

# Toras אש Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

"**A**nd 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. (Rashi 1:1) Given that it is a book of law -- the commandments that bind the children of Israel as a nation -- it should have started with the first law given to the Israelites, which does not appear until the twelfth chapter of Exodus.

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

One of the most striking propositions of the Torah is that we are called on, as God's image, to imitate God. "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2): The sages taught: "Just as God is called gracious, so you be gracious. Just as He is called merciful, so you be merciful. Just as He is called holy, so you be holy." So too the prophets described the Almighty by all the various a tributes: long-suffering, abounding in kindness, righteous, upright, perfect, mighty and powerful and so on -- to teach us that these qualities are good and right and that a human being should cultivate them, and thus imitate God as far as we can. (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos De'ot 1:6)

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. (Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 16-17)

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 ruah 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



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by words ("And God said...and there was") so we make the human world by words, which is why Judaism takes words so seriously: "Life and death are in the power of the tongue," says the book of Proverbs (18:21). Already at the opening of the Torah, at the very beginning of creation, is foreshadowed the Jewish doctrine of revelation: that God reveals Himself to humanity not in the sun, the stars, the wind or the storm but in and through words -- sacred words that make us co-partners with God in the work of redemption.

"And God said, let there be...and there was" -- is, the second stage of creation, is for us the most difficult. It is one thing to conceive an idea, another to execute it. "Between the imagination and the act falls the shadow." (T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men", in T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems 1909-1962, p92) 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." (Mishna, Avot 2:16) There is a lovely rabbinic phrase: mahashva tova HaKadosh barukh Hu meztarfah lema'aseh. (Tosefta, Pe'ah 1:4)

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 some few individuals who are inescapably evil, but they are few. Within almost all of us is something positive and unique, but which is all too easily injured, and which only grows when exposed to the sunlight of someone else's recognition and praise. To see the good in others and let them see themselves in the mirror of our regard is to help someone grow to become the best they can be. "Greater," says the Talmud, "is one who causes others to do good than one who does good himself." (Bava Batra 9a) 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. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1) Why does the Torah, the word of God given to Moses as His legacy to the Jewish people, begin with an account of creation, going off into gardens of Eden and towers of Babel? It could, and perhaps should, have begun with the first commandment given to Israel as a newly-born free nation after their departure from Egypt: "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months' [Ex. 12:2]. After all, is not the Bible primarily a book of commandments? So asks Rashi at the beginning of his commentary on Bereishit.

I would like to suggest three classical responses to this question, each of which makes a stunning contribution to our opening query, What is Torah? Rashi's answer to this question is the Zionist credo. We begin with an account of creation because, if the nations of the world point their fingers at us, claiming we are thieves who have stolen this land from the Canaanites and its other indigenous inhabitants, our answer is that the entire world belongs to God; since He created it, He can give it to whomever is worthy in His eyes. From this perspective, Rashi has masterfully taken a most universal verse and given it a nationalistic spin. He has placed our right to the land of Israel as an implication of the very first verse of the Torah!

It is also possible to give Rashi's words an added dimension. He concludes this particular interpretation, 'and He (God) can give (the land) to whomever is worthy in his eyes.' These words can be taken to mean either to whomever He wishes, i.e., to Israel, because He so arbitrarily chooses, or rather as a moral directive, to whomever is morally worthy of the land, which implies that only if our actions deem us worthy, will we have the right to Israel. Jewish history bears out the second explanation, given the fact that we have suffered two exiles – the second of which lasting close to two thousand years. If this is indeed the proper explanation, Rashi's words provide a warning as well as a promise.

Nahmanides also grapples with this question. For him, it is clear that God's creation of the world is at the center of our theology, and so it was crucial to begin with this opening verse.

After all, the Torah is not only a Book of Commandments but is rather a complete philosophy of life. Hence, the first seven words of the Bible most significantly tell us that there is a Creator of this

universe, that our world is not an accident, 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,' a haphazard convergence of chemicals and exploding gases. It is a world with a beginning, and a beginning implies an end, a purpose, a reason for being. Moreover, without the creation of heaven and earth, could we survive even for an instant? Our very existence depends on the Creator; and in return for creating us, He has the right to ask us to live in a certain way and follow His laws. The first verse in the Torah sets the foundation for all that follows, it is the verse upon which our entire metaphysical structure rests!

After all, the Creator has rights of ownership: He owns us, our very beings. He deserves to have us live our lives in accord with His will and not merely in accord with our own subjective, and even selfish desires. He deserves our blessings before we partake of any bounty of the universe and our commitment to the lifestyle He commands us to lead.

In addition, Nahmanides further suggests that the entire story of the Garden of Eden teaches us that the punishment for disobeying God's laws will be alienation and exile, just as Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden of Eden after eating the forbidden fruit. This process will be experienced by Israel during our two difficult exiles. This too is a crucial element in Jewish theology.

The Midrash [Gen. Raba 12] offers yet a third explanation. Implied in our opening biblical verse is a principle as to how we ought to live our lives, the major purpose of our very being. 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.' And since one of the guiding principles in the Torah is that we walk in His ways, our first meeting with God tells us that, just as He created, so must we create, just as He stood at the abyss of darkness and made light, so must we – created in His image – remove all pockets of darkness, chaos and void, bringing light, order and significance. In effect, the first verse of Genesis is also the first commandment, a command ordained by God to all human beings created in His image: the human task in this world is to create, or rather to re-create a world, to make it a more perfect world, by virtue of the 'image of God' within each of us.

The Midrash sees the human being in general, and the Jew in particular, as a creative force. Our creative energies – religious, ethical, scientific and artistic – must work in harmony with the Almighty to perfect a not yet perfect world, to bring us back to the dream-harmony of Eden, to which primordial world God first brought His human partner to develop and for which God bid Adam to take responsibility (Gen 2:15). Our sacred Torah reveals not only what humanity is but rather what humanity must become: it teaches us that it is not merely sufficient for us to engage the world but we must attempt to perfect the world in the Kingship –

and with the “fellowship” – of our Partner, the Divine and Majestic Creator. ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**here is a tendency to look at the narrative that appears in this first portion of the Torah as being a description of the past -- the story of the beginnings of creation, the planet and universe and of the story of civilization. However, we are taught in the traditions of Judaism that the Lord, so to speak, creates our universe and world anew each day.

Thus, the narrative contained in this week's beginning portion of the Torah is not only a story of the past, but it is just as importantly a description of our present world and society. We should not be surprised to find that human rivalries and disagreements often lead to murder and then to deep regret. The animalistic nature of humans leads them to sin and depravity.

The intellectual freedom and curiosity built into us by the fruit of the tree of wisdom leads to experimentation with strange ideas and to idolatry. As the population of the world increases, so does technology and ordered society. But deep within the original generations of humans lies a persistent and debilitating unhappiness.

Humans are not satisfied because they have been driven out of paradise and find their way back there only to be barred by heavenly forces beyond their control. They search for all sorts of detours and untraveled roads to return to where their soul wishes to lead them. And this has been the history of human civilization from its onset until today.

There is much that we today in our current so-called modern world can learn from this narrative as presented in this first portion of the Torah. We can learn that murder and violence really provide no solution to any of the problems that beset human beings. We can learn that false ideologies and man-made gods are of little value and in fact are quite counterproductive to human welfare, as the long run of civilized history makes abundantly clear.

We can learn that following our animalistic instincts only brings us farther away from where our soul longs to be, to our home and comfort zone. We can learn that temptations will always exist and that we are in one way or another doomed to fall and make mistakes. We can also learn that through our actions and ideologies, weaknesses and sins, we are capable of destroying our world and bringing on untold tragedy and despair.

But we can also learn that we have enormous qualities of greatness built within us and that we alone are able to conduct conversations with our Creator and are equipped to rise above the physical and intellectual challenges that surround us.

More importantly, we can learn that these fateful choices are given to us and, to a great extent, are the masters of our destiny and the shapers of our current world and future generations. This first portion of the Torah stands not only as the beginning of the holy words of God but also as representative of the entire story of human kind for all time. ©2018 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **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 to 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 to 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 – adding 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 that 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. ©2018 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 NAFTALI REICH

## Legacy

**W**hy would the Creator need any help to complete the work of creation? Surely, the One who formed the world out of nothingness, who created all the hosts of the heavens and the teeming life of the earth, was perfectly capable of creating anything He chose to create. And yet, on the seventh day of creation, He said, "Naaseh adam. Let us make man." Whose help was He seeking? And why?

The Sages explain that Hashem was consulting with the angels, inviting their participation in the process of creating mankind. Although He obviously did not need their participation, Hashem was teaching us to be sensitive to protocol and proper behavior. Before undertaking a major project, consult with others.

The questions, however, continue to baffle. The angels were created on the third day, yet Hashem did not consult with them until the sixth day when He created mankind. Why didn't he invite their input when He was creating the mountains and the valleys, the tress and the flowers, the animals and the fishes?

The commentators explain that the creation of mankind was indeed the most appropriate setting for teaching the lessons of proper etiquette. How do we measure the worth of a person? On the one hand, every person is infinitely valuable, worthy of having the entire universe created for his sake, as the Sages tell us. On the other hand, there are people who are undoubtedly a disgrace to their purpose and design.

How then do we evaluate a person? We see if he is attuned to others or if he is totally egocentric. Only a person who recognizes that there is much to be learned from the knowledge and experience of his peers, who is sensitive to the feelings and sensibilities of others, truly has the potential for growth and fulfillment as a sublime human being.

Therefore, it was in the context of the creation of man that Hashem teaches us this important lesson. A tree is a tree and a flower is a flower no matter what, but a human being who has no use for other people's advice is not much of a human being. He is not a mensch.

A young lady came to seek the advice of a great sage.

"I am so confused," she said. "I have many suitors who have asked my hand in marriage. They all have such fine qualities, and I simply cannot make up my mind. What shall I do?"

"Tell me about their qualities," said the sage.

"Well, they are all handsome and well-established. I enjoy their company, they are so entertaining. Why, I can sit and listen to any of them for hours and hours."

The sage shook his head. "These are not the qualities you should be seeking. It is all good and well if a man is handsome and wealthy, but does he have a good character? Is he a fine person? As for their being so entertaining, it is far more important that your husband be a good listener than a good talker. Look for a fine man who knows how to listen. He will bring you happiness."

In our own lives, we must learn to differentiate between selfconfidence, which is an admirable quality, and egotism, which is not. It is all good and well to believe in one's own talents and abilities. The truly wise person, however, knows that all people have limitations, and there is always someone of value to be learned from other people. And even in situations where other people do not have anything worthwhile to contribute, the wise person will be sensitive to their feelings and make them feel involved and helpful. If we can find it in ourselves to overcome our egotistic tendencies and behave in the sublime manner of which human beings are capable, we will reap not only spiritual rewards but material and emotional rewards as well. ©2018 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

### RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt

**P**irke Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, 5:4 tells us that Abraham was tested with "ten trials, and he withstood them all -- to show the degree of our forefather Abraham's love for God." Each trial was given to him in order to show how much God loved him. At first glance this seems strange. This is how you show you love someone?

First, you have him thrown into a furnace. Then, you tell him to pack his bags and move to a foreign country. When he obeys, you bring a famine to this country. And then, when he travels to find food, you have the ruler of the next place abduct his wife. Abraham gets her back and returns to his ordained

place of residence, only to find that his nephew has been kidnapped by four powerful kings.

He manages to release him and is then commanded to kill his only son. Upon his return, having overcome the greatest challenge of his life, he finds that his wife died from shock and he is forced to pay an exorbitant sum for an inferior burial plot in a land that God has already promised him as an inheritance. And all of this shows God's love for Abraham?!

This is precisely God's love. Because through these challenges, Abraham was able to come closer to God. He fulfilled his potential and became the great human being we know of, founder of the nation that has taught monotheism to the world. The pain was relatively short-lived. The results were eternal. Abraham sits in his place in eternity, not in spite of his hardships, but because of them. His pain is gone. His greatness remains forever.

Our lesson: Know that pain is transient and difficulties in life are our opportunities for spiritual growth, to develop our character, perfect our behavior.

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#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Divrei Harav

## V'divrei Hatalmid

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit  
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**O**stensibly, the serpent in this week's portion when he convinced Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge could have used the argument that after all, it was not his fault. For Eve, when hearing the words of G-d ("Harav") and the words of the Serpent ("The Talmid in this case the Nachash"), should have heeded the words of G-d. In truth this is why we say that one cannot appoint a messenger to perform a directive for committing a sin, because "Ein Sheliach L'dvar Avera" ("you cannot appoint a messenger to carry out a sin"). Thus in such a case the messenger would be liable for his actions. In our case the serpent would be vindicated and Eve would be culpable (this is the view of Rashi).

There are those however who state that in such a scenario it only frees the sender from culpability, in our case the "Nachash". Others state that in such a scenario, the entire action of the sender is nullified.

When a farmer leaves over "Leket", (gleanings of the field left for the poor) if he pronounced before it became "Leket" that his field is ownerless ("Hefker"), can a wealthy person possess this "Leket"? Once again we apply the principle "The words of the teacher (in this case the mitzvah commanded by G-d of "Leket") and the student (the owner of the property), we follow the word of the teacher and the gleanings remain in their state of "Leket" and cannot be made "Hefker".

This principle is not only applicable to those

commandments between G-d and man, but also in a practical way; if there is a dispute of law between the Rabbi and the student, the law follows the Rabbi.  
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#### RABBI DAVID LEVIN

## The Proper Path

**W**e have discussed before the uniqueness of the Torah and its ability to give us many different messages from what might seem to be a simple sentence. We have previously noted that repetition, order or lack thereof, letters of a different size (whether larger or smaller than the text), a dot over a letter, and several other clues indicate to us that there is another message that is being presented to us that is different than the simple meaning of the words. Often there are several indications in one sentence that there is a deeper meaning which is hidden within. Part of the joy of studying Torah is discovering these special messages that Hashem hid within the text.

In Chapter 2:4 we find, "Eileh toldot haShamayim v'haAretz b'hibar'am b'yom asot Hashem Elokim eretz v'shamayim, these are the products of the heavens and the earth when they were created on the day of Hashem's, Elokim's making of earth and heavens." HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch tackles the unusual use of the word "toldot" in our pasuk. This word is translated here only as "products" but is usually translated as offspring or generations. The problem that the translators have is that there cannot be an offspring directly of the heavens or the earth. Hirsch explains that the word "toldot" is simply "the expression for the most natural organic begetting" which differs greatly from the "yeish mei'ayin, something from nothing" from the word "barah" which is also mentioned in the sentence. Since neither the heavens nor the earth have reproductive powers, the translators used the word "products". "This is accordingly the heading for the whole series of the development of the natural phenomena of the world which appear before our eyes after the Creation." It is also learned that these developments were contained in the Creation. "The laws, according to which they work, produce and develop, are those that were implanted in them by the Creator at their creation, and all the toldot haShamayim v'haAretz (the products of the Heavens and the Earth) were given b'hibar'am (when He created them) and have their origin in that creation."

The Or HaChaim expands on the approach of Hirsch. Hashem wished that the Heavens and the Earth would be partners in the reproductive processes and the sustenance of the world. At the same time, however, Hashem was concerned that people would misunderstand the importance that He played in the development of the actions of these two entities. We see that people noticed the rain through which the Heavens provided them with water and the crops that

the Earth brought forth to sustain them, and they began to place their faith in those entities instead of in their Creator.

As we examine our pasuk we note that a repetition of words occurs. In the beginning of our pasuk we find haShamayim v'haAretz, the heavens and the earth, while at the end of our sentence we find erez v'shamayim, earth and heavens. Two things should be obvious immediately: (1) the order is reversed, and (2) the definitive "the" is absent in the second set. The Kli Yakar indicates that in the beginning it was the intention of the Supreme Being to create the world with the lofty ideal of Din, Justice, which is the five Hebrew-letter name of Elokim. Thus, in the beginning the heh, which is the Hebrew number five, was attached to shamayim and aretz, indicating a connection to the name and the characteristic of Elokim. Here the heavens preceded the mention of the earth to indicate the lofty ideals of Justice. When Hashem created Man and decided to give him Free Will, He understood that Justice alone would be an impossible standard for Man. Man was from the earth and his foundation was of the earth. He would need to struggle to achieve the ideal of Justice. Hashem chose to couple Justice with Mercy. This is the first sentence in which the second name of the Supreme Being, Hashem (the Tetragrammaton), was introduced, a name which is indicative of the quality of Mercy. The result of Hashem making Man from the dust of the Earth was the need for the introduction of this quality of Mercy. Here the earth precedes the heavens.

There is an interesting discussion in the Gemara which indicates that it was through the special merit of Avraham that the world was created. This is loosely based on the word b'hibar'am since the letters of that word can be shuffled to form the word "B'Avraham". HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that Avraham was supposed to be created first but Hashem was concerned that should he falter there would be no one later who could correct his flaw. The world would then be doomed. Instead Hashem decided to create Adam HaRishon, the first man Adam, in place of Avraham. In that way whatever flaw might arise from Adam it could be corrected later by the goodness of Avraham.

The letters of the word b'hibar'am match the name of Avraham, but there is a problem using this explanation. When Avraham was born his name was Avram with the heh missing. The word can also be broken into two words, b'heh bar'am, with the letter heh He (Hashem) created them. Hashem created the world with the letter heh in mind which He would add to Avram's name in the future as a way to correct the flaws in Man that would occur. It was Avraham who could see through the superficial "knowledge" of Man and his relationship to the forces of the world. It was Avraham alone who saw the unity of these forces and

the Superior Power Who had given these forces the powers which they displayed. The heh of b'hibar'am is written smaller to indicate that Elokim hid His power from Man and this led Man to think that the Heavens and the Earth had powers of their own. Only Avraham who examined Nature and these forces realized their unity behind a Superior Being.

When we look out on the beauty and the majesty of Nature today we are able to understand the greatness of that Supreme Being, Hashem. We see the intricate shapes of flowers, some seemingly ruled by symmetry while others asymmetric, and we marvel at the Supreme Being Who brought this all into existence. Science has enabled us to see every step of the reproductive process in the formation of a new baby, and we stand in awe of the division of cells and the specialization of new cells to form the spine, the heart, and the head of a fetus. With incredible telescopes we can view stars being born and others dying and we can see just how minute we are in the vastness of the world. This vision helps us to comprehend the special attention that Hashem has placed on human beings within His myriad of responsibilities. This insight helps bring us closer to Hashem and that unique relationship that we have with Him. This gives perspective to the mitzvot which He has commanded us to guide our lives on a proper path between ourselves and our neighbors, our world, and our Hashem. ©2018 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

### **Perceptions**

"In the beginning, God made the Heaven and the Earth." (Bereishis 1:1) And, of course everything else that followed over the course of the next six days of creating, which leaves ALL of mankind breathless to this very day. Well, ALMOST all of mankind. ONE person begged to differ, and it might not have mattered had this ONE person not been Shlomo HaMelech, the WISEST man to have ever lived. Regarding Creation, He wrote, as Rashi explains, the following: "VANITY OF VANITIES!" Koheles said, "Vanities of vanities! Everything is vanity!" (Koheles 1:2).

If it sounds familiar, it should. We just read Koheles on Chol HaMoed Succos, and it is obvious why. It started with Rosh Chodesh Elul, 29 days of shofar blowing, and "L'Dovid Hashem Ori, etc." During last two weeks of the month at least -- the Sephardim did it the ENTIRE month -- we said Selichos. This, of course, was followed by Rosh Hashanah and the Aseres Yemai Teshuvah -- Ten Days of Repentance -- the climax of which was Yom Kippur. Koheles CLEARLY was just the SUMMARY of all of that.

You mean it WASN'T so clear?

Perhaps had we read Koheles on Yom Kippur, it would have been. On a day that we basically forsake

the pleasures of the physical world, as if following the script of Koheles, and focus on fear of God, as Koheles advises at the end of the sefer. Koheles would have fit in perfectly then.

Instead however we read Megillas Koheles on Succos, after we have already joyfully moved on from the more esoteric energy of Yom Kippur back to the world of physical pleasure. We may leave the comfort of our houses and move into the succah for an entire week, but we do it in STYLE.

Perhaps that is SPECIFICALLY the reason why Koheles is read during Succos, and NOT on Yom Kippur. Maybe it was "postponed" because Chazal, in their great wisdom, foresaw how Koheles would better serve as reminder of Yom Kippur "themes" once we have forgotten about them, than on a day that they are ALL we think about.

A reminder of exactly WHAT specifically?

The purpose of life.

It was, after all, what Koheles was looking for, the purpose of life, and as the wisest man to have ever lived, he was entitled to search for it. The only question is, if he was SO wise, why did Shlomo HaMelech not save himself all his trouble and ink, and simply rely on the word of the greatest PROPHET to have ever lived, who already taught: "Now, Israel, what does God, your God, demand of you? Only to fear God, your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, and to worship God, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul..." (Devarim 10:12)

He DID. Koheles was not reinventing the wheel. He was showing all the "math" behind it. He was not re-teaching Moshe Rabbeinu's conclusion, but providing all the back up for it. Moshe taught his lesson at the END of the 40 years. Koheles takes the reader on their own personal journey to the same conclusion.

This is because, from Moshe Rabbeinu, it is clear that fear of God is important only because GOD commands it. HE wants it, and if we want to please HIM, we should pursue it. If a person wants to be counted among God's loyalists, they should make fear of Him their TOP priority in life, no matter what else might please them more.

Koheles says that fear of God is important for another reason. It is important FOR us because it is important TO us. True, a person has to work on fear of God because it is a Torah mitzvah. But, says the wisest man, a person should know that it is also what THEY want to do that changes the nature of the journey itself. Nothing motivates a person to acquire something more than their desire to have it.

What do you REALLY want from life? This is the question that Koheles is asking a person, and it is one which reverberates off the schach of the succah. Because, says Koheles, it is all too easy to think that one already knows the answer to this question, and yet be WRONG, even during their ENTIRE life.

The Torah, of course, has the answer. The Torah was only given to discuss this answer, and to direct people towards it. Every single word of Torah is a part of the answer, and every story, an example of it. Even the letters of the words themselves hint to the purpose of life, when one takes the time to learn how.

If man was made for a specific purpose, then we can only be happy fulfilling it. If Creation was made for this specific purpose, then we can only be happy using it this way. When we deviate from this path, warns Koheles, we create something called "vanity of vanities," the ESSENCE of emptiness and meaninglessness.

So WHERE, and WHY do we go wrong?

The Talmud answers this question in, of all masechtos, Succah: "In the Time-to-Come, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will bring the Evil Inclination and slay it before the righteous and the evil. To the righteous, it will have the appearance of a towering hill, and to the evil it will have the appearance of a hair thread. These will cry and these will cry. The righteous will cry saying, 'How were we able to overcome such a towering hill!' The evil also will cry saying, 'How is it that we were unable to conquer this hair thread!'" (Succah 52a)

It's the yetzer hara's fault. It's the evil inclination that distort's reality and makes us pursue "vanity of vanities." It's the yetzer hara that made Koheles necessary. Most people just listen to the yetzer hara, and take its word as fact. Koheles listens to the yetzer hara, and then says, "Let's take a look at what it is saying, and see just how false its words really are."

Because, teaches Koheles, if a person just goes the distance to work it through, they will be left, in the end, with the same conclusion: there is nothing more meaningful to pursue in life than fear of God. Once the "dust" of the yetzer hara settles, the only thing left standing is fear of God.

Thus, the same section of Talmud concludes: "The School of Rebi Yishmael taught, 'If this repulsive wretch meets you, drag him to the Bais Midrash. If he is of stone, he will dissolve, if of iron he will shiver into fragments...'" (Succah 52b)

The yetzer hara can also be found in a Bais Midrash, but rarely in the same manner that it is found in the world outside of it. The Torah lives in there. The Shechinah resides in there. Therefore, the Koheles-based truth, and therefore, the PURPOSE OF LIFE, is much clearer in there.

And this is why, as Rashi says about the very first word of the Torah, "Be-REISHIS," the world was made for Torah. As it says: "The beginning -- REISHIS -- of wisdom is the FEAR OF GOD." (Mishlei 9:10)

"The secrets of God to those who FEAR Him..." (Tehillim 25:14)

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