomparably refined and meaningful life. Humanity will experience a world in which life is no longer an onerous burden, but a precious gift and a wonderful blessing.

The Divine mandate of "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the world" demands that we perfect the world in all aspects. We are charged to advance the world, both physically and spiritually. We are commanded to "fill the world" both quantitatively and qualitatively.

We rise to this challenge when we overcome the harsh features of a raw and untamed world, through our efforts to settle and refine it.

(Adapted from Otzarot HaRe'iyah vol. II, pp. 518-519.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/BREISH65.htm

Judaism and Progress
An Essay on Bereishit

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) *

The fundamental questions of Genesis

One of Rashi's most well-known exegetical questions can be found in his first comment on the Torah, where he famously asks, "Why does the Torah begin with the account of the Creation?" However, according to Nachmanides, the very question is unwarranted. While it is true, as Rashi points out, that Genesis lacks the sheer quantity of mitzvot that can be found in the other books of the Torah, Genesis stands out as a source of all the basic principles of our faith. Genesis is preoccupied with fundamental questions, its narratives brimming with exemplary figures whose actions shape our lives today. Clearly, it would have been impossible to begin the Torah without them.

The protagonists of Genesis are tzaddikim – supremely righteous individuals – but they are not flawless, one-dimensional characters. These are real people with real failings. To be sure, this does not mean that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or even Joseph and his brothers, should be regarded as sinners, but each of them encountered scenarios in which the correct path was not necessarily clear. Nevertheless, these are our tzaddikim, our "pillars of the world." Indeed, four of the "seven shepherds"1 – the Jewish people's spiritual fathers – are characters from the book of Genesis.

Parshat Bereishit itself addresses life's fundamental dilemmas in detail. Almost every important issue appears here, including ascent and descent, Creation, and the nature of man. Parshat Bereishit is also the single place where the Torah discusses the concept of sin directly: What is sin and what constitutes it? The parshah also deals with the more human challenges of life: relationships between people, between husband and wife, between a father and his sons; quarrels between brothers, even murder. These are the building blocks of life, and Parshat Bereishit is full of them.

The nature of Cain

Shaar HaGilgulim, a kabbalistic work, identifies two different types of souls and elaborates on them: souls that possess the nature of Abel and souls that possess the nature of Cain. This is not a division between good souls and evil souls, for this source attributes the nature of Cain to the souls of many great Torah leaders. Rather, the division is one of character. The souls with the nature of Abel are milder and more pleasant, whereas those with the nature of Cain are stronger and more creative.

This distinction becomes apparent when one considers the Torah's portrayals of Adam's sons, Cain and Seth, and their descendants. Cain is remembered primarily for killing his brother Abel, but we are also told something else about him: He is the first person to build. Indeed, while Adam lived for many centuries and possessed abundant wisdom, Cain is the one who built the first city.

A look at the passage on Lamech's sons, Cain's grandchildren, reveals that they are involved in creativity and progress. The first is a shepherd – not an ordinary shepherd, but "the father of all those who live in tents and keep herds." The second is the originator of music – "the father of all those who play the harp and flute." The third creates weapons – "who sharpened all implements of copper and iron."

It appears that, in a certain respect, Cain's descendants possess creativity the likes of which is not found among Seth's descendants. In this respect, Cain's legacy recalls Jacob's description of Reuben, his first-born: "Exceeding in eminence and exceeding in power."2 The "eminence" that Jacob speaks of here refers to innovation. This quality does not necessarily express itself positively; after all, Cain is also the first murderer. Nevertheless, Cain is man's first creation, Adam's firstborn son, of whom Eve says, "I have gained a man with God." In making this statement, Eve is actually exclaiming in wonderment, "I have created a human being in partnership with God!"

We don't know much about Seth's descendants, and the little information we do possess is often unclear. Regarding Enosh, one of Seth's sons, the Torah says, "It was then that men began to invoke the Lord by name," and it is not at all clear whether "to invoke the Lord by name" refers to something positive or negative. Regarding Enoch, another of Seth's descendants, it says, "Then he was no more, for God took him," and here, too, midrashic opinion is divided as to why God took him. According to one Midrash, God took him so that he should not become corrupt3. In another Midrash it says that Enoch transformed into the angel Metatron,4 and elsewhere it says that he is "prince of the world."5

At first glance, it seems that mankind survives through the line of Seth and Noah, since Cain's line was wiped out in the Flood. However, this is not necessarily the case. There is a difference of opinion regarding the role of Naama, Lamech's daughter. According to the Zohar, she was "the mother of the demons."6 In contrast, Genesis Rabbah states that she was the wife of Noah.7 If the latter opinion is true, Cain's line did not come to an end. Rather, Noah's children, who survived the Flood, represent a continuation of both Seth's line – through their father Noah, and Cain's line – through their mother Naama. This would explain the continued existence of the "nature of Cain" as an aspect of human nature and behavior.

Creation for the purpose of action

The nature of Cain is part of our makeup as human beings. What is a person's purpose in this world? To put it simply – as the text hints, "There was no man to till the soil"8 – his task is "to till it and tend it."9 Man is charged with preserving the world. He is the one who must water the trees and ensure that nothing is damaged.

But surely man's task cannot be summed up as being the Garden of Eden's caretaker, to tighten loose screws and clean up spills here and there. Man is charged with a greater mission, namely, "Which God -created to do (laasot)." Man was created to take dynamic action, not just to preserve the present state of things.

To be sure, at the conclusion of Creation it says, "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good"10 – the soil is "good," the trees are "good," the lights are "good" – but this does not mean that everything is perfect. When God creates the world, He intentionally leaves things in an incomplete state. It is as if He says, "Look, I made the pattern, but I left you several things to complete on your own." This introduces man's requirement "to do" – laasot – to take action, to become a partner, as it were, in the Creation. This is part of our essence as human beings.

Man, by his very nature, affects the world in a significant way. But it is not enough to simply maintain the world; he is also responsible for improving it. The very fact that man is capable of this demonstrates that he is also required to do so. Throughout history, our sages have disputed this subject, discussing the nature and scope of man's role in the world. Tineius Rufus,11 a Roman governor of Judea, famously challenged Rabbi Akiva on the matter of brit milah, asking, "What right do I have to cut off part of an organ that a person was born with?"12 Rabbi Akiva pointed to the changes that man effects on the soil. Man does not leave it in its original state. He plows it, sows it, and constantly interferes with God's work. Man does not perform these actions merely to preserve the soil, but to improve on it as well, allowing it to yield crops that are greater in quantity and quality. Man is continually changing the order, improving nature – and this is exactly as it should be.

The same basic question arises in other contexts as well. Many have argued that seeking the services of a physician is a form of heresy. If God ordained that someone should be ill, how can you intervene and try to cure him? Likewise, if God ordained that someone should be poor, how dare you interfere with His doings? The answer is that although God indeed decides that some people should fall ill and some people should be poor, there is no requirement to preserve that reality. Man is permitted – even required – to intervene.

Even Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, who denounced physicians in the strongest terms, saying that when the Angel of Death understood that he could not kill everyone by himself, he appointed the physicians to do it for him,13 did not oppose medicine per se. He himself claimed, on another occasion, that a father who does not vaccinate his son against smallpox is a murderer. Apparently, his opposition to physicians did not stem from a conception that it is forbidden to interfere with God's doings, but simply from his deep distrust of the physicians of his time. In a certain respect, he was truly justified in this distrust.

When the Torah says, "Which God created to do," this means that the world is full of imperfect things. As the Midrash puts it, "Everything created during the six days of Creation requires rectification".14 One can always question whether the "imperfections" we encounter in life result from a defect in Creation or from the sins of human beings. But once it is clear that the thorns and thistles of life – for whatever reason – do exist, we must not abide them. We fight them, destroy them, and try to grow other things in their place.

Although none of these issues are discussed explicitly in Parshat Bereishit, they are present in the background of all the stories that concern Cain's line. Forging copper and iron entails a thorough transformation of the raw materials of nature – an act that only human beings are capable of undertaking. The process of refining iron and copper entails many stages, and once this is accomplished, one can then progress further, to steel and aluminum. This creativity is not limited to

practical, technical areas such as mining, cutting, or chiseling. In spiritual areas as well, man acts within the world, advancing it toward perfection. Any man can sing with his own voice, but a man "who plays the harp and flute" uses the world's resources to develop aspects of humanity that extend beyond his basic existence.

The Torah's attitude to progress

Whether we like it or not, progress is always bubbling in the world. What is the proper attitude to these constant changes? There is a formula attributed to the Chatam Sofer: "Innovation is forbidden by the Torah." Indeed, there are many Jews who try to live by this mantra. Ultimately, however, it is notable that even Jews of the most conservative streams do not take this opposition to innovation as far as some non-Jews do. There are some non-Jews who truly believe that innovation is forbidden – the Amish in the United States, for example, whose dress resembles that of charedi Jews, with black hats and black garments. They abstain from technology almost entirely, do not travel in cars, and use no mechanical tools. They work the land, build their own houses – all in the old-fashioned manner. They do this because they believe, simply, that all innovation is a product of the devil. Some object to airplanes, reasoning: If God had wanted human beings to fly, He would have created them with wings. This is an excellent rationale, but I do not know of any Jew – neither from the Edah Hacharedit nor from the Neturei Karta – who refuses to fly because of it. Jews do not express their opposition to innovation in this way. In general, even those of us who claim to refuse innovation will not hesitate to benefit from the innovations of others. The permissibility of using electricity on Shabbat can be debated from various angles, but no one contests its use during the week.

A God-fearing individual need not necessarily fear the "new"; he need not necessarily feel that it is his duty to fight against new things and protest them. On the contrary, we believe that if "God created to do," then our duty is to improve and perfect the work of God in the world. God says, "I finished my work; now it is your turn."

Life is full of problems. This reality is an essential and built-in part of life. It is not merely a local problem, such as whether to wear leather belts or what to do on a rainy day; it is a question of approach: How should we deal with matters that require attention and rectification? Adam was told, "Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you."15 If a person sows in the ground, and thorns and thistles grow instead of his desired crop, he must ask himself: What should I do with this problem? This is an essential question, one that is not connected to external conditions or to advantages that some people may have over others, but only to how each person decides to deal with the problems that arise in life.

Fear of sin takes precedence over wisdom

Nowadays, when the power and the tools that man possesses are incomparably superior to those of the past, the question of how they should be utilized becomes critical. Our forebears never could have imagined what is available to us today. Once, for example, not everyone could be expected to know thousands of books by heart, whereas today we possess machines that put all these books at our fingertips, besides affording many other possibilities. This progress merely accentuates the imperative and the urgency of the question: What must be done with these tools? How can we exploit them to their fullest?

Here, however, a different side of progress presents itself. Many of the awful things in the world today exist as a result of technology. This is not because the tool itself is awful, but because its use was perverted. Today, everyone has more free time, but few people utilize this time properly. There are countless examples of things that once could not be done but now are possible. But what are we doing with all these possibilities? Are we improving the world with these new opportunities, or abusing them?

A verse in Deuteronomy can be expounded as follows: "You neglected the Rock that begot you"16 – the Rock, God, created you with the capacity to forget, so that you should not remember everything that happens to you. We experience trouble, pain, and suffering. God was concerned that all this would weigh down on us, so He created in us the ability to forget. Yet what did people do? The verse concludes, "forgot the Lord who brought you forth." God created you with the capacity to forget things that you don't need to remember, but instead you forget God Himself.

Our sages say of David and Bathsheba, "She was intended for David…only that he took her before she was ripe."17 The same applies to the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge as well. Adam took it before it was given to him, before the proper time had come, like an unripe fig. According to this interpretation, the tree and its fruit were actually intended for Adam; it was only prohibited to eat from it because the proper time had not yet come: Either the man was not yet ready, or the fruit was not yet ripe. The assumption is that there was an order to the world, a plan as to how things were supposed to unfold, and

it went awry. There are certain things that, when experienced at the right time, can be beneficial, but when experienced at the improper time can be damaging.

In light of this, we must ask today whether the world is running too fast. Is it progressing beyond all proportion? The human race now has tremendous power, primarily the power to destroy, on a scale that was unattainable to earlier generations. Do people today have more power than they require? Is it more than we can handle? Is our power greater than our ability to judge how to use that power? Is it possible that we are eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge when it is not yet ripe?

The Mishna in pirkei avot criticizes the person "whose wisdom is greater than his deeds."18 This is not a repudiation of wisdom, but merely a safeguard: If a person does not want wisdom to affect him like a "deadly poison," he must always apply it. To be sure, no matter how much one applies his wisdom, it is never enough; one must always progress and improve. The Talmud advises teachers of young children that once a pupil has reached the age of six, "stuff him like an ox,"19 i.e., feed him as much knowledge as possible. At the same time, however, a person's fear of sin should take precedence over his wisdom – his wisdom must never exceed his ability to use it.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Referenced in Micah 5:4, the Kabbalists interpreted the "seven shepherds" as the seven ushpizin who attend our festive meals throughout the holiday of Sukkot, namely, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David.

2. Gen. 49:3. 3.
Genesis Rabbah 5:24.

4 Genesis Rabbati 5:24.

5. Tosafot, Chullin 60a.

6. Bereishit 55a.

7. 23:3.

8. Gen. 2:5.

9. 2:15.

10. Gen. 1:31.

11. Known in the Talmud as Turnus Rufus.

12. Tanchuma, Tazria 5.

13. Sichot HaRan 50.

14. Pesikta Rabbati 23.

15. Gen. 3:18.

16. 32:18.

17. Sanhedrin 107a.

18. 3:17.

19. Ketubot 50a.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

The Three Stages of Creation (Bereishit 5779)

By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

"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 attributes: 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 ruach 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 (Prov. 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: mahchashva tova HaKadosh baruch 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. There may be a 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.

Shabbat Shalom. [Emphasis added]

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.

* 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. *See*

https://rabbisacks.org/three-stages-creation-bereishit-5779/

Peeling the Fruit

By Menachem Feldman * © Chabad 2021

If you had to pick one word that would describe all negativity in this world, a word that would capture the heart and soul of evil, which word would you choose?

These are some of the synonyms for the word "evil" suggested by the thesaurus: wicked, bad, wrong, immoral, sinful, foul, vile, dishonorable, corrupt, iniquitous, depraved, reprobate, villainous, nefarious, vicious, malicious.

The word the Kabbalah uses to describe all negative energy, all unholiness in the universe is, surprisingly, a neutral word, a word that does not evoke a strong image of evil. The Kabbalah refers to all evil with the innocent-sounding word kelipah, the Hebrew word for "peel."

The metaphor of a peel captures all we need to know about unholiness: its origin, its purpose, the challenges it presents, and ultimately the way to deal with it.

Where does evil come from? There were many who believed that evil could not possibly come from G d. Since G d is good, they argued, all evil must therefore come from Satan, from a power independent from, and contradictory to, G d. Judaism fiercely rejects this explanation. The most fundamental premise of Judaism is that Hashem echad, G d is one, and there can be no force independent of G d. Where, then, does evil and negativity come from?

The answer lies within the metaphor of the peel.1 The peel serves a double function: it both conceals and protects the fruit. When man removes the peel and consumes the flesh of the fruit, both the peel and the fruit have served their purpose.

The same is true for all cosmic energy. Everything G d created, including evil, serves a purpose. Yet there is a distinction between good and evil: the purpose of good is intrinsic, while the purpose of evil is to benefit the good. The purpose of evil is to enable the human being to choose good from evil by removing the “peel” and consuming the “fruit.”

Within evil itself, there are generally two categories: the evil that must be rejected outright, and the evil that could become positive if used to serve that which is holy.

This sheds light onto one of the earliest dramas of the Bible, a story that has captured the imagination of humanity since the beginning of time: the story of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden.

What did this mysterious tree represent? And why was its fruit so enticing to Eve?

The Torah tells us that after a conversation with the serpent, Eve perceived the beauty of the fruit: “And the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desirable to make one wise; so she took of its fruit, and she ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”2

Eve perceived that there was beauty in the “peel,” and therefore she desired the “peel” for its own sake. Before Eve’s conversation with the serpent, the entire fruit, including the peel, was perceived as nothing more than a tool that served holiness. Until the sin, all material pleasures served as a vehicle for people to escape the confines of self, relate to other people, and connect to the Creator. The heart of the sin was that the human being now perceived material pleasure for its own sake, confusing the peel for the actual fruit, the means for the end.

Each and everyEvery day, we face the allure day, we face the allure.

The choice is ours. We can live in the tranquility of paradise or be expelled into a world of tension and chaos.

We can desire materialism for its own sake, seeking the sensual with no higher purpose. We can choose the peel and reject the fruit. The result will be conflict with others, as selfish egos inevitably clash, and inner chaos, as the body struggles with the soul.

We can, however, perceive that all material blessing in our life must be enjoyed and used as a vehicle for spiritual life, thus bringing peace between people and within our own psyches.

We can recreate paradise.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Shalah 19b; Sefer Hamaamarim 5659, p. 176.

2. Genesis 3:6.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4546008/jewish/Peeling-the-Fruit.htm

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Shabbat Bereishit: Why Did G_d Crreate the World?

By Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2021

The Torah begins with the account of how G-d created the world in six days.

The Purpose of Creation

In the beginning of G-d’s creation of heaven and earth. (Genesis 1:2)

We are taught in the Midrash that “G-d created the world because He desired to make His home in the lower realms.” That is, G-d first created the world as a “lower realm”—i.e., a realm initially devoid of Divine consciousness, and even opposed to it — intending that humanity fill this world with Divine consciousness.

The tool G-d gave humanity to enable it to perform this feat is the Torah.

The drama of creation thus required three elements: the world, the human race, and the Torah, serving respectively as the setting, the actors, and the script.

G-d gave humanity the free choice to ignore Him and His intentions for the world, and this is exactly what the early generations did. In keeping with His decision to grant free choice, G-d obliged, so to speak, by removing His revelation from the world, hiding progressively further behind the façade of nature.

In response to most of humanity’s choice to ignore Him, G-d implemented His “contingency plan”: He took the one family that continued to nurture the original ideal of Divine consciousness and forged them into a nation—the Jewish people—with whom He then entrusted the mission of fulfilling His original purpose for creation.

The Jewish people would both serve as an inspiration and example for the rest of humanity and encourage them to play their role in His scheme for transforming the world into His home.

The Book of Genesis is the chronicle of how the creation of the Jewish people became necessary and how it came to be.

* — From *Daily Wisdom #1*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 28, Issue 1 **Shabbat Parashat Bereshit** **5782 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The Genesis of Justice

There are words that change the world, none more so than two sentences that appear in the first chapter of the Torah:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

The idea set forth here is perhaps the most transformative in the entire history of moral and political thought. It is the basis of the civilisation of the West with its unique emphasis on the individual and on equality. It lies behind Thomas Jefferson's words in the American Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal [and] are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights …" These truths are anything but self-evident. They would have been regarded as absurd by Plato who held that society should be based on the myth that humans are divided into people of gold, silver and bronze and it is this that determines their status in society. Aristotle believed that some are born to rule and others to be ruled.

Revolutionary utterances do not work their magic overnight. As Rambam explained in The Guide for the Perplexed, it takes people a long time to change. The Torah functions in the medium of time. It did not abolish slavery, but it set in motion a series of developments – most notably Shabbat, when all hierarchies of power were suspended and slaves had a day a week of freedom – that were bound to lead to its abolition in the course of time.

People are slow to understand the implications of ideas. Thomas Jefferson, champion of equality, was a slave-owner. Slavery was not abolished in the United States until the 1860s and not without a civil war. And as Abraham Lincoln pointed out, slavery's defenders as well as its critics cited the Bible in their cause. But eventually people change, and they do so because of the power of ideas planted long ago in the Western mind.

What exactly is being said in the first chapter of the Torah?

The first thing to note is that it is not a stand-alone utterance, an account without a context. It is in fact a polemic, a protest, against a certain way of understanding the universe. In all ancient myth the world was explained in terms of battles of the gods in their struggle for dominance. The Torah dismisses this way of thinking totally and utterly. God speaks and the universe comes into being. This, according to the great nineteenth century sociologist Max Weber, was the end of myth and the birth of Western rationalism.

More significantly, it created a new way of thinking about the universe. Central to both the ancient world of myth and the modern world of science is the idea of power, force, energy. That is what is significantly absent from Genesis 1. God says, "Let there be," and there is. There is nothing here about power, resistance, conquest or the play of forces. Instead, the key word of the narrative, appearing seven times, is utterly unexpected. It is the word tov, good.

Tov is a moral word. The Torah in Genesis 1 is telling us something radical. The reality to which Torah is a guide (the word "Torah" itself means guide, instruction, law) is moral and ethical. The question Genesis seeks to answer is not "How did the universe come into being?" but "How then shall we live?" This is the Torah's most significant paradigm-shift. The universe that God made and we inhabit is not about power or dominance but about tov and ra, good and evil.[1] For the first time, religion was ethicised. God cares about justice, compassion, faithfulness, loving-kindness, the dignity of the individual and the sanctity of life.

This same principle, that Genesis 1 is a polemic, part of an argument with a background, is essential to understanding the idea that God created humanity "in His image, after His likeness." This language would not have been unfamiliar to the first readers of the Torah. It was one they knew well. It was commonplace in the first civilisations, Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, where certain people were said to be in the image of God. They were the Kings of the Mesopotamian city-states and the Pharaohs of Egypt. Nothing could have been more radical than to say that not just kings and rulers appear in God's image. We all do. Even today the idea is daring: how much more so in an age of absolute rulers with absolute power.

Understood thus, Genesis 1:26-27 is not so much a metaphysical statement about the nature of the human person as it is a political protest against the very basis of hierarchical, class- or caste-based societies whether in ancient or modern times. That is what makes it the most incendiary idea in the Torah. In some fundamental sense we are all equal in dignity and ultimate worth, for we are all in God's image regardless of colour, culture or creed.

A similar idea appears later in the Torah, in relation to the Jewish people, when God invited them to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). All nations in the ancient world had priests, but none was "a kingdom of priests." All religions have holy individuals – but none claim that every one of their members is holy. This too took time to materialise. During the entire biblical era there were hierarchies. There were Priests and High Priests, a holy elite. But after the destruction of the Second Temple, every prayer became a sacrifice, every leader of prayer a priest, and every synagogue a fragment of the Temple. A profound egalitarianism is at work just below the surface of the Torah, and the Rabbis knew it and lived it.

A second idea is contained in the phrase, "so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky." Note that there is no suggestion that anyone has the right to have dominion over any other human being. In Paradise Lost, Milton, like the Midrash, states that this was the sin of Nimrod, the first great ruler of Assyria and by implication the builder of the Tower of Babel (see Gen. 10:8-11). Milton writes that when Adam was told that Nimrod would "arrogate dominion undeserved," he was horrified:

O execrable son so to aspire
Above his Brethren, to himself assuming
Authority usurped, from God not given:
He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl
Dominion absolute; that right we hold
By his donation; but man over men
He made not lord; such title to himself
Reserving, human left from human free.
(Paradise Lost, Book 12:64-71)

To question the right of humans to rule over other humans without their consent was at that time utterly unthinkable. All advanced societies were like this. How could they be otherwise? Was this not the very structure of the universe? Did the sun not rule the day? Did the moon not rule the night? Was there not a hierarchy of the gods in heaven itself? Already implicit here is the deep ambivalence the Torah would ultimately show toward the very

institution of kingship, the rule of "man over men."

The third implication lies in the sheer paradox of God saying, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." We sometimes forget, when reading these words, that in Judaism God has no image or likeness. To make an image of God is to transgress the second of the Ten Commandments and to be guilty of idolatry. Moses emphasised that at the Revelation at Sinai, "You saw no likeness, you only heard the sound of words." (Deut. 4:12)

God has no image because He is not physical. He transcends the physical universe because He created it. Therefore He is free, unconstrained by the laws of matter. That is what God means when He tells Moses that His name is "I will be what I will be" (Ex. 3:14), and later when, after the sin of the Golden Calf, He tells him, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." God is free, and by making us in His image, He gave us also the power to be free.

This, as the Torah makes clear, was God's most fateful gift. Given freedom, humans misuse it. Adam and Eve disobey God's command. Cain murders Abel. By the end of the parsha we find ourselves in the world about to be destroyed by the Flood, for it is filled with violence to the point where God regretted that He had ever created humanity. This is the central drama of Tanach and of Judaism as a whole. Will we use our freedom to respect order or misuse it to create chaos? Will we honour or dishonour the image of God that lives within the human heart and mind?

These are not only ancient questions. They are as alive today as ever they were in the past. The question raised by serious thinkers – ever since Nietzsche argued in favour of abandoning both God and the Judeo-Christian ethic – is whether justice, human rights, and the unconditional dignity of the human person are capable of surviving on secular grounds alone? Nietzsche himself thought not.

In 2008, Yale philosopher Nicholas Woltersdorff published a magisterial work arguing that our Western concept of justice rests on the belief that "all of us have great and equal worth: the worth of being made in the image of God and of being loved redemptively by God."[2] There is, he insists, no secular rationale on which a similar framework of justice can be built. That is surely what John F. Kennedy meant in his Inaugural Address when he spoke of the "revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought," that "the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God."[3]

Momentous ideas made the West what it is, ideas like human rights, the abolition of slavery, the equal worth of all, and justice based on the principle that right is sovereign over might.[4] All of these ultimately derived from the statement in the first chapter of the Torah that we are made in God's image and likeness. No other text has had a greater influence on moral thought, nor has any other civilisation ever held a higher vision of what we are called on to be.

[1] What I take to be the meaning is of the story of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge is for another time. In the meantime, see Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, I:2.

[2] Nicholas Woltersdorff, Justice: Rights and Wrongs (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 393.

[3] John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, 20 January 1961.

[4] Read Rabbi Sacks' Introduction to his Essays on Ethics to understand his expanded thoughts on this notion.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And these are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, on the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." (Gen. 2:4).

Imagine, for a moment, a world conducted according to strict Divine justice: punishment immediately meted out to a person committing a wrongdoing. What kind of world would this be?

On the one hand, we would never have the question of why bad things happen to good people, because an evil act would be stopped in its tracks; after all, any innocent person's suffering would violate the principle of Divine justice. Thus, the Nazi soldier's hand would wither in the process of unsheathing his knife to harm a Jewish baby, and the individual's voice would be silenced before he was able to articulate a word of slander.

On the other hand, if evil could not exist because of the all-encompassing powers of Divine justice, how would a human being differ from a laboratory rat, conditioned to move down a certain tunnel, jolts of electricity guiding its choices?

For the world to exist with human beings granted the choice to wield either a murderer's knife or a physician's scalpel, with human beings not as powerless puppets but rather as potential partners with the Divine, God must hold back from immediate punishment.

Compassion (rahamim) must be joined with justice (din) so that the Almighty will grant the possibility of the wicked to repent, the opportunity to those who have fallen to rise once again, and offer the challenge to a fallible humanity to perfect an imperfect world.

Indeed, Rashi, the Biblical commentator par excellence, notes that the first verse of Genesis, in describing the world's creation, uses not the Divine Name "Y-K-V-H" ("Hashem"), associated with the Divine attribute of compassion, but rather the Divine Name "Elokim", associated with the Divine attribute of justice, because initially The Holy One, Blessed be He, intended to create a world of strict justice.

However, the Almighty realized, as it were, that the world could not endure in such a mode, and therefore gave precedence to Divine compassion, uniting it with Divine justice. This explains, says Rashi, why the verse (Gen. 2:4) that leads this essay utilizes the Divine Names "Hashem Elokim", combining the Divine attributes of compassion and justice.

There is, however, a steep price we must pay for this Divine compassion and human freedom of choice: the suffering of innocents. If people have the free will to act, then some people will take actions that harm others. And even those who act appropriately will not necessarily see the blessings of their good deeds.

In fact, the Talmud declares, 'there is no reward for the fulfillment of commandments in this world' [Kiddushin 39b], leaving Divine reward and punishment for the afterlife. In effect, Divine compassion allowing for free will and ultimate repentance must enable individuals to do even what God, in a perfect world, would not allow them to do!

In accordance with this theology, a Hasidic teaching provides an alternative way of reading the first three words in the Torah, 'Bereishit bara Elokim,' usually translated, 'In the beginning God created…' Since there is an etnachta ('stop' sign; semicolon) cantillation underneath the third word in the phrase, the words can also be taken to mean, 'Beginnings did God create.' This reading provides hope and optimistic faith even in a world devoid of reward.

Anyone who has experienced significant lifestyle changes – whether repentant Jews, recovering addicts, or marriages between widowed or divorced people – understands the significance of the challenge and opportunity of 'another chance.' Free will, the concept of making your own choices, implies that sometimes mistakes will be made and tragedies will occur.

But instead of Divine justice descending as a bolt of lightning, Divine compassion emerges to absorb the lethal voltage. Holding off Divine justice is saying we always have another chance to better ourselves, to redeem the tragedy, to try again. And is this not what beginnings are all about?

True repentance means carving out a new beginning for oneself. Beginnings, therefore, go hand in hand with Divine compassion, and Divine faith in the human personality to recreate him/herself and to forge a new destiny. The sinner isn't shut out forever; he is always given another opportunity through repentance, another possibility of re-creating

for himself and his immediate environment, a new beginning.

Thus, in the Torah's opening word, Bereishit ("beginning"), we find not only the theme of the Torah, but of the entirety of existence: God created an imperfect and sometimes unjust world to allow the possibility of change and growth. If change weren't possible, if human behavior were as fixed as that of all other mammals, then there would be no need for, and no uniqueness within, human beings. The Glory of God and humanity is to be found in the opening phrase of the Bible: 'God created beginnings' – new opportunities and manifold re-awakenings.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Life, and Death, from Adam's Perspective

I invite you to imagine yourself as Adam or Eve. Put yourself in their shoes. Remember that, as the very first humans, they had a most unique perspective on every aspect of a newly created world. Their reactions to their surroundings and to each other had no precedent. They entered the world as adults and had to cope on their own with innumerable objects and situations without parental guidance and with no culturally established norms or guidelines.

They were the first to see "the fish of the sea and the birds of the skies and every animal that crept along the land." They were instructed to eat from the earth's vegetation, but they did not know what it meant to eat. They beheld a wondrous garden of gorgeous trees, which included the "tree of life," but what did they know about life? They were admonished not to eat from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil." But what did they know about good and evil?

Yes, they were instructed to desist from eating of the "tree of good and evil," lest they die. But what did they know about death? What did they really know about anything?

The first thing we ourselves discover about Adam's thoughts or feelings is when we read the Almighty's pronouncement that "it is not good for man to be alone, I will make him a help mate." The omniscient Almighty recognizes that Adam is lonely. Thus, the first thing we learn about Adam's inner life is that he is capable of feeling the poignant emotion of loneliness.

As the biblical narrative proceeds, we begin to learn more and more about how Adam and Eve react to the world around them. Adam assigns names to each member of the animal world. Adam and Eve relate to each other fondly. They yield to temptation, and, finally, they suffer the horrible pain of exile.

We eventually learn that they become parents, but we know nothing about how they went about the vital task of parenting. Did they love their children? Did they discipline them? Did they teach them right from wrong? The Torah provides us no answers to these questions.

Rather, the Torah proceeds to tell us a bit about their two sons, Cain and Abel, and about how Cain murdered Abel. But there is nary a word in the Torah about Adam and Eve's reaction to this horrible event. We are left wondering about how these parents reacted to tragic bereavement, to grief, to mourning, to death.

Remember, they had never experienced death. They knew not what death meant.

The curious student of Torah knows that he can count upon our Sages whenever he encounters a gap in a biblical story. In this case, a Midrash fills in the gap:

When Abel was killed, Adam and Eve were stunned. They sat and wept and mourned but did not know what to do. The watchdog of Abel's sheep guarded his corpse, protecting it from the beasts of the wild and from the birds soaring above. Then, a raven descended from the sky, a raven that had himself experienced the death of its mate. The raven declared, "I will teach Adam what to do." He took the body of the dead bird, dug a small ditch in the earth, and proceeded to bury it before Adam and Eve's eyes. Adam then said to Eve, "Let us do what the raven did!" They took Abel's corpse and buried it. (Yalkut Shimoni, 38)

I first encountered this Midrashic passage in a masterful Yizkor sermon delivered by Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, a former Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, who passed away in 1945.

This sermon is included in the first volume of Rabbi Amiel's Derashot El Ami. There, Rabbi Amiel eloquently elaborates upon the story, stressing the helplessness that Adam and Eve experienced in the face of a phenomenon that they had never previously encountered. He paints the picture of a man and woman who desperately attempt to revive the body of their beloved son. They cannot accept the finality of his death. That is, until the raven comes along.

Rabbi Amiel points out that Jewish tradition sees the raven as the very symbol of cruelty. He cites the verse in Psalms (147:9), which is part of a hymn to the Almighty who gives "to the raven's brood what they cry for." Apparently, the raven ignores even its own young. To which I would add the verse in Job 38:41, which reads, "Who provides food for the raven when his young cry out to God and wander about without food?"

The message of Rabbi Amiel's sermon is this: Humans must not emulate the raven's response to death. For humans, the dead are not merely "dead and buried." The point of the Yizkor ceremony is to perpetuate the memory of the dead, to keep them alive in our own consciousness. Human life, any and every human life, is too precious to be forgotten. The raven may be cruel to its young, but we must affectionately care for our young. The raven digs a grave and cruelly forgets what it buried there. But we remain aware of those who, although consigned to the grave, live on in our hearts and minds.

How well do I recall the remarks made by the late Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach to a group of rabbis who sought his guidance. He urged us to impress upon our congregations that Judaism believes in techiyat ha'metim, that the dead will live again. He pointed out that in the relatively brief second blessing of the Shemoneh Esreh, we mentioned the concept of resurrection no less than six times!

I've used Rabbi Amiel's Yizkor sermon more than once in my rabbinic career. But I've occasionally taken the liberty to differ with Rabbi Amiel's dim assessment of the raven. He sees the raven as the irredeemable embodiment of cruelty. But I prefer to point out that the raven appears more than once in scripture. In fact, it plays a role in next week's Torah portion when Noah sends it out of the Ark on a futile mission. Moreover, much later in history, the ravens prove capable of a remarkably admirable task.

I refer to the passage in I Kings 17:2-7. There, the story is told of the prophet Elijah who informs King Ahab that there soon would be "no dew or rain except at my bidding." The Almighty then instructs Elijah to go into hiding by the Wadi Kerit, just east of the Jordan. There, he will be able to drink from the wadi, and will be fed by the ravens. Elijah obeys, and lo and behold, "the ravens brought him bread and meat every morning and every evening, and he drank from the wadi."

Some commentaries insist that the ravens were chosen as the Almighty's messengers to impress upon Elijah that he was as cruel as are ravens by prophesizing drought and famine. However, other commentaries suggest that this episode demonstrates that even ravens can overcome their instinctive cruelty and become noble benefactors of a starving human.

The raven thus becomes a model for teshuva, for the human capacity to overcome even one's darkest instincts. No longer need the raven represent callous disregard for the dead. After feeding Elijah, the raven is transformed into a symbol of heroic rescue, of life-sustaining forces.

Fortunately, we can all progress beyond what Adam and Eve may have learned from the raven and instead learn the dual lesson of eternal respect for the dead and compassionate regard for the living.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Did you know that God used speech to create our world?

The Mishna in Masechet Avot at the beginning of Chapter 5 tells us,
"B'asara ma'amarot nivra haolam," – "The world was created with ten utterances."

This is a reference to this week's Parsha of Bereishit, in which on nine different occasions the Torah says, "And God said let there be -" this or that. In addition, the opening verse of Bereishit according to the Gemara is also a statement.

The Mishna is pointing out that surely Hashem could have created the world with one utterance. Why ten utterances? The Mishna gives the following answer: In order to increase the reward for the righteous who sustain the world created with ten utterances and to increase punishment for the wicked who destroy the world created in this way.

What I find intriguing is that the Mishna points out that Hashem could have created the world with one utterance such as, "Let there be a world." But the Mishna could have asked a better question. Surely Hashem didn't need any utterance at all! God is all powerful! He can just think, "Let there be a world," and the world would come about!

It is clear that Hashem wanted to show us the power of speech. Speech can create a world and speech can destroy a world.

Indeed we find how powerful speech is, prompting King Solomon in the book of Mishlei (Proverbs) to declare,
"Chaim v'mavet b'yad halashon," – "Life and death are in the hands of the tongue."

The great commentator Ibn Ezra divides up all the commandments of the Torah into three categories:

Mitzvot asei – the practical commandments which require action,
Mitzvot halev – commandments of the heart which require contemplation, thought, belief, feelings, and
Mitzvot hapeh – the oral commandments – numerous mitzvot which are performed through us saying something or desisting from

saying something.

In addition so many of the mitzvot asei the practical commandments are introduced by a statement, a bracha (blessing), highlighting for us how crucially important it is what we say.

Through our sayings we can be mekadesh shem shamayim – we can sanctify the name of God in this world, or God forbid through what we say we can also be mechalel shem shamayim – we can desecrate the name of God. We can bring kedusha – added holiness – into this world through our oral statements and at the same time we can destroy.

We're living in a world in which, worryingly, there is an increasing tendency for people to try to demonise others. Instead of engaging in a machloket lesheim shamayim – an argument for the sake of heaven – where you tackle the issue rather than the person pronouncing it, now there is a tendency to try to cancel out that person, to blacken his or her name, to tackle the individual and to try and destroy that person.

From Hashem Himself we learn how speech needs to be used for constructive and positive purposes. After all, God created our world through speech. So let us therefore strive to be always amongst the righteous who sustain the world through what we say.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Book of Bereishit: Becoming Partners in God's Creation
Rabbi Boaz Pash

Once again, we find ourselves reaching for the first volume on the far right of the shelf – the Book of Genesis, Bereishit. A new year has begun; a new beginning, new weekly portions to be read, and maybe, if we are lucky enough – new insights will be gained. Hopefully we will open the Book of Bereishit week after week, read it with new eyes, as if we have never read it before, never perused its exegesis nor contemplated its significance. New thoughts will blossom. New life rekindled.

In fact, anytime we take a new book in hand, a moment before opening it and reading it, we wonder: What are our expectations? What do we hope to find in it? If it's a suspense novel, the answer is pretty straightforward – we expect to be excited; we want to be swept into the plot, in which the good guys always win and the bad guys are defeated forever. If it's a classic literary work, we expect to be inspired by lofty literary forms, complex characters, exalting expressions as well as values and dilemmas that will highlight the fact that humans are superior to all other living creatures. If it's a non-fiction work, we might pay less attention to the language or the emotions the work evokes, and focus mainly on the information it provides – in this case, the input is paramount. In short, every book has its unique features.

What are our expectations of Bereishit, which we have just pulled off the shelf? And what do we generally expect when reading the weekly Torah portions? Superficial excitement? A convoluted plot? Lofty language? Reading about a crime that doesn't pay off? I don't think any of the above are what the Torah wishes to convey or evoke.

If so, what does the Torah wish to teach us?

Our Sages, as can be expected, gave this matter their attention as well.

Rabi Akiva's words are well known: "'Love thy neighbor as yourself' – this is a fundamental Torah principle."

Less known, but no less important, are the words of Ben Azzai (disciple and friend of Rabbi Akiva), which either follow or precede Rabbi Akiva's words: "'This is the book of the generations of Man' – this is a fundamental Torah principle." (Midrash Rabbah 24:7). Or more simply put: "This is a core principle in understanding the Torah."

Ben Azzai was probably referring to the entire verse he was quoting – "This is the book of the generations of Man. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; male and female created He them, and blessed them, and called their name Man, in the day when they were created." (Genesis 5:1-2)

This is the story of Man, says Ben Azzai – not as an individual, but as mankind, the pride of God's creation.

The Book of Genesis tells the story of the universe, of humanity in its initial stages – a tale that will be told and retold in different versions throughout history, sometimes as a tragedy and sometimes as a comedy, as historians like to put it. The book will give a vivid description of the "germinal humanity" with the clear objective of letting humanity shape itself, based on very clear options: catastrophic apocalypse or utopian Messianic times; the consoling prophecies of Isaiah, or Jeremiah's prophecies of doom and destruction. Humanity's great adventure begins right here, but how will it end? There are a great many possibilities.

But it is not humanity that is telling its story. Rather, God almighty, who makes His appearance at the start of the human story, is the playwright who weaves the plot, chooses the genre and determines how His creation will play out. It is He who knows the purpose of all creation; foresees all that is hidden; pulls the ropes behind every scene; and also knows – perhaps even decides – what will be the final scene of the human saga. This means that although he story is told from the standpoint of Man, the protagonist, the plot is directed and navigated by (supposedly implicitly; de facto – quite explicitly) by the Creator Himself.

This notion is expressed in many of our Sages' words. Here is one such example:

"The light created by the Almighty on the first day was of such a nature that Man could look through it and see the world until eternity. When God looked and saw how flawed are the deeds of the generations to come, He took that light and concealed it. And for whom did he conceal it? For the righteous, in the world to come." (Babylonian Talmud, Chagiga 12)

The Midrash, too, describes the primal moment of Man's creation, and how at that point in time, the so-called Big Bang, the encounter between the Great Artist and His creation – the history of all future creation is embedded. This is how the Midrash portrays it in its picturesque and figurative manner:

"When the Blessed One created the first Man, he extended him from one end of the earth to the other, from East to West and from North to South, such that Man filled all spaces and voids…and this first Man lay before the Creator as a lifeless lump. And God showed him all generations to come; each generation and its scholars; each generation and its sages; each generation and its scribes; each generation and its leaders. All, with no exception, had already been inscribed in the Book of the Generations of Man. As is written: 'This is the book of the generations of Man.'" (Bereishit Rabbah 8).

The book was written by God. He may even have written the outline of the plot. However, the details are written by Man himself. Man's mission is to discover the Divine Intent in all of creation and in every historical event, and make these compatible with the Creator's primal intent.

The Book of Genesis teaches us that we continue God's act of creation in this world; we are partners – whether of equal standing or secondary – to God's great enterprise. In much the same manner that God had created worlds and destroyed them, Man, too, has the ability to do so, and put the wheels of history into motion. Man can either be a partner in God's creation by doing justice, keeping the Sabbath, telling the truth, lending money to the needy and so forth; or else Man can become a destructive force by preventing the study of Torah, by being impulsive and malicious; by acting miserly; by spreading words of gossip and harming others…

If we revert to our original question – what should we be looking for when reading the Book of Genesis once again? The answer that must follow is – ourselves. Where is my personal Book of Man's Generations? How does this book tell my own story, as a human, as a nation, as a tiny atom in the humungous and infinite mosaic of the entire cosmos? Are my ideas in keeping with the ideas expressed therein? How will I find the Man inside me,

my individual personality within the Book of Man's Generations? And perhaps the most disconcerting question: How can I, on the personal, family, national and universal level, contribute to the continuity of this divine-human plot? Have I, as an individual or as part of a collective, left a mark on one of its pages? Have I left an impression on a single line, a word, or even a letter?

In the Book of Genesis there are hardly any practical commandments; so much so, that our Sages question the necessity of this book and its inclusion in the Five Books of Moses – a composition comprised mainly of Israel's binding laws and commandments. Rashi, in his opening exegesis on the book, begins with this very question: "The Torah should have opened with 'This month shall be for you the first of all months' (Exodus 12, 2), as this is the first commandment given to the People of Israel. Wherefore did the Torah begin with Genesis?" (Rashi on Genesis 1,1).

Nonetheless, there are a few commandments in this book, among which is the first Torah commandment to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land" (Genesis 1, 28). One cannot but turn to the end of the Torah to find the last written commandment; surely the first and last mitzvah must be connected in some way, as any end is connected to its beginning, as any flame connects to its wick. The last mitzvah is "And now write for you this song," whereby every Israelite is commanded to write his very own Torah scroll. Is this perhaps the Book of the Generations of Man mentioned in the beginning of Genesis? If so, perhaps the message to us is that the general story titled 'The Generations of Man' in the book of Genesis, as well as the unique story of the history of the People of Israel mentioned in the following four books of the Torah – which together make up the foundation for humanity's entire historical account – should serve as a framework or mold into which we must pour our own personal human account, and which we are commanded to write with our very own hands.

In fact, Ben Azzai fulfilled his own words quite literally, when he set aside the fulfillment of the Torah's first mitzvah in favor of the last – the latter was viewed by him as the loftiest expression of the former, being fruitful and multiplying through Torah.

Thus, when we take the book of Bereishit in hand once again, on the eve of Shabbat Bereishit, and reread the ancient book which is forever relevant, we might find ourselves engaged in a different sort of reading: one through which I try to find myself in the book; a reading that shows me a reflection of who I am; a reading that makes me feel that I belong in the story and that the story belongs to me – both on the personal-emotional level, as well as on the national and universal level; so much so, that I feel I myself have written it. If one toils and searches – one finds; so our Sages taught us. We might not find exactly what we are looking for, but we are sure to find some of what the Divine wisdom wanted us to find and make it our own.

The Book of Genesis, Bereishit, is indeed the Book of the Generations of Man, and one rule of thumb when it comes to Torah reading – read it with the aim of finding your own human story in it.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yakov Haber

The Split Personality of Man

"וייצר ד' אלקים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה" - "And Hashem Elokim formed man [out of] dirt from the earth, and He breathed into his nostrils a soul of life, and man became a living soul" (Bereishis 2:7). Rishonim debate the exact nature of the soul and the interrelationship of its diverse aspects. This verse, as noted by Ramban, at first glance seems to indicate that the human soul comprises a single entity endowing life, growth, movement, intellect and speech. Before the "breathing in" of the soul, man was a lifeless body. According to this interpretation, the first word "man" in the above verse refers to the lifeless, if elegant, clod (golem) of dirt forming the body of man. Only after the "breathing in" of the soul did man become simultaneously a living, moving, thinking, and speaking creature.[1]

However, Ramban quotes Onkelos' translation of "ויהי האדם לנפש חיה" as "and it [the soul] became in man a speaking spirit (לרוח ממלל)". This implies that man already was alive before the entry of the soul which added the power of speech. Ramban continues to explain the verse in accordance with this understanding: In contrast with the first approach, the first word "man" refers not to a lifeless form but to Hashem's creating man with a soul akin to an animal's soul endowing life and movement within man, this soul being rooted in earthly material. Only afterward, did Hashem "breath in" a supernal upper-worldly soul. Ramban prefers this view that there are multiple souls within man: an animal-like soul and a uniquely human soul from the supernal spheres. As a result, Adam did not become a living being through the entry of the soul through his nostrils for he already was one but became controlled by this higher-level soul. More clearly, the letter "lamed" of "לנפש חיה" according to the first interpretation connotes "transformation" from dead to alive. According to the second, preferred approach, it means "controlled by". Ramban further verifies this approach quoting additional sources in Chazal corroborating this view of the dual soul.

In the daily prayer service we recite, "אלקי, נשמה שנתת בי טהורה היא" - "My God, the soul You have placed in me is pure". The prayer at first glance seems circular. Declaring before God, "the soul You have placed in me" implies that there is a distinct self-indicated by the word "me" who is making this declaration of the soul having been placed inside him. But the body is not alive without the soul! This implies that man has life even without this higher-level soul. Presumably, this is an allusion to the animal soul.

In trying to understand the widespread view apparent in the words of Chazal that Olam Haba, the world to come, is a world after the messianic era, after the national resurrection , consisting of body and soul, Rishonim question the need for a body in an eternal world of reward where human action is no longer needed. The body, at first glance, being merely a tool in attaining eternity, would seemingly be useless in the world of reward. [2] Rabbeinu Bechaye (Devarim 30:15) answers that since the body earned the reward together with the soul, Divine justice dictates that it too should receive the reword. Initially, this view seems difficult. If the body without the soul is lifeless then what is the meaning of bestowing reward upon it! It is not a sentient being without the soul; only the soul is the living entity in the body. This would be the equivalent of paying the plumber only when he is holding his wrench or the computer programmer only when holding his laptop! It seems clear that R. Bechaye also assumes Ramban's[3] view that there is a lower level animal soul within man which gives basic life. But this is not the soul which endows him with Divine-like qualities and connects him to his Creator; that is accomplished by the higher-level Divine soul. Divine justice dictates that even this lower level human entity animated by the animal soul also share in the reward of the afterlife.

Ramchal in Derech Hashem (1:3:7,12) goes a step further. The higher-level soul was meant to elevate the body to become a holy entity itself. As a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, this ability was limited as a result of the corruption of the body. Only after death and recreation of the body, only after the soul exits the body after death and its enormous spiritual power is rejuvenated and 'recharged' can it re-enter the body and elevate the body as it was originally designed to do. In so doing, the soul acts in a God-like manner bestowing kindness on the needy, less fortunate body. But the body is lifeless by itself; what is the meaning of bestowing chessed on a lifeless entity! Ramchal by the term "body" seems also to be referring to the body-animal soul entity not just the biological body. It is this entity to which the higher soul bestows its kindness and elevates.

This view is assumed as the cornerstone of all kabbalistic discussions of the soul and serves as a major point of the analysis presented by works such as Nefesh Hachaim and Seifer HaTanya in turn quoting from the writings of the Ari z"l rooted in turn on sources in the Zohar HaKadosh.[4] This complexity of the human entity: on the one hand human animal - homo sapiens , but on the other, angelic and majestic being as reflected by his two souls serves as an important driving force in understanding ourselves and what we have the ability to accomplish. Science unfortunately focuses too often on the animalistic side of

man comparing him to apes and other animals. [5] A reflection of the true nature of man should allow for a fuller appreciation and, as a result, utilization of true human ability.

Chazal (Chagiga 16a) express this duality succinctly: There are six characteristics of people (sons of man): three are similar to the ministering angels; three are similar to animals. The three similar to ministering angels are: they have intellect like angels, they walk with an erect posture like angels and speak in the Holy Tongue like angels. The three similar to animals are: they eat and drink like animals, they reproduce like animals and they excrete like animals.

Furthermore, Chazal (Berachos 10a) extol the virtues of the higher-level soul: The five phrases "let my soul bless [God]" (Tehillim 103-104), about whom did David declare them? About HaKadosh Baruch Hu and the soul. Just as the Holy One blessed be He fills the world, so too the soul fills the body. Just as Hashem sees and is not seen, so too the soul sees and is not seen. Just as HaKadosh Baruch Hu sustains the whole world, so too does the soul sustain the whole body. Just as HaKadosh Baruch Hu is pure, so too is the soul pure. Just as Hashem dwells in inner chambers, so too does the soul dwell in inner chambers. Let the entity which has these five aspects come and praise the One who has those same five aspects!

This clearly is a reference to the upper, uniquely human, even angelic, higher level soul which allows mankind to directly relate, and to some extent, however unbelievable it seems, to emulate his Creator!

Alshich has a remarkable statement on the opening verse of Parashas Kedoshim: "Be holy for I am Holy, I am Hashem, your God" (19:1). The question is obvious: how can man be commanded to be holy since God is Holy. How can one compare the created with his Creator! Answers the Alshich, since God breathed in a God-like soul inside of man, we have the ability to somewhat emulate the holiness of our Creator. This helps explain the equally remarkable conclusion of the Midrash Rabba (24:9) on this verse: "I might think [you must be as holy] as Me, therefore the verse states,'I am Hashem, your God'".

We constantly struggle as to who will be the master, the animal soul or the Godly soul. Originally the dominant force was clear as the above-quoted Ramban teaches, "ויהי האדם לנפש החיה", man was controlled by his Godly soul marshaling the forces of the animal soul and the body to heed his true Master's call. After Adam and Chava sinned, they knew they were unclothed (3:7). Malbim (2:25) explains: "Before the sin, the soul was not connected to the body in a fused connection but in a proximal manner. The body was like a garment which could be removed and worn such that in time of contemplation and prophecy their soul removed itself from their body. Since the body was like a garment there was no need for another one. One already clothed is not 'arum. Only after the sin, when the body fused with the soul, and they became as one, from that time onward was he considered 'arum when walking without a garment." This "fusion" leads to "confusion" and the constant struggle of the two souls within man.

R. Chaim Volozinher in his commentary to Pirkei Avos (1:1), Ruach Chaim, writes that the uppermost parts of a person's Divine soul remains on high; the body is like a "shoe" enclothing the lower parts of it. As a result, he has the ability to affect the upper worlds by his actions "filtering" trough the various levels of his unique soul. Elsewhere, (Nefesh Hachaim 1:4) he writes that even the "simple Jew" has this ability to literally affect the spiritual cosmos! He compares the enormous effects of human actions to a rope being moved on one end affecting the other end however distant it may be, as the verse states "יעקב חבל נחלתו", (Devarim 32:9) which can be translated as "Jacob is the rope of His inherence" (ibid.1:17). This powerful ability is rooted within the mystery of the Divine soul.

May Hashem guide us to return as closely as possible to the original state of man whereby the Godly soul is the dominant force in our lives constantly elevating us in our journey every upward serving and cleaving to our Creator.

[1] This approach is espoused by Rambam in his Shemoneh Perakim.

[2] It is precisely this difficulty which leads Rambam to reject this view of soul-body existence in Olam Haba and adopt the view of existence in Olam Haba as consisting of soul alone after death.

[3] His teacher's (Rashba's) teacher.

[4] This author is certainly no expert is these works or any kabbalisitic ideas but has merited slightly studying them.

[5] I have oftentimes noted that Darwin's second volume on evolution focusing on his theory of the development of man from primates in which he writes that man's intellect is different from that of primates only in degree and not fundamentally (!) is entitled "The Descent of Man". Unfortunately, his viewpoint truly serves as a "descent", from man's true nature of majestic, angelic being to higher level primate!

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Really SOMETHING

BREISHIS… In the beginning of G-d creating the heavens and the earth was astonishingly empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit of G-d was hovering over the face of the water. (Breishis 1:1-2)

What was the first thing that was created? The answer may be surprising, but it is openly stated in the first verse. In order to get it right let's begin from the beginning!

Why did the Torah begin with the letter BEIS? Beis is the 2nd letter. Years back I spoke to a group of scientists At NASA (v' Nishma) and they all agreed that no one has even a hint of a theory about what might have preceded the BIG BANG, which is the dominant paradigm about the origin of the universe. We know what preceded the BIG BEIS of BREISHIS. It was the ALEF of ADON OLAM ASHER MALACH B'TEREM KOL YETZIR NIVRA… Master of the world Who was the King before anything was created. It was the ALEF of OHR AIN SOF, "The Endless Light", which the mystical books use in reference to HASHEM. Also it was the ALEF of ANOCHI HASHEM – I am HASHEM which was pronounced to the entire Nation of Israel on Mount Sinai. Before the world was HASHEM!

The Zohar says the HASHEM looks into the Torah and creates the world. Like the light of a camera passing through film and projecting an image on a screen so the illusion of this world is manifested. The word for create in that first verse in Torah is BARA. It means to create something from nothing. We take things that already exist and reshape or reorganize them. HASHEM created the laws of physics and every molecule of existence from before scratch. From a physical standpoint The Almighty created the world SOMETHING from NOTHING because there was no physicality prior to HASHEM willing it into existence, but from the ultimate spiritual standpoint HASHEM actually created the world NOTHING from SOMETHING, because HASHEM is eternal existence.

Now we can go back to our question. What was the first thing that was created? The answer is NOTHING! It's the "illusion" of a world that on the extreme micro and macro scale is more empty space than substance. TOHU v'VOHU… "astonishing emptiness" or as King Solomon says, HEVEL HAVALIM…breath of breath.

Now let's be very practical about applying this knowledge. We walk away from 51 Days of AVODA – spiritually rigorous days, starting with Rosh Chodesh Elul and concluding with Simchas Torah, and all we have is one small but very powerful souvenir. MASHIV HaRUACH v'MORID HaGESHEM… a small phrase added to our daily prayers. We begin mentioning the need for rain in Israel, as we credit HASHEM for delivering winds and bringing down the rain.

Taken literally, though, the words take on a new dimension. How so? HASHEM miraculous contracts the most sublime Ruchnios – Spirituality and collapses it into Gashmios – physicality. Though our Avodas HASHEM, our spiritual efforts, we discover the pure spirituality in the material world around us and within us, and we return it to HASHEM.

It starts with us first making best use of the stuff we have and converting it to RUCHNIOS and then we are granted and entrusted with even more GASHMIOS. Now let us visit the words literally and understand our mission in this world and the mandate of this tiny phrase. Literally, "Return the RUACH (spirituality) and bring down the GESHEM (materialism).

When we go from the BEIS of this world that houses us for a finite period and return to that ALEPH. That spells out BEIS – ALEPH, BA… OLAM HABA – the world to come, the world that comes from our journeying in this world. This vacuous universe may look like NOTHING from an ultimate perspective, but we can turn it back into really SOMETHING!

BS"D

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **BEREISHIS** - 5782

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Netiv Aryeh HaRav Avigdor Nebenzahl shlita
BEREISHIT 5777
WHAT WAS WRONG WITH KAYIN'S OFFERING?

"After a period of time, Kayin brought an offering to Hashem of the fruit of the ground" (Bereishit 4:3). The first person in the history of mankind which the Torah relates that he wished to bring an offering to Hashem was Kayin. The Ramban explains that Kayin as well as the others who brought offerings in the early days of civilization (such as Noach) understood the hidden power of an offering and its ability to awaken the upper worlds. With this in mind, the Meshech Chochma (beginning of Vayikra) explains the reasons posited by the Rambam and Ramban behind the mitzvah of bringing offerings, he explained that the offerings brought on the bamot were intended to prevent the Jewish nation from worshipping avoda zara (see Rambam Moreh Nebuchim 3:22). However the offerings in the Beis Hamikdash were to be a pleasing offering to Hashem and to create unification in the worlds above. According to the Ramban the word korban implies a closeness, bringing the unification and forces above close to us (Ramban Vayikra 1:4, see also Rabaenu Bechaye there 9).

Some say that if we combine the words of Chazal (Pirkei D'R' Elieizer 31) that Kayin, and Adam Harishon and Noach as well, brought their offerings on Mt. Moriah, the site of the Mikdash then we now learn the initial ones to bring offerings not only understood the deep meaning behind offerings and the pleasant aroma it brings to Hashem but they also understand the most auspicious place for it (see Meshech Chochma Bereishit 8:20).

If so, Kayin was the first of the brothers who felt an awakening to bring a gift to the King of the world. Hevel felt this awakening only at a later stage, as the pasuk states: "and as for Hevel he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and from their choicest (ibid. 4). The implication here is that Hevel's offering was secondary to Kayin's yet the Torah informs us: "Hashem turned to Hevel and to his offering, but to Kayin and to his offering He did not turn". Hashem accepted specifically Hevel's offering however the Torah does not explain the reason.

On the surface we would explain that Kayin's offerings should be more desirable for he was the one who introduced the idea of giving to Hashem by giving something to the One Whom "the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain" (Melachim I 8:27). Even though we are already accustomed to the idea that Kayin was evil and Hevel was the righteous one and therefore it is obvious that Hashem does not wish to accept the offering of an evil person, but we must realize that we are speaking about an event which occurred prior to when Kayin killed Hevel. At first glance it would appear that Kayin was greater than Hevel with regards to the idea of bringing an offering, which behooves us to try to understand why Kayin's offering was rejected (see Sichot Mussar 5732, essay 7).

Perhaps already from the first offering described in the Torah, Hashem wishes to teach us the most basic foundation in offerings and that is that the offering itself is not an end but only a means to an end. What is the goal of an offering? It is to elevate the spiritual level of man - Hashem has no desire for offerings in and of themselves unless it stirs a person to changing his ways. Since Hashem saw that Kayin's heart was not as pure as Hevel's he therefore preferred Hevel's, to teach future generations that Hashem desires the heart.

However based on the teaching of R' Yehudah Halevi in Kuzari (2:14), the answer to our question is very simple - the initiative to bring offerings did not emanate from an inner desire to come close to Hashem rather it was within the framework of a battle between two brothers over Eretz Yisrael. When time came to divide the world among themselves, each of them had a desire for Eretz Yisrael to be their portion. When they did not reach an agreement they decided to bring an offering to Hashem, whoever's offering Hashem will accept will be sign that he is greater than his brother and thus Eretz Yisrael will be within his share. Thus, explains the Kuzari, Kayin was so angry that his offering was not accepted.

Why then did Hashem permit Kayin to kill Hevel - for the lesser of the two brothers to take the life of the greater of the two? This is something which the human mind cannot grasp, but it is a question that has plagued many throughout history - why do the righteous suffer and the evil prosper?

Even so, perhaps we can sweeten this bitter fate with the teachings of the Kabbalists who taught that Kayin did not succeed in removing Hevel from the world. The good soul of Hevel did not disappear into thin air but returned in the guise of Sheis who was born after Hevel had already died. Chava therefore carefully chose her words when giving him a name: "because Hashem provided me another child in place of Hevel ..." (4:25). Sheis was not just any replacement for Hevel but he arose "in place of Hevel" - the soul of Hevel returned to the world within the body of Sheis. The soul of Hevel then returned within the body of Noach and in that manner although almost the entire creation which had been destroyed following the flood, the lofty soul of Hevel continued to exist (see Zohar 1:55).

Furthermore, say the Kabbalists, this pure soul continue to reach higher and higher levels for it also merited residing in the body of Moshe Rabenu. Moshe Rabenu's name is spelled "mem, shin, hei" with the letter "mem" standing for Moshe, "shin" standing for Sheis, and "hei" for Hevel. These people were all reincarnated in the soul of Hevel. Interestingly, there is no "nun" representing the name Noach. The reason for this is that during the days of Noach Avoda Zara was rampant and thus his name should not be alluded to in the name Moshe whose entire purpose in life was to eradicate Avoda Zara and to publicize belief in a single G-d.

For this reason when the Tanach describes Moshe's grandson as worshipping Avoda Zara, the reason does not apply and thus the letter "nun" appears within the name Moshe in what is referred to as "tliya" - it is hanging and not on the same level on the line. Tradition has it that in this manner we are told about (Shoftim 18:30) Yehonatan son of Gershom, son of Menashe (spelled "mem" "nun" "shin" hei", thus the reference is to Moshe

but a small "nun" is added to include Noach as well).

Returning to our opening question: although Kayin initiated the idea of bringing an offering to Hashem, Hevel's was accepted because he gave it with more heart - this is a lesson for generations that Hashem desires the heart.

Taking a look at the Torah's description of the offerings - Kayin's is described as "the fruit of the ground" without specifying they were the "choicest fruits" or something similar. Chazal explain that Kayin brought whatever was available, some say that he actually brought the worst portions (see Rashi). Perhaps both commentaries are providing the same message - Kayin did not intentionally choose the inferior fruits but took whatever came into his hand first without any sort of selection. This is a complete denigration of the offerings. Had he intentionally brought the worst of the lot then at least he would have been aware that he should be bringing the best, but his stinginess prevents him from doing so. A person who could not be bothered to even think about what to bring implies that he is mocking the idea of bringing an offering and he places no importance in it whatsoever.

If Kayin brings whatever comes into his hand by chance, or according to one view he brought flax which can only be eaten under extenuating circumstances, then this implies that Kayin brought the worst for the worst thing a person can do is to pay no attention whatsoever and bring whatever comes into his hand.

On the other hand Helvel brought "of the firstling of his flock and from their choicest". Hevel understood that externals are important when it comes to offerings because they reflect a person's inner desire and what is his heart's true desire. The desire of the heart and proper feeling is the entire purpose behind offerings.

We find in the Messilas Yesharim that it is not sufficient to perform a mitzvah but it must be honored and glorified. What prevents this from happening - laziness, a person's laziness and desire not to work hard can convince him: "honor is only for people who are enticed by this nonsense, however Hashem has no need for honor He is above all of this, therefore it is sufficient to perform the perform the mitzvah meticulously following its details.

Kayin, explains Messilat Yesharim, felt this was a valid claim - does Hashem really need these fruits? Does He care if the fire burns a choice fruit or one which is blemished? After all, Hashem desires the heart and my heart was the first to offer is that enough.

However, had Kayin descended to the core of the matter he would have discovered that in truth YNA Newsletter Parshat Bereishit 3 of 4 Hashem is the Master and we must honor him even though He does not need our honor. Hashem does not need a choice offering but we must bring a choice offering because external honor that we bring to him is always a reflection of the inner relationship in our heart - the outer actions of the body reflect that which is hidden within the depths of our heart.

When David said: "I will prostrate myself towards My holy sanctuary in awe of You' (Tehillim 5:8), he is not taking pride over the fact that he is prostrating but rather that his fear of Hashem was to such an extent that his entire bent over in the Sanctuary of Hashem. Similarly, Ezra said: "My G-d, I am embarrassed and ashamed to lift my face to You" (Ezra 9:6) - he does not emphasize his face in the ground rather his great shame before the King Who is above all blessing. When his heart is filled with such shame than his face is unable to rise up and straighten and look ahead.

When the heart wishes to give to Hashem, then the feeling fills his entire being and expresses itself in external activities. When a person goes to a wedding and wishes to give a monetary gift to the couple, he will make sure to place it in a nice envelope even though he is aware that they will tear the envelope and throw it out. However, the trouble he goes to portrays the joy he has in giving the gift and if he could he would give them even a larger gift. Such giving shows that the recipients are important in the eyes of the giver.

One whose mitzvah observance remains in a cheap envelope testifies the true way he views his relationship with the One Who commanded us to do mitzvoth, his mitzvoth are in a wrinkled envelope. The recipient has no desire for such gifts.

The One Who knows the thoughts of man understood that the flawed externals in Kayin's offering is testimony to his faulty internal motivation and thus his offering was not accepted.

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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> genesis@torah.org
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Parshas Bereishis
The Sun Pioneers Gevurah - Self Control
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1220 – Forgetting Mashiv HaRuach on Friday Night. Good Shabbos!
The Sun Pioneers Gevurah: Hearing an Insult and Keeping Quiet
Towards the beginning of Sefer Bereshis, the Ribono shel Olam created the sun, the moon, and the stars. The pasuk says, "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 here alludes to a famous teaching of Chazal: At first the pasuk refers to the sun and moon as being "two great lights" and then suddenly they are referred to as the "greater light" and the "lesser light." Rashi explains that the sun and the moon were created equal however the moon was reduced in size after complaining "it is impossible for two kings to both use a single crown." The change was not only a change in the size of the moon – it was more than that. Today the moon only reflects the light of the sun. In the original act of Creation, the moon had its own independent light source. That is the full meaning of the shift in the pasukim from "two great lights" to "the great light and the smaller light."
There is a very interesting Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos. They note that while the moon was reduced in size, the sun remained the same size. Why was that? It was because it did not say anything. Even though the moon was impugning that the sun should be reduced in size, the sun did not say "Hey! Why should I be reduced in size? – You should be reduced in size!" The sun retained its size because "It heard the moon's complaint and did not respond."
The Gemara [Gittin 36b] praises those who "allow themselves to be shamed without shaming back, who hear themselves being insulted and do not respond." The Gemara records: About them Scripture writes (at the end of Shiras Devorah): "And those who love Him go forth like the sun in its strength." [Shoftim 5:31]. What is the connection between the sun going forth in its strength and those who do not answer back when they are shamed?
The Daas Zekeinim explains beautifully: This is exactly what the sun did at the time of Creation. The sun did not say anything! It was insulted and nevertheless did not respond. This is what Devorah was referring to when she wrote "and those who love Him go forth like the sun in its strength."
This is the definition of Gevurah. The popular concept of Gevurah suggests being muscular. Someone who works out on a regular basis is thought to be a Gibor. The concept of Gevurah in Chazal is epitomized by the Mishna "Who is the strong man (Gibor)? It is the one who conquers his evil inclination." [Avot 4:1]
To be able to be in control of oneself and not always need to reflexively react to insults and put downs – requires true strength – "like the sun going forth in its strength". Gevurah is the ability to overcome one's natural instincts. The first manifestation of such Gevurah in the history of the world was the sun's non-response to the impugned insult of the moon!

Why are School Teachers Like Stars?
The above cited pasuk [Bereshis 1:16] concludes with the words "v'es haKochamim" (and the stars). Rashi notes "Because He reduced the size of the moon, He made its hosts many, to conciliate it." This is an amazing idea!

In the original Master Plan of Creation there was apparently only supposed to be a sun and a moon. But after reducing the size of the moon, the Ribono shel Olam decided to create stars to accompany the moon in the night sky. Rashi explains that this was a sort of conciliation prize to the moon, who suffered a reduction in size and the loss of its own source of light. To assuage the feelings of the moon, G-d created stars.

Now, how many stars are there? There are billions of stars! No one knows how many stars there are in the heavens. Consider the Milky Way! The number is astronomical! And what is the whole purpose of the stars? They are to make the moon feel better!

The Tolner Rebbe of Jerusalem made a beautiful observation: Anyone contemplating a career in Chinuch (Jewish education) should take note and remember this observation! The truth of the matter is that every parent is a Jewish educator.

The Gemara comments on the pasuk "The wise (maskilim) shall shine like the radiance of the firmament, and those who teach righteousness to the multitudes (matzdikei haRabim) will shine like the stars, forever and ever" [Daniel 12:3]: The term Maskilim refers to Judges (Dayanim) who render true judgement and to charity collectors." The term matzdikei haRabim (who are compared to the stars) refers to teachers of school children (melamdei tinokos). [Bava Basra 8b]

Everyone who ever wrote any type of homiletic drush always gravitates to this enigmatic Gemara. Why are melamdei tinokos like Kochavim?

The classic interpretation is the following: The average person looks at a star and see it as a tiny little object, a mere spec in the heaven. Chazal say "No!" They are k'Kochavim l'Olam Vaed (like stars forever and ever). Someone might mistakenly consider a Rebbe, a school teacher, as insignificant. He might think "Eh! A second grade Rebbe. What else can he do?" Our sages tell us this is not the way we should view it. They look small but their function and accomplishments are eternal! That is the classic homiletic teaching associated with this pasuk.

The Tolner Rebbe interprets differently. Just as the purpose of the stars was to make the moon feel good – to serve as conciliation for its decrease in stature, so too, that is the purpose of a Rebbe! The tachlis of a Rebbe is to make a Talmid feel good about himself. "L'hafis da'ato" – the whole creation of the stars was to make the moon feel better. You may be smaller, you may not have your own source of light but you are something, you play a significant role in the heavenly order. That is what a Rebbe must always have in mind when working with his students. Make them feel worthwhile. This is what the pasuk means by the expression "Matzdikei haRabim (about which Chazal say 'Elu melamdei tinokos') k'Kochavim l'Olam va'ed."

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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The Genesis of Justice (Bereishit 5782)
Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZT"L

There are words that change the world, none more so than two sentences that appear in the first chapter of the Torah:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

The idea set forth here is perhaps the most transformative in the entire history of moral and political thought. It is the basis of the civilisation of the West with its unique emphasis on the individual and on equality. It lies behind Thomas Jefferson's words in the American Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal [and] are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights …" These truths are anything but self-evident. They would have been regarded as absurd by Plato who held that society should be based on the myth that humans are divided into people of gold, silver and bronze and it is this that determines their status in society. Aristotle believed that some are born to rule and others to be ruled.

Revolutionary utterances do not work their magic overnight. As Rambam explained in The Guide for the Perplexed, it takes people a long time to change. The Torah functions in the medium of time. It did not abolish slavery, but it set in motion a series of developments – most notably Shabbat, when all hierarchies of power were suspended and slaves had a day a week of freedom – that were bound to lead to its abolition in the course of time.

People are slow to understand the implications of ideas. Thomas Jefferson, champion of equality, was a slave-owner. Slavery was not abolished in the United States until the 1860s and not without a civil war. And as Abraham Lincoln pointed out, slavery's defenders as well as its critics cited the Bible in their cause. But eventually people change, and they do so because of the power of ideas planted long ago in the Western mind.

What exactly is being said in the first chapter of the Torah?

The first thing to note is that it is not a stand-alone utterance, an account without a context. It is in fact a polemic, a protest, against a certain way of understanding the universe. In all ancient myth the world was explained in terms of battles of the gods in their struggle for dominance. The Torah dismisses this way of thinking totally and utterly. God speaks and the universe comes into being. This, according to the great nineteenth century sociologist Max Weber, was the end of myth and the birth of Western rationalism.

More significantly, it created a new way of thinking about the universe. Central to both the ancient world of myth and the modern world of science is the idea of power, force, energy. That is what is significantly absent from Genesis 1. God says, "Let there be," and there is. There is nothing here about power, resistance, conquest or the play of forces. Instead, the key word of the narrative, appearing seven times, is utterly unexpected. It is the word tov, good.

Tov is a moral word. The Torah in Genesis 1 is telling us something radical. The reality to which Torah is a guide (the word "Torah" itself means guide, instruction, law) is moral and ethical. The question Genesis seeks to answer is not "How did the universe come into being?" but "How then shall we live?" This is the Torah's most significant paradigm-shift. The universe that God made and we inhabit is not about power or dominance but about tov and ra, good and evil.[1] For the first time, religion was ethicised. God cares about justice, compassion, faithfulness, loving-kindness, the dignity of the individual and the sanctity of life.

This same principle, that Genesis 1 is a polemic, part of an argument with a background, is essential to understanding the idea that God created humanity "in His image, after His likeness." This language would not have been unfamiliar to the first readers of the Torah. It was one they knew well. It was commonplace in the first civilisations, Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, where certain people were said to be in the image of God. They were the Kings of the Mesopotamian city-states and the Pharaohs of Egypt. Nothing could have been more radical than to say that not just kings and rulers appear in God's image. We all do. Even today the idea is daring: how much more so in an age of absolute rulers with absolute power.

Understood thus, Genesis 1:26-27 is not so much a metaphysical statement about the nature of the human person as it is a political protest against the

very basis of hierarchical, class- or caste-based societies whether in ancient or modern times. That is what makes it the most incendiary idea in the Torah. In some fundamental sense we are all equal in dignity and ultimate worth, for we are all in God's image regardless of colour, culture or creed.

A similar idea appears later in the Torah, in relation to the Jewish people, when God invited them to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). All nations in the ancient world had priests, but none was "a kingdom of priests." All religions have holy individuals – but none claim that every one of their members is holy. This too took time to materialise. During the entire biblical era there were hierarchies. There were Priests and High Priests, a holy elite. But after the destruction of the Second Temple, every prayer became a sacrifice, every leader of prayer a priest, and every synagogue a fragment of the Temple. A profound egalitarianism is at work just below the surface of the Torah, and the Rabbis knew it and lived it.

A second idea is contained in the phrase, "so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky." Note that there is no suggestion that anyone has the right to have dominion over any other human being. In Paradise Lost, Milton, like the Midrash, states that this was the sin of Nimrod, the first great ruler of Assyria and by implication the builder of the Tower of Babel (see Gen. 10:8-11). Milton writes that when Adam was told that Nimrod would "arrogate dominion undeserved," he was horrified:

O execrable son so to aspire. Above his Brethren, to himself assuming. Authority usurped, from God not given: He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl. Dominion absolute; that right we hold. By his donation; but man over men. He made not lord; such title to himself. Reserving, human left from human free. (Paradise Lost, Book 12:64-71)

To question the right of humans to rule over other humans without their consent was at that time utterly unthinkable. All advanced societies were like this. How could they be otherwise? Was this not the very structure of the universe? Did the sun not rule the day? Did the moon not rule the night? Was there not a hierarchy of the gods in heaven itself? Already implicit here is the deep ambivalence the Torah would ultimately show toward the very institution of kingship, the rule of "man over men."

The third implication lies in the sheer paradox of God saying, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." We sometimes forget, when reading these words, that in Judaism God has no image or likeness. To make an image of God is to transgress the second of the Ten Commandments and to be guilty of idolatry. Moses emphasised that at the Revelation at Sinai, "You saw no likeness, you only heard the sound of words." (Deut. 4:12)

God has no image because He is not physical. He transcends the physical universe because He created it. Therefore He is free, unconstrained by the laws of matter. That is what God means when He tells Moses that His name is "I will be what I will be" (Ex. 3:14), and later when, after the sin of the Golden Calf, He tells him, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." God is free, and by making us in His image, He gave us also the power to be free.

This, as the Torah makes clear, was God's most fateful gift. Given freedom, humans misuse it. Adam and Eve disobey God's command. Cain murders Abel. By the end of the parsha we find ourselves in the world about to be destroyed by the Flood, for it is filled with violence to the point where God regretted that He had ever created humanity. This is the central drama of Tanach and of Judaism as a whole. Will we use our freedom to respect order or misuse it to create chaos? Will we honour or dishonour the image of God that lives within the human heart and mind?

These are not only ancient questions. They are as alive today as ever they were in the past. The question raised by serious thinkers – ever since Nietzsche argued in favour of abandoning both God and the Judeo-Christian ethic – is whether justice, human rights, and the unconditional dignity of the human person are capable of surviving on secular grounds alone? Nietzsche himself thought not.

In 2008, Yale philosopher Nicholas Woltersdorff published a magisterial work arguing that our Western concept of justice rests on the belief that "all of us have great and equal worth: the worth of being made in the image of God and of being loved redemptively by God."[2] There is, he insists, no secular rationale on which a similar framework of justice can be built. That is surely what John F. Kennedy meant in his Inaugural Address when he spoke of the "revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought," that "the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God."[3]

Momentous ideas made the West what it is, ideas like human rights, the abolition of slavery, the equal worth of all, and justice based on the principle that right is sovereign over might.[4] All of these ultimately derived from the statement in the first chapter of the Torah that we are made in God's image and likeness. No other text has had a greater influence on moral thought, nor has any other civilisation ever held a higher vision of what we are called on to be.

Footnotes [1] What I take to be the meaning is of the story of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge is for another time. In the meantime, see Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, I:2. [2] Nicholas Woltersdorff, Justice: Rights and Wrongs (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 393. [3] John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, 20 January 1961. [4] Read Rabbi Sacks' Introduction to his Essays on Ethics to understand his expanded thoughts on this notion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR BEREISHIT

1) What do you think the Torah intends for us to learn from the concept that we were each created 'in the image of God'?

2) What was revolutionary about this idea during biblical times? Is it still a radical idea?

3) How does this idea impact the way we live as Jews in a practical way?

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Torah Wellsprings

Rav Meilech Biderman

Compiled by Rabbi Boruch Twersky

Parshas Bereishis

Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin taught: Everything in the Torah is contained in chumash Bereishis. [The average person will not recognize it, but concealed in the words of chumash Bereishis are all the halachos and lessons stated in the other four chumashim that follow it. Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin continued and said]: Everything in chumash Bereishis can be found in parashas Bereishis. And everything in parashas Bereishis is contained in the very first passuk of the parashah (Bereishis Bora etc.) Everything that's in this first passuk is concealed in the first letter of Bereishis (the letter Beis). And everything that is in the Beis is found in a drop of ink at the edge of the Beis. And that drop of ink represents a Torah that is so high and so concealed…

Tzaddikim therefore studied the word Bereishis because this word alone contains the entire Torah. We will give a few examples:

1] The grandson of Rebbe Henoch of Alexander zt'l had his bar mitzvah on Shabbos Bereishis. The Rebbe of Alexander told his grandson that Bereishis is gematriya Taryag. This grandson was bright, and immediately realized that Taryag and Bereishis do share very similar letters, and the Beis and Alef of Bereishis are gematriya Gimel. "But Bereishis also has a Shin?" the bar mitzvah bachur asked. The Rebbe replied, Gimel is gematriya Yetzer, the yetzer hara. Bereishis implies that when one rids himself from the Yetzer Harah, he will be able to keep the Taryag mitzvos. The Rebbe added that this is the meaning of the phrase we say on Yom Kippur, Labris Habeit vi'Al Teifen La'Yeitzer : Keep the Taryag mitzvos (which are gematriya Bris) by not paying attention to the yetzer hara.

2] The Chida teaches: Bereisis is roshei teivos of Amen Yehei Shmei Raba Mevorach Taaneh Bikol Answer menyehei shmei rabba out loud."

3] Bereishis means that for Reishis, for yiras shamayim (Reishis Chochma Yiras Hashem), Hashem created the world (Bara Elokim Es Hashamayim Vies Haaretz. This one word teaches us the purpose of creation; it was for Reishis, yiras shamayim.

The first letter of the Torah, the beis (a Bayis, a house) also represents yiras

shamayim, because the Gemara says, Chaval Al Diles Lei Dirah Vitara Lidirta Avid "Woe to those who don't have a house, and they build a doorway for the house…." (Shabbos 31). Torah and mitzvos are like the doorway, which lead to the home, to yiras shamayim. The purpose of Torah and mitzvos is to lead a person to yiras shamayim. Woe to those who build the doorway (they keep Torah and mitzvos) but they don't reach the home (yiras shamayim). So, the first word of the Torah, Bereishis, and the first letter of the Torah, Beis, both teach us that the purpose of the Torah is for yiras shamayim. As the Gemara concludes, Lo Bara HKBH Es Olamo Ela Kedei Sheyiru Milifanav "Hashem created the world, solely so people should fear Him" (Shabbos 31).

4] Logically, we would assume that the first letter of the Torah would be an Alef. But it isn't. It is a Beis. We can learn an important lesson from this as well. The Imrei Emes zy'a explains that the Torah begins with a beis, because the alef is yegiyah, to toil. The Torah teaches us lessons, but there is something that precedes it, and that is the alef, to be prepared to toil in Torah.

Rebbe Yochanan of Stolin zy'a told the following parable: An artist drew a beautiful painting that was sold for a lot of money. He also made prints of the painting, and sold those for a fraction of the price of the original. Why? The copies are just as beautiful as the original. Why were they worth so much less? The answer is, art isn't only about the beautiful work. It's about appreciating the effort that went into the painting, together with the artist's talent, training, and energies. Rebbe Yochonon of Stolin zt'l said that the same is with avodas Hashem. It isn't just the deeds that Hashem desires from us. The heart and effort that one puts into the mitzvos are what make them truly valuable.

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>
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Parshat Bereshit — Reflections on the Divine Image
Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages — Genesis, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern

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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Insights Parshas Bereishis - Tishrei 5782
Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University
Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig
This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moshe Chaim ben Avraham Aba. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Light and Darkness

God said "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good and God separated between the light and the darkness (1:3-4).

Rashi (ad loc), in his second interpretation of this verse, comments: "According to its simple meaning explain it thusly – He saw that it was good and that it wasn't proper for it (the light) and the darkness to be functioning in a jumbled manner so He assigned this one (light) a sphere of activity during the day, and the other (darkness) a sphere of activity during the night."

These concepts require an explanation. First of all, what does it mean that Hashem saw that the light was good? In Rashi's first (less literal) interpretation, light refers to a spiritual light that Hashem reserved for the righteous in the World to Come. This can be understood as being good. But in his more literal explanation of the possuk, what was good about light? It was a creation like anything else; what was particularly good about it?

Secondly, how are we to understand the original "jumble" of light and darkness? How is that possible and what was this separation that was created because Hashem saw that it was good?

The Gemara (Nedarim 64b) teaches us that there are four types of people who are considered as if they were dead; one who is blind, one who has lost all his money, one who has leprosy, and one who is childless. Why is a blind person considered as if he were dead?

Light gives us the ability to see objects and seeing is our way of connecting to objects. People who are obsessed with themselves are constantly looking at themselves in the mirror (and taking lots of selfies) because that is how they connect to themselves. When someone has an experience of losing something, he says, "I never thought I would see it again." In fact, this is what Yaakov says upon being reunited with Yosef after giving him up for dead for twenty-two years, "I can die at this time after having seen your face…" (46:30).

A person who cannot see his body isn't properly connected to himself. In fact, Rashi points out by Yitzchak, who was home bound because of his blindness, that he no longer had an evil inclination and Hashem was therefore able to associate His name with Yitzchak without fear that Yitzchak would sin. Seeing is a way to be connected and take ownership. If you cannot see something, you cannot sense it as being yours – so a blind person is as if he is dead because it is as if he has no body. This is why they no longer have an evil inclination.

This is the difference between day and night. Hashem divided creation into day and night because they have two very distinct purposes. During the day a person is connected to his body, while at night a person is connected to his soul. This is what the possuk (Tehillim 92:3) means, "To declare your loving kindness in the morning, and your faithfulness every night."

We sense the kindness of Hashem and the opportunity to gain from all that he has created for us during the day. When night comes, we begin to feel alone and yearn to seek a spiritual connection.

Originally, light and dark were created to be intermingled intermittently so that a person could connect to both parts of his psyche. But when Hashem saw that light would actually give a person the ability to sense himself, he separated the darkness, which would immediately limit man's sense of

himself. He thus separated light and darkness into two distinct spheres of influence – a time to focus on one's physical body and a time to focus on one's soul.

The Great Satan

And God saw all that He had made and behold it was very good (1:31).

At the end of the sixth and final day of creation, the possuk says that Hashem reflected upon all that He had created and saw that it was very good.

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 9:6-9) has a fascinating discussion on what is meant by "and behold it was very good." There are several dissenting opinions, including: "Nahman said in the name of R' Shmuel this refers to the evil inclination […] R' Zeira said this refers to Gehinnom […] R' Shmuel ben Yitzchak says this refers to the angel of death."

These are not ordinarily considered wonderful additions to creation; what do Chazal mean by saying that the evil inclination, the angel of death, and Gehinnom are all part of what Hashem saw as "and behold it was very good"?

The Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) makes an odd statement: Hashem told the Jewish people "I created the evil inclination and I created the Torah as its spice." In other words, the very basis of creation is built on the evil inclination and the Torah is "merely" its antidote. What does this really mean?

The answer is that man was created with the ability to desire things for himself. In order to receive and fully appreciate the good that Hashem intended to bestow on mankind, man has to be in touch with his sense of self and what he wants to have. The evil inclination is the prime motivator for man to achieve. On the other hand, the more we focus solely on what we want the further we move away from Hashem. Thus, the yetzer hora is the basis to creation and the Torah, which is meant to guide us in the maelstrom of the physical world, is really the key to keeping us on track to receive the ultimate good that Hashem desires us to have.

Even though the evil inclination was the root cause of Adam's original sin and caused a rift between man and Hashem, the desire for self-fulfillment is the basis for creation. The Torah is the guide for the road back to Hashem and the relationship with Him, which is the ultimate good, but creation is built on man choosing for himself.

Similarly, the angel of death can also be seen as a great kindness. Death really means that man now has an end time to his life cycle. Once man sinned and his spiritual soul could no longer sustain the physical body, it became necessary for man to die in order to expel the physical contamination to his body.

Man's life now has boundaries, and just like every physical object in the universe, boundaries provide definition. This is what Shlomo Hamelech meant when he said, "It is better to go to a funeral than a feast" (Koheles 7:2). If a person takes to heart that his life on earth is limited, it allows him to transcend the mere physical desires of this world and seek a deeper eternal existence.

Lastly, Gehinnom can also be seen as the ultimate expression of Hashem's love for mankind. Meaning, if a person is so far off the proper path and separated from Hashem that he cannot go to an eternal reward, he should just perish into oblivion. But Hashem, in his great love for man, wishes to rehabilitate his creations. The Mishna points out that there are only a few people who have no share in the World to Come. Thus, this pain of rehabilitation is really just a purification process so that a person can merit an eternal existence at some point, and this is, after all, the entire purpose of creation.

An Abel Proxy

After a period of time, Kayin brought an offering to Hashem from the fruit of the land, and Hevel also offered some of the firstborn of his flock. Hashem paid heed to Hevel and his offering; but to Kayin and his offering Hashem paid no heed. Kayin became furious and depressed (4:3-5).

This week's parsha recounts the famous story of the first conflict between brothers, which ultimately leads to the first case of fratricide. The Torah gives us the background on the source of the conflict: Kayin who had first conceived of bringing an offering to Hashem was outdone by his younger brother who seized on the same concept but prepared a much nicer offering to Hashem (see Rashi 4:3-4). Hashem accepts the offering of Hevel, while Kayin's offering is all but ignored.

The Torah describes Kayin as "furious and depressed." One can only imagine how slighted Kayin felt; after all, he had the original idea to make an offering to Hashem but was outdone by his younger brother who merely co-opted his idea and improved on it. Kayin's fury is understandable, but why does the Torah also describe him as depressed? Being furious and being depressed are not complementary emotions; what is Kayin's state of mind?

Shortly thereafter, in what seems to be a fit of jealous rage, Kayin rises up to kill Hevel. Immediately, Hashem appears to Kayin and asks, "Where is your brother Hevel?" Kayin responds in a very strange manner – "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Why does Kayin take such an insolent position with Hashem to make the derisive remark, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Kayin could have simply responded, "I don't know." What point is Kayin trying to convey?

The Ten Commandments were written on two side by side tablets (as opposed to one long tablet listing the Ten Commandments in order). Chazal note that this is significant in that the Ten Commandments can also be read across; therefore the first commandment "I am Hashem…" is connected to the sixth commandment "Do not murder." Thus, the transgression of murder is also an attack on Hashem Himself, as it were. The reason for this is, as we see in this week's parsha regarding the creation of man, on the sixth day of creation Hashem says, "Let us make man in our image and likeness." Thereby an attack on man is also an attack on Hashem.

This is what the Torah meant when it said that Kayin was furious and depressed. He was angry at Hashem for ignoring his offering, but at the same time he also recognized that he had no way of expressing his anger at Hashem. This impotence to act caused Kayin to feel helpless and thereby depressed. Kayin's attack on Hevel wasn't motivated by jealousy or anger towards Hevel, it was a proxy attack on Hashem. He killed Hevel to get even with God.

Now we can understand his insolence towards Hashem when he said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" This was just a continuation of his attack on Hashem.

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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.

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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