

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LABEL LAM**

### Dvar Torah

The opening words of the Torah are too often misread, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth." That statement would imply that the Torah is communicating cosmology, as a science text book, and is interested in satisfying our curiosity about the order of creation. The Torah, Rashi relates, is rather a teaching book with a more important set of lessons to be learned in the first verse.

The first letter "Beis" taken as a prefix, meaning "for" or "for the sake of" when attached to the word "Reishis" means that the world was created for the sake of something called, "Reishis". Using the rest of Torah as a self-referential dictionary of sorts, Rashi qualifies and crowns two items with the title, "Reishis"-Primary. It is for their sake all is created. We are being told not "how" but rather "why" the world was created.

I have in mind a certain huge factory that I used to gaze at frequently when barreling down some New Jersey highway. The building was humungous. The Parking lot was jammed. The smoke stacks billowed constant smoke. I never figured out what it produced. I'm sure every car that pulls up in the morning represents another subset of activity at the plant. There's the accounting department, food service, janitorial crew etc.

There must be some prime product that justifies all the rest. It might be a slim vile of perfume or a variety of buttons but something of value must be exiting the assembly line that makes the entire complex worth its while.

Similarly, if I were to attempt to solicit from you a large donation to build a school building, you would be justified in asking a few questions. "Why do we need this school?" I'll answer, "We have a wonderfully unique curriculum." Then you might follow up and ask, "Who would attend this school? From where do you get your faculty?" Good questions!

Imagine the whole world is this school. Why is it here? What is it in this life that justifies the existence of

all the world's parking lots? It may seem arrogant or ethnocentric to say so, but the Torah is saying it, right in the beginning, and not me. Why and to whom should we apologize? The curriculum is the Torah. The students and the faculty are Israel.

Together they produce something so valuable that the Talmud tells us that whole world was created for "this" alone. What is this "this"? Something else is also called "Reishis"- Primary. "The primary wisdom is fear of HASHEM!" This profound educational process is meant to inspire in its students a sense of awe and ecstasy in relationship to The Creator.

And so over the course of centuries and millennium millions of worthy students have graduated from here and many with high honors too. It is for their great sake and for our blessed benefit as well that there has been made to exist this generously endowed and sophisticated school that offers such a superior primary education. © 2003 Rabbi L. Lam & www.torah.org

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

On Simchas Torah we complete the yearly cycle of Torah readings, and celebrate our divine gift. As we mention in the prayers on every holiday, "You have chosen us from all the nations and made us holy through your commandments." By following the Torah and living it, we become exalted- building a stronger connection with our Creator. But we weren't the only nation offered this heavenly present.

In the final Parsha in the Torah, read on Simchas Torah, Moshe describes G-d's revealing Himself to us on Mt. Sinai (Devarim 33:2): "G-d came from Sinai, and shone from Sayir towards them, and appeared from Mt. Paran." The Sifrai (referenced by Rashi) explains the verse to mean that G-d first offered the Torah to Edom (who lives in Sayir), but they turned it down, then offered it to Yishmael (whose home includes Paran), but they too declined it. The Sifrai elaborates, explaining that the other nations refused G-d's gift of the Torah because of specific commandments contained within it. Edom couldn't accept it because of the prohibition against murder; Yishmael because of the prohibition against theft; and Amon and Moav were unable to consent to having adultery outlawed. Each nation was approached, and they all declined, until G-d offered it to the Children of Israel- who not only didn't ask what is in it, but committed themselves to following

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by

**David, Debbie, Mayer, Josh and Zach Grashin**

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it even before having heard what it entailed. After all, if G-d was offering it, it must be good!

One of the more famous questions asked on this Midrash is how these specific prohibitions (murder, theft and adultery) could be the reason for those nations turning down G-d offer. Even without accepting the Torah, all of humanity was given seven Noachide Laws that they must obey, and these three are included in those seven; not accepting the additional obligations of the Torah didn't negate these seven! If Edom wasn't allowed to kill others in any case, why should that prohibition's inclusion in the Torah be a reason not to accept it? Similarly, since theft and adultery were already off limits, how can their having been included as 2 of the 613 mitzvos in the Torah be given as a reason to reject it? We may appreciate the beauty of Shabbos, yet can still understand why others would not want to take on the responsibility of keeping it. The same is true for any of the other 605 mitzvos not included in the 7 Noachide Laws. But why reject the Torah because of a mitzvah that they are obligated to keep anyway?

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 2b) says that the nations of the world didn't keep the 7 Noachide Laws. They were supposed to, but nevertheless didn't. Therefore, G-d gave in, and removed the obligation to keep them. This was not to their benefit, though, as now- if they do keep them- their reward for doing so is less than had they still been obligated to (as is true with any non-obligatory mitzvah). Even so, it can explain why these nations rejected the Torah based on a commandment also included in the 7 Noachide Laws.

It would be one thing if they were reluctantly keeping these laws, and were offered a wider set of laws. However, how could they accept upon themselves to start keeping a commandment they hadn't been keeping until now? Especially if the commandment they weren't keeping had already been, or could possibly be, made not obligatory! In contrast, the Torah will always

be binding. They couldn't take upon themselves that specific commandment without any possibility of its obligation ever being lifted! Therefore, upon being told that murder/theft/adultery were prohibited in G-d's Torah- and would always be- they turned it down.

We, on the other hand, rejoice in G-d having chosen us to fulfill His mission, and with our having agreed to do so. We celebrate having read through the Torah in its entirety, and relish the chance to do so once again. May G-d give us the opportunity to complete another full year of learning His Torah, and gaining a fuller understanding of it. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**T**here are three distinct celebrations of G-d's revelation of the Torah: the Festival of Shavuot, just seven weeks after the re-experiencing of our exodus from Egypt, referred to in our liturgy as the "Festival of the Giving of the Torah; the white fast of purity and forgiveness, Yom HaKippurim, which is the anniversary of the second set of Tablets of the Covenant which the Almighty gave to Moses; and Simchat Torah, the Joy of Torah, which we celebrate this Sabbath of Shemini Atzeret.

Why three Festivals surrounding the Revelation of the Torah? What is the unique message of Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah, and which historical event does it commemorate?

Let us explore each of these three celebrations - and attempt to analyze their respective messages. From a certain perspective the first of the three, the Festival of Shavuot, is the most problematic of all, since it is defined as the Festival of the Revelation by the Sages who composed our liturgy, but not by the Bible itself. Is it not strange that our Sacred Scriptures do not see fit to identify the exact day of the Revelation, to eternalize the supernatural event which forged us into a nation more than any other historical experience and bequeathed the immortal Ten Commandments which established absolute and universal moral standards until this very day?

The probable answer, as suggested by the Rivash (Rav Yitzchak Bar Sheshet), is that the Bible is "ashamed" to reveal the date; after all, only forty-nine days after the awe-inspiring, supernatural revelation, the Israelites stoop to the lowest level of impurity by engaging in immoral licentiousness in their worship of the golden calf. Shavuot is therefore Biblically known as the Festival of the First Fruits, the date of the Revelation only to be revealed by the Sages of the Talmud and the prayers of our liturgy.

The tenth day of Tishrei, the date declared by the Bible as "the day on which the Almighty will forgive you of all your sins," is identified by our Sages as the day when G-d forgave Israel for their sin of worshipping the golden calf. Moses had smashed the first Tablets of

Stone when he saw the perversion of Israel as they danced around the golden calf; the Almighty commanded Moses to "hew out two tablets of stone like the first ones" after the greatest of prophets prayed for forty days and forty nights for Israel's exoneration.

My revered teacher and mentor, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l, notes two fundamental differences between the first and second sets of tablets: the first Revelation took place amidst thunder, lightning and an awesome Divine voice communicating to an entire nation; the second Revelation took place in the silence of the cleft of a rock in the Sinai desert, an intimate communication between G-d and Moses alone. The first set of tablets were produced by the Almighty Himself, as it were, "the handiwork of G-d and the writing of G-d," whereas the second set of tablets were hewn out by Moses. Rav Soloveitchik goes one step further, based upon the midrash: the first set of tablets were to be a Divine Torah, limited to the written Torah, whereas the second tablets included the basis for the Oral Torah, expressive of a partnership between G-d and Israel throughout the generations in the interpretive development of Torah. In effect, G-d understood that a Torah devoid of Israel's participation would ultimately lose Israel's allegiance; only if Israel could take "ownership" of Torah would Israel remain committed to Torah! Thus, Yom Kippur may well be considered the day of the Revelation of our second chance, or the day of the Revelation of the Oral Law.

And finally, the Festival of the Rejoicing of the Torah on Shemini Atzeret - Simchat Torah. Shemini Atzeret is the climax of the Rosh Hashanah - Yom Kippur- Sukkot period, whose major message is Israel's task to "repair the world in the Kingship of G-d," to teach the ethical monotheism of a G-d of life, justice and peace to the nations at large. The Festival of Shavuot, the anniversary of the First Revelation of the Torah to Israel, came on the fiftieth day after the exodus, on the day following seven times seven days, with the beginning of the eighth week being the time of the Revelation. According to the Maharal of Prague, the number seven symbolizes the perfection of the natural, and eight symbolizes the supernatural; seven representing the physical world and eight the metaphysical, supernal world. Similarly, seven days comprise a week, and the eighth day is the circumcision, the divine sign of the human ability to repair and sanctify the natural, physical instinct of the organ of propagation.

Sukkot is our nature festival, wherein we give thanks to G-d for the bounty of the produce of the land of Israel. The eighth day is a separate festival, the day when we pray for Divine rain and Divine grace, the day when we invoke in our prophetic reading (Haftorah Kings 1,8) the City of Jerusalem, the City of the Holy Temple, the City of G-d. And the prophets (Isaiah 2, Micha 4) speak of a time, in the end of the days, when the Temple of G-d will be secure on the Temple Mount,

when the Gentiles will rush to learn our laws and walk in our ways, when the Torah will come forth (to the world) from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, when nation will not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn war anymore.

On the Festival of the Rejoicing of the Torah, we take the Torah out of the ark, even into the streets, and dance in circuits with sacred abandon. This third Festival celebrates the third Revelation, when the Torah - at least the seven Noahide commands of morality - will be accepted by the nations of the world.

Just as Rosh Hashanah celebrates the perfection of the world which has not yet arrived (Malkhuyot: "on that day G-d will be One and His Name will be one"), so does Shemini Atzeret Simchat Torah celebrate the Gentiles acceptance of our Torah, which has not yet occurred. "When will the Messiah come? When the well-springs of Divine waters, life-giving waters of Divine grace and Divine Torah, spread round about, to Gentile as well as to Jew."

Shabbat Shalom and Hag Sameach! © 2000  
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#### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**W**hile some maintain that the human being is only physical form, the Torah, in one of its most important sentences, insists that every person is also created in the image of God—tzelem Elokim (Genesis 1:26,27). On the surface we see each others' outward appearance, but if we look deeply, we ought be able to perceive a little bit of God in our fellow human being. In fact, it is the tzelem Elokim which makes the human being unique. In the words of Pirke Avot, "beloved is the human being who is created in the image of God." (Avot 3:18) Several fundamental ideas emerge from the tzelem Elokim principle.

Bearing in mind that each and every human being is created with tzelem Elokim, it follows that all people—regardless of race, religion, nationality, age, mental faculties, handicap etc—are of equal value.

Human beings can relate to God "vertically" and "horizontally." In the sense that we have the capacity to reach upwards to the all powerful God through prayer and ritual, we relate vertically. Additionally, when we relate to our fellow person, we connect to that part of God in them. If one hurts another human being, God is hurt. Similarly, if one brings joy to another, God is more joyous. Hence a horizontal relationship exists as well.

No matter how far one strays, one has the potential to return to the inner Godliness we all possess—which is, of course, good.

Even if a person holds him/herself in low esteem, he/she ought have self confidence. After all, God is in each of us. God, as the ultimate creator has given us the capacity to be endlessly creative—lending an important ingredient to our self esteem.

As God is omnipresent, so too do people created in the image of God have the inner desire to reach beyond themselves. We accomplish this by developing lasting relationships with another. In this sense one's presence is expanded.

Similarly, as God is eternal, we, created in the image of God have the instinctual need to transcend ourselves. This need is met by raising children. Unlike animals, human beings are uniquely aware of historic continuity.

The image of God points to life after death. As God lives forever, so too does the part of God in us, our soul, live beyond our physical years.

Of course it must be remembered that tzelem Elokim does not mean that every human being is automatically good. Image of God is potential. If properly nurtured, it takes us to sublime heights. If abused, it can sink us to the lowest depths. Hence the words *ki tov*, found after every stage of creation, are not recorded after the human being is formed. Whether we are *tov* depends on the way we live our lives; it is not endowed at birth.

And, the mystics add, that when we live our lives properly, the image of God in each of us merges with the omnipresent God to become One—Ehad.

The tzelem Elokim is an eternal spark. Whether it is lit is up to us. © 1998 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

#### **RABBI EFRAIM LEVINE**

## **Hadrash Ve'Haiyun Dor Revi'i**

**A**dam knew his wife again, and she bore him a son and named him Sheis, because: "Hashem has provided me another child in place of Hevel, for Kayin had killed him." (Bereishis 4:25)

In the fourth blessing of the *shemona esrei* prayer we recite "You graciously endow Adam with *da'as* and teach Enosh, *binah*." In this phrase we encounter two different titles for man and two different terms for wisdom. The commentators explain the word Adam relative to Enosh connotes a positive reference to man whereas Enosh connotes the weakness, frailty and mortality of man.

Similarly, the word *da'as* generally refers to the basic building blocks of understanding whereas the word *binah* represents a higher level of understanding. Chazal explain this refers specifically to the insight that is gained when one compares one thing to another.

We may note that it would seem proper to match the weaker title for man with the simpler term for understanding and the stronger term for man with the deeper level of understanding. In other words, it would seem that the phrase should properly read "you graciously endow Enosh with *da'as* and teach Adam, *binah*? Why are the terms and titles reversed?

In order to answer this question we must understand the difference between the words Adam and Enosh. The most fundamental difference between the two is that Adam does not have a plural whereas the Enosh does, namely An'osh'im.

Rav Zadok HaKohen explains the word Adam comes from the word *ad'am'eh* which means "to be similar." Man is called Adam to convey "*ad'am'eh la'el'yon*," I will be similar to the most High, i.e., Hashem. Man's name reminds him that his goal in life is to emulate the characteristics and attributes of Hashem. This interpretation explains why the word Adam has no plural. Just as Hashem is One, likewise when man emulates Hashem he achieves a similar uniqueness of being one.

In contrast the word Enosh does have the plural An'osh'im. The singular word Enosh connotes an individual man's willingness and desire to join others and work together as a team. Indeed, this is man's weakness. An individual can accomplish very little, it is only through a group or community that magnificent things are achieved and accomplished.

We may now understand why Sheis named his son Enosh. Originally, Adam's two sons Kayin and Hevel were not willing to live with each other. From our perspective it is difficult to understand how Kayin could kill Hevel when they were the only people in the world besides their parents and twin sisters. Was the whole world not large enough for both of them to share? The answer is that both Kayin and Hevel strove to fulfill their mission of being created as an Adam. They strove to be similar to Hashem. Just as Hashem is One above likewise they considered themselves one below. However, two kings cannot share the same crown. Kayin and Hevel thus could not coexist. One had to go. After the death of Hevel, Chava gave birth to Sheis. The *posuk* tells us that he was to be the replacement of Hevel. What was the purpose of a replacement? Just as Kayin and Hevel could not coexist, it would just be a matter of time before Kayin and Sheis try to kill each other.

In answer to this question the *posuk* says: "And as for Sheis to him also a son was born and he named him Enosh" (Bereishis 4:26). Enosh connotes man's willingness and desire to coexist with others. An Enosh has the plural An'osh'im. Sheis acknowledged that to prevent the tragedy of Kayin and Hevel from reoccurring he was to abandon the focus of being an Adam. Man's new mission was to be an Enosh. Man needs to live in peace together with his brother.

This idea further explains why precisely now there was a proliferation of idolatry. The *posuk* goes on to say "Then, they began to call in the name of Hashem" (Bereishis 4:26). Rashi explains this *posuk* to mean that at the time of Enosh the proliferation of idolatry began. At this point the focus of man was on the need to work together and build the world. They abandoned the concept of Adam which represented the

idea of being similar to Hashem. They acknowledged that on earth there are many men who could coexist peacefully. They began to think that perhaps in heaven there are also many gods that coexist.

We may return to our question as to why we match the term binah with Enosh. The commentators explain the da'as represents the basic building blocks of wisdom. Binah represents a deeper form of understanding. Binah requires one to combine multiple pieces of information and compare them one to another.

One important example of binah is what the Mishna (Avos 6:6) lists in its forty-eight ways with which the Torah is acquired as pilpul hatalmidim, sharp discussion with students. Here, one gains insight through debate and dialogue with another, similar to the understanding one gains by comparing one thing to another. We may now understand that binah, which can only be accomplished through engaging one's fellow man relates to the word Enosh which also connotes man's willingness to work together with his fellow man.

#### AISH HATORAH

## MiOray HaAish

by Rabbi Ari Kahn

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” [Genesis 1:1] The Torah begins with a description of the unfolding of events at the dawn of history. It has long been the understanding of the Rabbis that, as important as the literal meaning of the text may be, the primary importance of the Torah lies in its theological teachings. The Torah is a book of theological truth which is the word of God, and, therefore, historically accurate as well. The Rabbis interpreting the Torah in the Talmud, Midrash, and the Zohar, the chief work of the Kabbalah, were well aware of this idea. Consequently, verses which may seem mundane or simplistic to the uninitiated often contain the most profound teachings and secrets of the Torah.

Examining this Torah portion, the Midrash makes an inference, not from what is said, but by noting what is missing. After each day of creation God declares that “it was good,” except for the second day. Why?

“R’Yochanan explained in the name of R’Yose ben R’Halaftha: Because on this day Gehenna (Hell) was created. R’Hanina said: Because on this day schism came into the world, as it is written, And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters...” [Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 4:6]

The Midrash teaches that this act of separation is the power which allows for dissension to enter into the world. However, readers familiar with the text will note that the term VAYAVDIL, “to separate,” was used on the first day as well, when God separated between

light and darkness. Why, then, is the power of dissension only expressed on the second day?

Apparently, argumentation can only take place when two things or two people do not have clearly-defined boundaries. The separation between light and darkness is absolute—they are opposites, and therefore no dissension follows their separation. However, the separation between water and water, which are ostensibly the same, is where the power of dissent originates. God separated the higher waters from the lower waters, water from water, like from like. And in this act of the second day dissension was created.

This Midrash serves as an introduction to one of the most tragic events described in the Book of Genesis. Chapter 4 records the birth of Cain and Abel, their difference of opinion, and finally the tragic murder of Abel.

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, ‘I have acquired a man from the Lord’. And she again bore his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.” [Genesis 4:1-2]

These two verses lack symmetry. When Cain is born, his name is immediately explained. He is a gift from God, perhaps seen as an agent in the mending of the relationship between God and Eve that had become dysfunctional since the eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. When Abel is born, no reason is given for the choice of his name. In Hebrew, Abel, HEVEL, means “nothingness.” It seems that from the outset, Abel doesn’t count, he is simply the brother of Cain.

“And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.” [Genesis 4:2] Cain becomes a farmer. As per the rules of exile, he is following God’s commandment to work the cursed earth “by the sweat of his brow.” Abel, however, becomes a keeper of sheep; he seems to be ignoring the rules of exile and trying to relate to God in the way his father did in the Garden of Eden, where Adam was given the task to be the keeper of the animals.

The Midrash tells us something interesting about the births of Cain and Abel. Cain, we are told, was born with a twin sister; Abel, however, was born along with two sisters. [Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 22:2]

Perhaps this is the origin of the friction between Cain and Abel. Cain is the older brother, the “golden child.” The hopes and aspirations of Eve rest upon him. So why, Cain asks, did God give Abel a larger portion of sisters? After all, we should be treated equally, but if anyone were to receive a double share, it should have the first born. This sets the stage for the rest of the Book of Genesis, where the younger brother consistently achieves superiority over the older brother who inevitably fails.

Initially Cain sets about his task, works the land and brings an offering of some fruit to God. Abel, too, offers from his flock, sacrificing the best of them.

“And the Lord had respect for Abel and for his offering. But for Cain and for his offering he did not have respect. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry and why is your countenance fallen? If you do well, shall you not be accepted? And if you do not well, sin lies at the door. And to you shall be his desire, and yet you may rule over him.’ [Genesis 4:4-7]

Cain repeatedly compares himself with his brother Abel, and finds himself on the short end of the stick. In so doing, he defines himself in terms of his relationship with his brother. He judges his accomplishments by comparing them with his brother's. When Cain sees that he has not been as successful as Abel, he becomes bitter, angry and depressed. Cain's problem was that he assumed that he and his brother were the same and were, therefore, deserving of equal opportunities and success. This reminds us of the second day of creation when God separated between the waters. When two things are assumed to be equal, dissension follows.

“And Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.” [Genesis 4:8] Again there is a lack of symmetry. Cain speaks to Abel. (We do not know what he said.) Abel does not answer. Abel is apparently not involved in this argument; it is one-sided. At this point, Cain is overwhelmed by rage and murders his brother.

“And the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ And he said, ‘I know not; Am I my brother's keeper?’ And He said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened her mouth to swallow your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall not henceforth yield to you her strength; a fugitive and a wanderer shall you be in the earth.’ [Genesis 4:9-12]

The earth had already been cursed once—when Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden—and now it is cursed again because it swallowed the blood of Abel. While Adam had to work the earth by the sweat of his brow and in sorrow eat of its produce, Cain, the next tiller of soil, will get nothing from it; all he can do is wander the barrenness, finding no respite.

The tragic end to the relationship between Cain and Abel unleashed the spiritual power for other arguments that will take place in the future. One such argument related in the Torah, in the Book of Numbers—between Korach and Moses—strikes us with its stunning parallels: “And they [Korach and his followers] gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, ‘You have taken too much upon yourselves, since the entire congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you lift up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?’” [Numbers 16:3]

Korach, the leader of the revolt, was a populist. He had an attractive philosophy which he conveyed to the masses. Korach claimed that all people are equally holy, therefore all people should be treated the same, with the same rights and opportunities. Of course, Korach's argument was the same as Cain's.

The end that God chose for the Korach rebellion is filled with irony: “The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their houses and all the people belonging to Korach and all of their possessions.” [Numbers 16:32]

The last time—and the only other time—that the Torah used that phrasing was in reference to Abel when the earth “opened its mouth to swallow” the blood of the murdered brother. [Genesis 4:11]

The mystics, based on a tradition from the great 15th century Kabbalist Ariza'l have a very elegant explanation for these similarities—they teach that Korach was a reincarnation of the soul of Cain. [Shaar Hagiligulim Hakdama 33; also see the Shem MiShmuel in Parshat Korach]

But there are other similarities in the Cain/Abel and Korach/Moses stories: Abel's name meant “nothingness.” We are told that Moses was the most modest of men. We may assume that Moses, like Abel, did not think too much of himself. His leadership position was not attained through political maneuvering; he was given it directly by God and tried to decline.

When Cain argued with Abel, Abel did not respond. Similarly, the Pirkei Avot, “Ethics of the Fathers,” describes the argument of Korach as “the argument of Korach and his followers,” not as the argument between Moses and Korach. [Avot 5:17]

Moses was aware of the uniqueness of each individual; Korach tried to blur the differences between people.

It is one of the profound teachings of Judaism, that not all people are created equal. Each person certainly has an inalienable right to his or her dignity, but not all people possess equal roles and destinies.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik illustrated this idea with an insight regarding the quintessential statement of Jewish monotheism, the SH'MA: “Listen Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One.” Rabbi Soloveitchik commented that he would prefer to translate the Hebrew word *ehad* not as “one” but as “unique.” Jewish monotheism does not differ from polytheism purely in numeric terms—a belief in one God vs. many. The declaration implied in the SH'MA is that God is unique. Man is created in the image of God, which means that each and every human being is unique as well. The challenge of life is to find our uniqueness and develop it, not to define ourselves in comparison with others, but to search within ourselves and find our uniqueness, our image of God.

Indeed, when the Torah commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, we can ask, “How can one possibly love others”? The secret of loving others is in

discovering their uniqueness and appreciating it. A mother loves all her children, for she appreciates the uniqueness of each child. We are commanded to find the uniqueness in each person and to love them for it.

When a person identifies his own uniqueness and develops that uniqueness, he truly manifests the image of God within himself. And then he can love others in the same way. Therein lies the mistake of Cain. He could not see his own uniqueness. He could not appreciate his brother's uniqueness. He did not know the meaning of brotherhood.

On the other hand, the behavior of Moses from earliest adulthood illustrates the opposite attitude.

"And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brothers, and looked on their burdens; and he spied an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers." [Exodus 2:11] He goes out to his brothers to see their suffering. Notwithstanding that he is the prince of Egypt, he identifies with the plight of the slaves. He responds to the sense of brotherhood he feels between himself and the Jews.

"And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." [Exodus 2:12]

Moses kills a man but his act is profoundly different from the act of Cain. Cain's act was a murder resulting from jealousy of his brother. Moses was acting to protect his brother.

The Ariz'al explains all these similarities and parallels—the soul of Abel was reincarnated in Moses. And thus we come to find the first two brothers in the Torah who really, truly, related to one another with love and respect—Moses and his brother Aaron.

"And the Lord said to Aaron, 'Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him.'" [Exodus 4:27] The Midrash stresses the importance of this kiss: "When it says: 'Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other' [Psalms 85:11] mercy refers to Aaron... while truth refers to Moses... Righteousness refers to Moses, of whom it is said: 'He executed the righteousness of the Lord' [Deuteronomy 33:21], and peace refers to Aaron, of whom it says: 'He walked with Me in peace and uprightness' [Malachi 2:6] Righteousness and peace have kissed each other, as it says,... 'And he [Aaron] kissed him [Moses].' Why? Each one rejoiced at the other's greatness." [Midrash Rabbah, Exodus 5:10]

Throughout the Book of Genesis, we do not find harmony among brothers. The unity of these two brothers, Moses and Aaron, is what enables them to lead the people out of Egypt and to bring them to Mt. Sinai to accept the Torah. In order to leave Egypt the children of Israel had first to become a nation. In order to receive the Torah they needed unity. The core of this unity was the love and mutual respect exhibited between Moses and Aaron. "Each one rejoiced at the

other's greatness." Each appreciated the greatness and uniqueness of the other as Cain and Abel never did.

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### RABBI BENJAMIN HECHT

## Insight

A few years ago, a controversy arose in Israel over a company's use of dinosaurs as part of their marketing campaign. Elements of the Orthodox community threatened to boycott this company's products over what they perceived to be an affront to Torah. Belief in the existence of dinosaurs—with the corollary approval of the theory of evolution—was simply deemed to be, in the eyes of these individuals, sacrilegious. Use of dinosaurs in the campaign implicitly demonstrated acceptance of these irreverent ideas which represented a challenge to the truth of Torah and its declaration of a creation, 5764 years ago, in seven days. Furthermore, as this product was also used by children, the presentation of dinosaurs on the product's packaging would be no less than a suggestion of heresy to the young. Dinosaurs were simply unacceptable.

The general community, upon hearing of this boycott, responded with humour to this fundamentalist expression of such a starchy staid religion. Orthodoxy was vilified and the wisdom of Torah mocked and challenged. This attack upon their position did not perturb the boycotters; in a certain way, it actually strengthened their resolve. After all, they contended quoting such sources as Rashi, Bamidbar 19:2: that we should expect those who reject Torah to taunt us because of our practices and beliefs. And clearly there is some truth in this assertion. In accepting Revelation, one is declaring that he/she accepts an overall presentation of facts and ideas that otherwise would not be recognized or known. As such, there must be a rift in understanding between one who accepts Revelation and one who does not. Furthermore, it can be expected that with this difference in viewpoints, there will be instances when one, on either side of the breach, will find the opinion of the other more than unacceptable—even ludicrous. And the case of evolution and creation is one of these instances.

It is often heard from various individuals who accept the story of creation how absurd the idea of evolution is. The chances of the random creation of a universe is compared to the chances of a monkey writing, randomly, the entire works of Shakespeare; how absurd is it to believe such an idea? Similarly, these individuals are themselves attacked for their rejection of evolution, as evidenced by the above case of the dinosaurs. The battle lines are thus drawn. Each on their own side, believing their view to be clear and the other view to be folly. And it is precisely because these lines are drawn and the rift so clear, that events such as those that transpired in Israel occur. How can there be any acceptance of the existence of dinosaurs for, to do

so, would give tacit approval to any possible legitimacy of the other's view. And, for similar reasons, there cannot be any acceptance, by the other side, of a view that rejects the possibility of dinosaurs. The creationist believes that he/she is defending the faith against the attacks of the infidel. And the proponent of evolution believes that he/she is defending the scientific process from the attacks of fundamentalists, fanatics and obscurantists. To declare even an inch of uncertainty is deemed to offer a level of victory to the enemy in the battle toward truth.

The problem with the above scenario is that neither Revelation nor science exists in a vacuum, yet, the above rift, treats them as if they do. So fearful of the findings of science and their possible challenges to a specific understanding of Revelation, various creationists are motivated to reject the possibility of any value in the undertakings of science, even misrepresenting scientific theories.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, so fearful of being limited by the presentation of Revelation, various evolutionists are motivated to reject the possibility of any value in the beliefs of Revelation, even misrepresenting the faith.<sup>2</sup> What occurs is actually an intellectual rigor mortis—depriving all sides of a heart beat—and, subsequently, friction. But in reality, both Revelation and science are born of the same source and thus must conjoin, at least in ambition. The challenge is that we do not understand this merging—and thus, we must recognize that both our understanding of science and of Revelation are lacking. The problem for many who accept Revelation is that they cannot accept the possibility of a lack in their understanding of Revelation. Since Revelation is a statement from the past, it is already declared clear and understandable. Science with its vision towards the future and its acceptance of new ideas cannot be deemed to add anything to Revelation for, if this was so, the statement of Revelation would be continuously unclear. So the rift. The reality of Torah, however—and the reason why a commitment to Torah should not advance this rift but actually mend it—is that its view of Revelation is not static but dynamic.<sup>3</sup> Torah declares that new ideas will be uncovered within its words and, thus, the advancements of science can find expression in bringing forth new ideas in the realm of Revelation. As such the rift is only an illusion to be overcome.

Ramban, Bereishit 1:1 writes: "...the process of creation is a deep mystery not to be understood from the verses..."<sup>4</sup> The Written Torah demands the further explanations of the Oral Torah. As such, challenges to the literal understanding of the creation story never

<sup>1</sup> There is an article in Torah U'Madda Journal, volume 2 that demonstrates this point in regard to evolution.

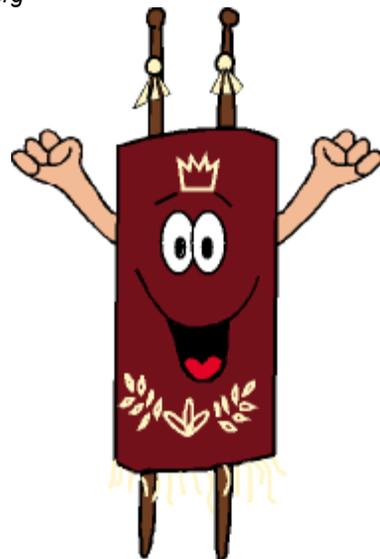
<sup>2</sup> In a different context, the Israeli movie Kaddish is an example of such distortion.

<sup>3</sup> See Rabbi Benjamin Hecht, The Cloud of Revelation, Nishma Introspection 5763-2.

<sup>4</sup> Translation by Rabbi Charles B. Chavel.

bothered Torah thinkers, for the text obviously demanded further explanation, even into the realm of allegory.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the Oral Torah is inherently a living entity that expands through history as new insights became part of its corpus. As such science can never challenge Torah; it can only serve to further our understanding of it. The discovery of dinosaur bones and the various theories that explain their existence are thus not challenges to our understanding of creation but rather further information that allows us to truly grasp the nature of this event. This is so because we recognize that our understanding of the words and ideas of Revelation are constantly evolving for this is the nature of Torah.

Similarly, the ideas of Torah can bring insight into the theories of science. Science is only the genuine expression of the best possible theory that we can formulate at this time. As such science is also ever-evolving, so why can the ideas of Torah not be used to assist in the formulation of these ever-developing theories? It is precisely because Torah is also an ever-developing realm of ideas that this is possible. No thought is static—but there are jailers who attempt to lock thoughts away. The key is recognizing and accepting the limitations and endlessness of our knowledge. Science today is a picture of our understanding of the universe at this moment—but there is always room for improvement through study, investigation and the achievement of new ideas. Similarly, Torah knowledge today is also a picture of our understanding of Revelation at this moment—with spilling room for improvement through study, investigation and the achievement of new ideas. Any rift between them—between creation and evolution—is simply a reflection of our lack—and our fear—of knowledge. This, not the poor old dinosaur, is the problem and the challenge. © 2003 Rabbi B. Hecht & [www.torah.org](http://www.torah.org)



<sup>5</sup> See, further, Challenge, Section 2, Creation and Evolution.