

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The story of the first eight chapters of Bereishit is tragic but simple: creation, followed by de-creation, followed by re-creation. God creates order. Humans then destroy that order, to the point where "the world was filled with violence," and "all flesh had corrupted its way on earth." God brings a flood that wipes away all life, until -- with the exception of Noach, his family and other animals -- the earth has returned to the state it was in at the beginning of Torah, when "the earth was waste and void, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

Vowing never again to destroy all life -- though not guaranteeing that humanity might not do so of its own accord -- God begins again, this time with Noach in place of Adam, father of a new start to the human story. Genesis 9 is therefore parallel to Genesis 1. But there are two significant differences.

In both there is a keyword, repeated seven times, but it is a different word. In Genesis 1 the word is tov, "good." In Genesis 9, the word is brit, "covenant." That is the first difference.

The second is that they both state that God made the human person in His image, but they do so in markedly different ways. In Genesis 1 we read: And God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of heaven, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every moving thing that moves upon the earth."

"So God created man in His image, / In the image of God He created him, / Male and female He created them." (Gen. 1:26-27)

And this is how it is stated in Genesis 9: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; / For in the image of God, He made man." (Gen. 9:6)

The difference here is fundamental. Genesis 1 tells me that I am in the image of God. Genesis 9 tells me that the other person is in the image of God. Genesis 1 speaks about the dominance of Homo sapiens over the rest of creation. Genesis 9 speaks about the sanctity of life and the prohibition of murder. The first chapter tells us about the potential power of human beings, while the ninth chapter tells us about the

moral limits of that power. We may not use it to deprive another person of life.

This also explains why the keyword, repeated seven times, changes from "good" to "covenant." When we call something good, we are speaking about how it is in itself. But when we speak of covenant, we are talking about relationships. A covenant is a moral bond between persons.

What differentiates the world after the Flood from the world before is that the terms of the human condition have changed. God no longer expects people to be good because it is in their nature to be so. To the contrary, God now knows that "every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood" (Gen. 8:21) -- and this despite the fact that we were created in God's image.

The difference is that there is only one God. If there were only one human being, he or she might live at peace with the world. But we know that this could not be the case because "It is not good for man to be alone." We are social animals. And when one human being thinks he or she has godlike powers vis--vis another human being, the result is violence. Therefore, thinking yourself godlike, if you are human, all-too-human, is very dangerous indeed.

That is why, with one simple move, God transformed the terms of the equation. After the Flood, He taught Noach (and through him all humanity), that we should think, not of ourselves but of the human other as in the image of God. That is the only way to save ourselves from violence and self-destruction.

This really is a life-changing idea. It means that the greatest religious challenge is: Can I see God's image in one who is not in my image -- whose colour, class, culture or creed is different from mine?

People fear people not like them. That has been a source of violence for as long as there has been human life on earth. The stranger, the foreigner, the outsider, is almost always seen as a threat. But what if the opposite is the case? What if the people not like us enlarge rather than endanger our world?



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There is a strange blessing we say after eating or drinking something over which we make the blessing shehakol. It goes: borei nefashot rabbot vechesronam. God "creates many souls and their deficiencies." Understood literally, it is almost incomprehensible. Why should we praise God who creates deficiencies?

One beautiful answer is that if we had no deficiencies, then lacking nothing, we would never need anyone else. We would be solitary rather than social. The fact that we are all different, and all have deficiencies, means that we need one another. What you lack, I may have, and what I lack, you may have. It is by coming together that we can each give the other something he or she lacks. It is our deficiencies and differences that brings us together in mutual gain, in a win-win scenario. It is our diversity that makes us social animals.

(I thank Mr Joshua Rowe of Manchester from whom I first heard this lovely idea. This notion is what led thinkers like Montesquieu in the eighteenth century to conceptualise trade as an alternative to war. When two different tribes meet, they can either trade or fight. If they fight, one at least will lose and the other, too, will suffer losses. If they trade, both will gain. This is one of the most important contributions of the market economy to peace, tolerance and the ability to see difference as a blessing, not a curse. See Albert O. Hirschman, *The passions and the interests: political arguments for capitalism before its triumph*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.)

This is the insight expressed in the famous rabbinic statement: "When a human being makes many coins in the same mint, they all come out the same. God makes us all in the same mint, the same image, His image, and we all come out different." (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5) This is the basis of what I call -- it was the title of one of my books -- the dignity of difference.

This is a life-changing idea. Next time we meet someone radically unlike us, we should try seeing difference not as a threat but as an enlarging, possibility-creating gift. After the Flood, and to avoid a world "filled with violence" that led to the Flood in the first place, God asks us to see His image in one who is not in my image.

Adam knew that he was in the image of God. Noah and his descendants are commanded to remember that the other person is in the image of God.

The great religious challenge is: Can I see a trace of God in the face of a stranger? *Covenant and Conversation 5777 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, so that they shall not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7) What is the connection between Adam's existential state of aloneness and the tragic social isolation which results from the Tower of Babel, when one universal language is replaced by seventy languages, leading to bedlam, confusion and dispersion?

To answer our question, let us begin by returning to the story of creation and G-d's declaration: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a help-opposite for him" (Gen.2:18). When Adam fails to find his 'help-opposite' among the animals, we are told: "The Lord G-d cast a deep sleep upon man and while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place, and of the rib, which the L-rd G-d had taken from the man, He made a woman, and brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:21-22).

Why is the birth of Eve surrounded with this poetic quality? Why does her creation differ radically from all other creatures?

The answer is that had Eve been created from the earth like the rest of the animals, Adam would have related to her as a two-legged creature. Even if she walked and talked, she would end up as one of the animals to name and control. Her unique 'birth' marks her unique role.

In an earlier verse, we read that "G-d created the human being in His image; in the image of G-d He created him, male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:27). "Male and female" suggests androgynous qualities, and on that verse, Rashi quotes a midrashic interpretation that G-d originally created the human with two "faces," Siamese twins as it were, so that when He put Adam into a deep sleep, it was not just to remove a rib but to separate the female side from the male side.

G-d divided the creature into two so that each half would seek completion in the other. Had Eve not emerged from Adam's own flesh to begin with, they could never have become one flesh again.

Awakening, Adam said of Eve, "Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" (2:23). His search was over, and what was true for Adam is true for humankind. In the next verse, G-d announced the second basic principle in life: "Therefore shall a man leave his father

and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (2:24). "Leave" does not mean reject; but it does mean that one must be mature and independent in order to enter into a relationship of mutuality with one's mate. (How many divorces can be traced to crippling parent-child relationships!)

One of the goals of a human being is to become one flesh with another human being, and this, the truest of partnerships, can only be achieved with someone who is really part of yourself, only with someone to whom you cleave intellectually and emotionally. If a relationship suffers from a lack of concern and commitment, then sexuality suffers as well. The Torah wants us to know that for humans, sexual relations are not merely a function of procreative needs, but rather an expression of mutuality on a profound level. Hence, in contrast to the animal kingdom, humans are not controlled by periods of heat; sexuality is ever-present. Thus Nahmanides speaks of one flesh in allegoric terms: through a transcendent sexual act conceived in marriage, the two become one.

Rashi interprets the verse, "You shall become one flesh" to mean that in the newborn child, mother and father literally become one flesh. In the child, part of us lives on even after we die.

The entire sequence ends with the startling statement, "And they were both naked, and they were not ashamed" (2:25). Given the Torah's strict standards of modesty how are we to understand a description which seems to contradict traditional Jewish values?

I would suggest a more symbolic explanation: Nakedness without shame means that two people must have the ability to face each other and reveal their souls without external pretense. Frequently, we play games, pretending to be what we're not, putting on a front. The Hebrew word 'begeg' (garment) comes from the same root as 'bagod' – to betray. With garments I can betray; wearing my role as I hide my true self. The Torah wants husband and wife to remove garments which conceal truth, so that they are free to express fears and frustrations, not afraid to cry and scream in each other's presence without feeling the "shame of nakedness." This is the ideal 'ezer kenegdo.'

The first global catastrophe, the flood, struck when the world rejected the ideal relationship between man and woman. Rape, pillage, and unbridled lust became the norm. Only one family on earth – Noah's remained righteous. Now, with the Tower of Babel, whatever values Noah attempted to transmit to future generations were forgotten.

What exactly happened when one language became seventy is difficult to understand. Yet, metaphorically, one language means people understand each other. With their 'ezer-kenegdos,' existential and social loneliness is kept at bay as they become one in love and in progeny.

The Tower of Babel represents a new stage of

depravity, not sexual, but social. People wanted to create a great name by building great towers, not for the sake of Heaven, but for the sake of materialism; the new god became splendid achievements with mortar and brick. As they reached greater physical heights, they forgot the human, inter-personal value of a friend, a wife, a life's partner. According to the Midrash, when a person fell off the Tower, work continued, but if a brick crashed to the ground, people mourned.

Thus the total breakdown of language fits the crime of people who may be physically alive, but whose tongues and hearts are locked –people who are no longer communicating with each other. It was no longer possible for two people to become one flesh and one bone, to stand naked without shame, to become 'ezer-kenegdos.' Existential loneliness engulfed the world and intercommunication was forgotten. The powerful idea of one language became a vague memory.

The Tower of Babel ended an era in the history of mankind, and the social destruction it left behind could only be fixed by Abraham. His message of a G-d of compassion who wishes to unite the world in love and morality is still waiting to be heard. ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The greater a person is or believes he or she is, the smaller the room for error in one's life decisions. Had Noach been merely Mister Noach, his choice of beginning the world again with a vineyard and wine would have been acceptable and even understandable. After all, the trauma of the destruction of so many human beings in the waters of the great flood required some sort of release of tension and an escape mechanism. But he was not just plain Noach when the Lord commanded him to build his ark and restart humanity.

He was Noach the righteous man of his generations, the person who represented goodness and service to God and humanity. He was special, an exalted person who overcame the influences of a wicked and dissolute society and withstood its ridicule and insults. A person of such noble character and pious nature should not begin the rebuilding of human society with vineyards and wine.

It sent the wrong message to his progeny and through them to all later generations as well. Holy people are to be held to holy standards of behavior and endeavor. There is no one size fits all in ethical and moral behavior standards. The rabbis of Midrash taught us that the greater the human capacity for holiness brings with it a commensurate capacity for dissolute behavior as well.

The Talmud stated that it was the scholarly righteous who had the strongest evil inclination within them. The responsibility for spiritual greatness is

commensurate with the capacity for holy greatness of each individual person. This is why Noach found himself criticized by Midrash and later Jewish biblical commentators in spite of the Torah's glowing compliments paid to him in its initial description.

A person of the stature of Noach should not be found drunk and disheveled in his tent, an inviting figure for the debauchery of his own offspring. The failure of greatness is depressing. As King Solomon put it: "If the flame has consumed the great cedars, then what else can be the fate of the hyssop of the wall?"

Greatness carries with it enormous burdens and fateful consequences. As we pride ourselves on being the "chosen people" we are held by Heaven to behave and live our lives as being a chosen people. Wine and drunkenness will not suffice for a nation that is destined to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a special people.

Burdened by this greatness the Jewish people have fallen short of the mark numerous times in our history. But we have always risen again to attempt to fulfill our destiny and realize our potential. It is this characteristic of resilience, inherited from our father Abraham, that has been the key to our survival. We have constantly dealt with great ideas and issues. Drunkenness, whether physical or spiritual, has never been a trait of Jewish society. We are aware of the story and fate of Noach and therefore we pursue the greatness of Abraham as our goal in life. ©2017 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

At the conclusion of the deluge, God proclaimed that "while the earth remains...day and night shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22) Rashi deduces from this verse that the natural progression of day and night, ceased to exist during the time of the flood.

Since this verse mentions day before night, the position of Rashbam that at creation day preceded night makes sense. Before the Great Flood, we were sun people with the day being paramount.

Only much later, after we left Egypt did God proclaim that we were to become moon people – that the day would begin at night.

What then is the conceptual difference between the sun and moon? There is a deep difference between these two approaches. It has been noted that the sun represents sameness. This because it is always the same size. Kohelet writes "there is nothing new under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9) In other words, tomorrow is no different than today, today is no different than yesterday. When facing challenges there is little

hope that there can be any change--everything seems to be the same as it was and will always remain stagnant.

The moon, however, fluctuates in size. It diminishes and eventually vanishes only to reappear. Thus the Hebrew word for moon, chodesh, is similar to chadash which means new. The moon teaches that no matter the obstacles, we have the power to renew ourselves and overcome.

While our calendar is primarily lunar, it is solar as well. Every few years a month is added to the lunar year so that the lunar cycle be in sync with the solar. The emphasis on the ever-changing moon with a need to acknowledge the consistent solar cycle, teaches that life is made up of a balance of sameness and newness. Some things remain as they always were; other things have the capacity to change.

Events in Israel speak to this balance. On the one hand, all seems the same. Jews are being murdered because they are Jews. The world by and large blames us. The message of the sun is alive and well. Things today seem no different than throughout history.

In the same breath, the lunar side of our calendar reminds us that all need not be the same. One should not be overly pessimistic. No doubt we face serious challenges, the likes of which I believe we've never faced since the establishment of the state.

So while we were originally sun people with day preceding night, we, in time, learned to infuse the sun with the spirit of the moon. Night precedes day. No matter how bleak and how the same life seems, we must always be alive and hopeful for a different reality than before, a new dawn – when our people can live in unity without fear – when real shalom will prevail. ©2017 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

“But Noach found chayn in the eyes of God." (Bereishis 6:8) The end is near. That's what Noach told his generation for 120 years, as he sawed and hammered away to build his refuge-on-water for the upcoming Great Flood. But did anyone listen? Not a one, at least not beyond his own family.

Whose fault was that? The people of his generation, right? Well, not so fast. As Rashi points out at the beginning of this week's parsha, at least one side of the discussion in the Talmud has something to say about Noach's approach to outreach. In fact, they fault him to some degree for not being more aggressive in changing the hearts of his generation, as Avraham was.

So then why was Noach even saved? The Torah says: "But Noach found chayn in the eyes of

God." (Bereishis 6:8)

In other words, Noach had a redeeming quality: chayn. Normally translated as "grace," it is clearly much more than that if it saved Noach from world destruction. On the contrary. Somehow it has to be tied up with the entire purpose of life if it mitigated Noach's judgment at a time of Divine anger.

This is why chayn is the root of such important concepts as "chanukah," which means "dedication," and "chinuch," which means "education." Whatever it is that a person is supposed to dedicate his life to, or learn and teach others, it has to do with the concept of chayn. Clearly, it is worth understanding what chayn is.

Before we do it is worth pointing something out that is an important part of the chayn discussion. The verse above seems only complimentary. Noach's generation was bad and angered God. He decided to destroy them. Noach was excluded from the judgment because, unlike everyone else in his generation, he had CHAYN.

True. But, maybe the verse is conveying something else as well, something that seems to support those who question Noach's approach to saving the world. Perhaps the verse is saying that though Noach found chayn in the eyes of God, he did not find chayn in the eyes of his fellow man, and THAT is why they did not listen to him.

Weren't they all evil people? Yes, but so were the people of Avraham's time. Did he even have to care what such people thought of him? Avraham seemed to. Besides the mishnah states: "Which is the straight path? That which is beautiful to the one who uses it, and beautiful for him in the eyes of others." (Pirkei Avos 2:1)

Arguably, the rabbis who authored this statement did not mean that a person has to go around pleasing EVERYONE. After all, evil people are evil because they like evil things, and people who similarly do evil things. A righteous person could never stoop to such a level, even for the right reasons.

Did they only mean in the eyes of other RIGHTEOUS people? If so, you wouldn't need a mishnah for that. It would just be stating the obvious. It would seem then that the rabbis were referring to a large group of people between these two extremes, people who are easily confused by what they don't understand. They can be pulled in the wrong direction as a result.

For example, a person can be strict with himself, which makes him disciplined, and strict with others, which makes him hated. Rebi Shimon bar Yochai spent 12 years in a cave with his son, devoted to nothing but deepening his understanding of Torah and performing mitzvos. He certainly made God happy.

When he came out of the cave though and saw people involved in worldly matters, he could not relate, and burned them up with his vision alone. A Heavenly

Voice told him to go back to his cave and to stop destroying God's world. A year later, he was far more sensitive to the needs of others and allowed to leave his cave for good.

Or a person can be easy going, which relaxes him, and easy going with others, which makes them think he doesn't care about anything. Life is about balance, and the difficult part is finding it.

In fact, the Hebrew word for "beautiful" employed by the Mishnah is not the typical word used in such a context. It is the word "tifferes," which implies balance. Avraham was the trait of Chesed, or Kindness. Yitzchak was the trait of Gevurah, or Strength. Ya'akov was Tifferes, the perfect balance between the two.

That is harmony.

That is TRUE beauty.

This would imply that there was something unbalanced about Noach. He was balanced enough to have chayn before God, but not balanced enough to have chayn before man. To think God does not care about that is a mistake, as Noach found out the year he had to take care of what remained of the world. It was far from a picnic.

Nor did he look forward to the brave new world waiting for him once the waters receded and the door of the Ark opened a year later. He had to be coaxed from the Ark by God Himself. He probably spent a lot of time wondering about what he could have done differently to avoid the Flood in the first place.

So where did his chayn fall short?

Avraham Avinu was the answer, which is why HE was the first forefather, and not Noach. Avraham knew who he was and what he stood for. He was most at home living in a holy environment and talking with God. He learned Torah, the Talmud says, and we can assume that he loved it and learned it as well as he humanly could. He was, in yeshiva vernacular, "Shtark," religiously intense.

Being somewhere unholy did not "shter," that is, contradict or interfere with that. When he had to talk to non-spiritual people, instead of God, he never lost himself or forgot his goals in life. In other words, nothing made him feel spiritually insecure because the reality of God was so firmly implanted in him. Nothing could stop him even for a moment from being who he was.

This allowed him to focus on others when he needed to, and to tend to their needs and wants. As they say, "Your spirituality is someone else's materialism." This means that when you care about other's most basic material needs, you are acting spiritually.

People appreciate this. They are grateful for it, especially if they see that what they NEED you don't even WANT. They feel the care and concern, and they feel valuable in your eyes. This makes them feel special, and it allows them to avoid being on the

defensive. Survival, they realize, is not an issue around you.

Consequently, they are more open to a relationship with such a person, and more importantly, to learn from them. They might even be willing to make some sacrifices for a higher cause, because feeling the other person's chayn puts them in touch with their own chayn, that is, their soul.

You see, God can see a person's soul and spirituality even if it remains bottled up inside. He reads hearts, and knows what a person really thinks and wants. He can sense a person's chayn even if not projected to the outside world.

Not people though. If a person's soul is not visible to others on the outside, they won't see it on the inside. If a person appears to them to be religiously extreme, they will not see it as a lesson about life, but as a reason to run the other way. The most secular person can tolerate someone else's religious extremism if it doesn't prevent them from being respectful to others who are unlike them.

As far as outreach goes, it has a long term impact. If a person is sincerely Torah observant, nothing can change their way of life. They may compromise from time to time, but they will stay true to Torah values overall. History has shown that time and time again.

Secular people, on the other hand, are that way by default. A non-religious lifestyle is never the result of a moral choice, but of an immoral or amoral choice. They are vulnerable to change over time if they do not feel defensive around religious people. This too has been proven countless times in the past. Shields down, the truth has a way of reaching anyone's soul, and then empowering it to choose right over wrong. This then gives THEM chayn in God's eyes, and in the eyes of others. ©2017 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Chamei Teverya

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

"All the fountains of the deep opened". This marked the beginning of the flood, but at the conclusion of the flood the Torah states "And the fountains of the deep closed" to which our sages derive that not all the fountains of the deep were closed. Those which benefit human kind were left open, as the hot springs of Teverya (Rashi).

In Jewish law, when we refer to a source of heat we are referring to fire. Thus if we are discussing cooking on Shabbat, or the roasting of the Pascal lamb, or the prohibition of cooking milk and meat together, we refer to acts performed with fire or any derivative thereof. Hence, someone cooking with the hot springs of Teverya, would not be culpable.

Cooking on Shabbat refers to using fire and not

the hot springs of Teverya or the sun. (Rashi Tractate Shabbat39). If we could harness the sun to cook on Shabbat, according to normative Halacha it might be permitted (Shmirat Shabbat K'hilchata chapter one note127)

Some say that when a Non-Jew cooks using the waters of "Chamei Teverya" the food does not become forbidden because of "Bishulei Akum" (food cooked by a Non-Jew, which is forbidden to partake thereof) since the heat is not of fire. However all would agree that should a person cook a non-kosher product in a pot, using as the heat source the "Chamei Teverya", that the utensil and the food would become forbidden. There is a concept in Jewish law of "K'bolo Kach Polto" (a utensil that absorbs by fire can only be rid of the prohibitive substance only when heated in the same way that it absorbed the original product). If we carry this further we might derive that if the pot absorbed the prohibitive food by fire, it can only rid itself of this prohibitive ingredient only by fire and not the "Chamei Teverya". Thus, the people of Teverya can save on electric in using the "Chamei Teverya" waters to kosher their utensils before Pesach.

Another interesting fact; women would be able to use the waters of "Chamei Teverya" for purification purposes, but the waters cannot be used for "Netilat Yadayim" (washing hands before a meal), for the law is that hot water could only be used for "Nitalat Yadayim", if it was once cold and then heated. However water which was always heated (as "Chamei Teverya") cannot be used for "Nitalat Yadayim". However some sages state that the reason the "Chamei Teverya" waters cannot be used for "Netilat Yadayim" is because of the sulfur content which makes it unfit for eating. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

After the Great Flood the Almighty said: "My rainbow I placed in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth" (Genesis 9:13). What lesson for life can we learn for life from the symbolism of the rainbow?

The rainbow symbolizes peace and unity. A rainbow is made up of various colors and shades of colors and although they are very different from each other, they come together to make one entire whole. Similarly, people are very different from each other. They come from different national backgrounds, and they have different personalities.

However, if they will look at themselves as one unit there can be peace and harmony despite the differences between them. This is basic for the existence of the world and for the welfare of individuals. For this reason the rainbow is the symbol of the covenant between the Almighty and the earth.

Whenever you see a rainbow, or a picture of a

rainbow, let it be a reminder to work towards harmony with other people even if there are major differences between you. While differences in interests and personality might make it difficult for you to become close friends with a specific person, you can still have a harmonious and peaceful relationship with that person. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

When the Flood Began

In Gemara Rosh Hashanah (11b) we find a machloket, a difference of opinion, as to the date of the beginning of the flood at the time of Noach. The Torah tells us, "Bishnat sheish mei'ot shanah l'chayei Noach bachodesh hasheini b'shiv'a asar yom lachodesh bayom hazeh nivk'u kol may'not t'hom rabah va'arubot hashamayim niftachu, in the six hundredth year of the life of Noah, in the second month on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened." Rashi brings us the machloket between R' Eliezer and R' Yehoshua: "Rabi Eliezer omeir zeh Mar Cheshvan, Rabi Yehoshua omeir zeh Iyar, R' Eliezer says that this is the month of Mar Cheshvan and R' Yehoshua says this is the month of Iyar." Mar Cheshvan is the second month of the year if we count from Tishrei whereas Iyar is the second month if we count from Nisan. With these few words Rashi hints at a deep philosophical debate in the Talmud concerning the month in which the Creation took place. The simple form of the question would be "did the creation of the world take place in the month of Tishrei or in the month of Nisan?"

Part of the disagreement concerning the month of Creation involves whether the spiritual component of the world preceded the physical component. The Midrash Rabbah brings an interesting Midrash which may enlighten us. As Hashem began to create the world, the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet approached Hashem, each one arguing that the Creation begin with it. The final argument was between the first two letters, the aleph and the bet. Hashem explained to the aleph that the first letter of the Aseret Hadibrot, the Ten Commandments, the spiritual component of the world, would begin with it (Anochi Hashem Elokecha, I am the Hashem your Elokim). Hashem then explained to the bet that the first words of Creation, the physical component of the world, would then begin with it (B'reishit bara Elokim, in the beginning Elokim created). One could still argue, though, as to which came first since the words of the Aseret Hadibrot did not occur until the second book of the Torah whereas the Creation begins the Torah. Using that argument, we would have to say that the physical world came first to be joined later by the spiritual world. In Mishlei, Proverbs, however, we find that the Torah itself is

called reishit since the commandments of the Torah are the very basis for the Torah. One could then easily posit that the Torah preceded the Creation even though it was not yet given to Man, and the word b'reishit means that with the Torah's commandments or by means of the Torah's commandments the world was created. Using this argument, we see that the spiritual world of the commandments preceded the physical world of the universe.

Returning to our machloket among the Rabbis, there does not appear to be any dispute that the spiritual aspect of the world was created before the physical. The nuance in their argument is over whether it is more likely that one could comprehend the relationship between the spiritual and the physical if one viewed them as coming into being at the same time with the physical being created immediately after the spiritual or whether it was more important for Hashem to demonstrate the importance of the spiritual over the physical by clearly creating the spiritual world significantly prior to the creation of the physical world. Those Rabbis who wished to say that the world began in Nisan also wished to emphasize the mutual bond of the physical and the spiritual worlds. Those Rabbis who wished to say that the world began in Tishrei wished to emphasize that the physical world was dependent on the spiritual world for its very existence.

Rashi's question at the very beginning of the Torah can be understood now in a different framework. Rashi questions why the Torah began with the story of Creation and continued through Adam, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Yosef, and Moshe rather than beginning with the first commandment from Hashem which does not occur until the twelfth chapter of the second book of the Torah. His question makes clear that the important lessons for us as people who should study the Torah involve the spiritual aspects of our lives. Rashi's answer to his question involves the historical creation of the physical world and the future assigning of that area of the physical world, at the direction of the Creator, to His people, the B'nei Yisrael. Rashi indicates that the physical world is dependent on the spiritual world to give it meaning and purpose. What makes the land of Israel special is the spiritual component that the B'nei Yisrael bring into that land. The spiritual nature of the people enabled the land to produce an abundance of food and beauty. It is no wonder then that when the B'nei Yisrael lost their connection to the spiritual, the physical nature of the land also changed. During the nearly two thousand years of exile, it became clear that the land could no longer support its inhabitants, and the fields and fauna dried up and lost their physical beauty. Now that the B'nei Yisrael have returned with a renewed sense of commitment to Torah and spirituality, we see the land flourish and regain its amazing beauty.

Whether the world of spirituality or of physicality

was the first to be created, our task remains the same even if viewed from two different perspectives. It is incumbent on us to either bring spirituality into our physical world or raise our physical world to incorporate within it the spiritual component of our world. We must come to understand Hashem's presence within our world and recognize His guidance and direction in all that surrounds us. We must learn to take the time to marvel at the nature of Hashem's Creation and appreciate the incredibly intricate forms around us. Even Science has begun to comprehend the order and structure that exists in seemingly unrelated areas of our lives. "Chaos Theory" indicates the repetitive nature of our world which permeates so many different Scientific areas that it becomes clear that it is not "chaos" but the Hand of the Creator. Our comprehension of this allows us to see our relationship with Hashem as necessary on our part in recognition for the great gifts which He has bestowed on us. That recognition is our way of raising the physical to the spiritual or imbuing the physical nature of our world with its spiritual component. May we take time on a regular basis to marvel at Hashem's gifts to us. ©2017 Rabbi D.S. Levin

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The Kabalists answer the basic question of why Hashem created the world with the comforting response of "tevah hatov l'heitiv -- the nature of the Good One is to bestow goodness." Rashi (Breishis 2:4) notes that this world was created with the letter hey which has an opening at the bottom, symbolizing man's descending into oblivion if he is not successful in leading a righteous life. Moreover, we are taught that the world to come is symbolized by the letter yud, the smallest letter, proclaiming that those privileged to go there are the minority of the population. If Hashem is good, and He breathes a living soul of His essence into man, literally a chip off the magnificent spiritual block, then why did He make the world so challenging that only a minority end up succeeding and reaching the world to come?

The high failure rate in this world is further emphasized by the Mishnah (Avos perek 5) which teaches that in the ten generations from Adam to Noach the great majority of the world population did not live a noble life. Similarly, from Noach to Avraham there were again ten generations and again man failed to live up to his potential, and Avraham received the reward that was initially allocated to all of them.

The Ohr Ha-Chaim Hakadosh (Breishis 3:4), in beginning to analyze Adam's sin of eating from the eitz ha-daas, similarly asks why Hashem did not diminish the power and attraction of the yetzer harah thus making man's mastery over it easier and more manageable? His answer is that in accordance with the challenge and effort to defeat the yetzer harah is the

reward and benefit for both this world and the world to come. He cites the Mishnah (Avos 5:26) which states, "in accordance with the exertion is the reward."

The Ramchal (Da'as Tvunos 18) teaches that the good which Hashem extends to man is the opportunity to connect with and benefit from the Shechina -- the Divine. To capitalize on this opportunity one must fulfill the six hundred and eleventh commandment (Devorim 28:9) of "v'holachto biderachav -- walking in His ways." Man is to emulate Hashem who is all giving and perform acts of kindness and spirituality.

Were man to receive a reward without performing and accomplishing to earn it, the reward would be "Na'amah d'kisufah -- bread of shame", i.e. degrading and debasing. Perhaps this is what our Rabbis are teaching when they state (Shabbos 127a), "receiving guests is greater than greeting the Divine Presence", for it is better to have a relationship with Hashem in a manner of giving, and thereby emulating His exalted character, than to encounter Him by simply being the recipient.

What emerges is the realization that meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in this world are, as stated by the introductory words of Mesilas Yesharim, comprised of overcoming the obstacles and challenges of the evil inclination. Freud taught that man is inherently bad and possesses an ID which yearns for negativity; Judaism says man possesses a yid -- a holy Divine image that enables him to overcome his desire for bad. Man is to emulate Hashem, and as His nature is to do good so too must man use his free will to overcome the desire to do bad and do good instead.

Our initial question assumed that tests and challenges are not really good for man. However, the Ramban in his commentary on the akeida (Breishis 22:1) teaches that Hashem only tests those that can pass the test. Avraham became the great father of our nation because he was tested with ten tests through which he became elevated and actualized his potential. Each individual as well is to be cognizant of the fact that they possess a unique mission and potential and a unique array of challenges. Our challenges are Hashem's way of offering us His l'heitiv -- His ultimate goodness, which is the opportunity to grow and earn the best of this world and the next. Indeed, the Ohr Ha-chaim cited earlier ends his treatment of this most important concept with the words "praiseworthy is the people for whom this is so". It is all a matter of perspective.

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