

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

There are times when an ancient text seems to speak more directly to where we are now than to the time when it was first written. Rarely has that been truer than in the case of the famous first comment of Rashi to the Torah, to the words: "In the beginning, God created..."¹ Let us listen to it in its entirety:

Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah should have begun with the verse, "This month shall be to you the first of months" (Exodus 12:2) which was the first commandment given to all of Israel. Why then did it begin with, "In the beginning"? It began thus because it wished to convey the idea contained in the verse (Psalm 111:6), "The power of His acts He told to His people, in order to give them the estate of the nations." So that if the nations of the world will say to Israel, "You are robbers because you took by force the land of the seven nations," Israel might reply to them, "The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He created it and gave it to them, and by His will He took it from them and gave it to us." Rashi on Genesis 1:1

Rashi might have been speaking directly to us today, in our age of anti-Zionism, boycotts, sanctions, and divestments against Israel (BDS), and even a growing questioning of the State's right to exist.

Rashi (1040-1105) lived in Troyes, Northern France, at a time when the position of Jews under Christian rule was beginning to worsen severely. He lived through the most traumatic event of that period, the massacre of Jewish communities in the Lorraine at the beginning of the First Crusade in 1096. Jews in his day were persecuted and powerless. They had no realistic hope of imminent return to the land.

As to the logic of Rabbi Isaac's interpretation, it seems strained. Why did the Torah begin with Creation? Because that is a fundamental of Jewish faith. Rabbi Isaac seems to be arguing that since the Torah is primarily a book of commandments, it should begin with the first command – at least the first given to the Israelites as a collective entity. But clearly not everything in the Torah is command. Much of it is narrative. So

Rabbi Isaac's question is odd.

So too is his answer. Why relate creation to a challenge to the Israelites' right to the Land? Why, if Rabbi Isaac's interest is solely in commandments, not give the obvious halachic answer: the story of Creation is told to explain the command to keep Shabbat. Considered thus, it is all highly perplexing.

In fact, however, Rabbi Isaac is making a very cogent point indeed. Some years ago a secular scholar, David Clines, wrote a book entitled *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. His conclusion was that the single overarching theme of the Five Books of Moses is the promise of the land. That is surely the case. There are sub-themes, but this dominates all others.

Seven times in Bereishit God promises the land to Abraham, once to Isaac, and three times to Jacob. The rest of the Mosaic books, from the beginning of Exodus when Moses hears about "the land flowing with milk and honey," to the end of Deuteronomy, when he sees it from afar, is about Israel, the destination of the Jewish journey.

There is a fundamental rule of literary form. Chekhov said: if there is a gun on stage in the first act of a play, it must be part of the plot or it should not be there at all. If the central theme of the Mosaic books is the promise of the Land, the beginning must in some way be related to it. Hence Rabbi Isaac's point: the Creation narrative must have to do with the Land of Israel. What could this be if not to signal that the promise in virtue of which the Jewish people holds title to the land comes from the highest conceivable source, the sovereign of the universe, the Author of all.

No sooner have we said this than an obvious question arises. Why should a religion be tied to a land? It sounds absurd, especially in the context of monotheism. Surely the God of everywhere can be served anywhere.

Here too Rabbi Isaac steers us in the right direction. He reminds us of the first commandment given to the Israelites as a people, as they were about to leave Egypt. "This month shall be to you the first of months. It shall be the first of the months of the year for you." Exodus 12:2

Judaism is not primarily about personal

¹ This essay was originally written by Rabbi Sacks in September 2010. Years later when he began his translation of the entire Torah, he offered a radical new translation of the first phrase of the Torah: Bereishit bara Elokim... – "When God

began creating...". The full translation by Rabbi Sacks is available in the Koren Tanakh: Magerman edition.

salvation, the relationship between the individual and God in the inner recesses of the soul. It is about collective redemption, about what it is to create a society that is the opposite of Egypt, where the strong enslave the weak. The Torah is the architectonic of a society in which my freedom is not purchased at the cost of yours, in which justice rules, and each individual is recognised as bearing the image of God. It is about the truths Thomas Jefferson called self-evident, “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” It is about what John F Kennedy meant when he spoke of “the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God.”

We are social animals. Therefore we find God in society. That is what we discover when we reflect on the basic structure of the Torah’s many commands. They include laws about the administration of justice, the conduct of war, ownership of land, employer-employee relationships, the welfare of the poor, the periodic cancellation of debts, in short, an entire legislative structure for the creation of what Rav Aaron Lichtenstein called ‘societal beatitude’.

Laws shape a society, and a society needs space. A sacred society needs sacred space, a holy land. Hence Jews and Judaism need their own land.

In four thousand years, for much of which Jews lived in exile, the people of the covenant were scattered over the face of the earth. There is no land in which Jews have never lived. Yet in all those centuries, there was only one land where they were able to do what almost every other nation takes for granted: create their own society in accordance with their own beliefs.

The premise of the Torah is that God must be found somewhere in particular if He is to be found everywhere in general. Just as, in the Creation narrative, Shabbat is holy time, so in the Torah as a whole, Israel is holy space. That is why, in Judaism, religion is tied to a land, and a land is linked to a religion.

But now we come to the most perplexing part of Rabbi Isaac’s comment. Recall what he said: Should anyone call into question the Jewish people’s right to the land of Israel, the Jewish people can reply, “God created the universe. He divided earth into many lands, languages, and landscapes. But one small land He gave to the Jewish people. That is our title to the Land.”

How on earth could Rabbi Isaac think of this as a compelling answer? Almost inevitably, someone who challenges the Jewish people’s right to the Land of Israel will not believe in the God of Israel. So how will a reference to Israel’s God make Israel’s case?

Ironically, we know the answer to that question. Today the overwhelming majority of those who challenge Israel’s right to exist believe in Israel’s God, that is to say, the God of Abraham. They belong to the large family of faith known as the Abrahamic monotheisms.

To them, we must humbly say: when it comes to

political conflict, let us search for a political solution. Let us work together in pursuit of peace. But when it comes to religion, let us not forget that without Judaism, there would be no Christianity and no Islam. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism never sought to convert the world and never created an empire. All it sought was one tiny land, promised to the Children of Israel by the Creator of the universe, in whom Jews, Christians, and Muslims all believe.

Sadly, Rabbi Isaac was right, and Rashi was right to quote him at the beginning of his Torah commentary. The Jewish people would be challenged on their right to the land, by people who claimed to worship the same God. That same God summons us today to the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of human life, and the imperative of peace. And that same God tells us that in a world of 82 Christian nations and 56 Muslim ones, there is room for one small Jewish State. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt”l* ©2023 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Torah Lights

“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 at the point when the Jews are given their first commandment as a nation after departing from Egypt: ‘This month shall be unto you the beginning of months’ [Ex. 12:2], referring to the month of Nissan, when Pesach, the uniquely Jewish festival commemorating our emergence as a nation, is celebrated. 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 to whomever He wishes, i.e., to Israel, because he so arbitrarily chooses, or they can mean 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 a complete philosophy of life. 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.

First of all, there is a beginning. Second, there is a Creator who created heaven and earth. Third, everything in heaven and on earth owes its existence to the Creator; and fourth, in owing one's existence to the Creator, there could very well be deeds the Creator wants and expects from His creation. According to Nahmanides, the opening verse of the Torah is the one 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 is experienced by Israel during our difficult exile. 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. 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.' In this sentence, 'created' is the verb; the world reveals to us the creative function of the divine. 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 peace and harmony of Eden.

All too often, Bible critics make two fatal errors. They divest the Torah of context and subtext, losing sight of what the Torah really wants to say. They take apart the grammatical mechanics of the words, disregarding the majesty and the fire, the vision and the message.

What we must remember is that essentially the Bible is not merely a book of laws, no matter how important they may be, and is certainly not written by man in his feeble attempt to understand creation and God; it is rather the Book of Books emanating from God, which gives instruction and life direction. It reveals not only what humanity is, but what we must strive to become; it teaches us that we must not merely engage the world, but attempt to perfect it in the majesty of the divine. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2023 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There are many moral lessons that are derived from the story of creation as related to us in this parsha and also in next week's parsha of Noach. One of the insights that I find most relevant and instructive has to do with the relationship of humankind to the animal kingdom and the rest of the natural world.

According to Jewish tradition Adam and Chava and their immediate descendants were herbivorous, subsisting on the fruit, plants and the bounty of the earth. According to rabbinic tradition the animal kingdom imitated the human species and also refrained from killing other creatures to satisfy their own daily need for food. The lion ate as did the elephant, the leopard as did the giraffe. In short, the animal kingdom followed the lead of the human species.

It was only after the Great Flood and the new lower level of human existence that the Lord allowed humankind – Noach and his descendants – to become flesh eaters and to kill animals for human purposes and gain. The rabbis again taught us that this change in human behavior precipitated a change in animal

behavior as well. Now deadly predators and killers stalked other creatures in the animal world.

Judaism sees humans as the primary creature in the process of creation. It is human behavior that influences animal behavior. Those who deny a Divine Creator have it the other way round - it is animal behavior that influences human behavior and civilization. To them, humans are not exceptional and unique creatures. A humans is just a more dangerous lion or leopard or crocodile.

The prophet Yeshayahu, in his majestic and soaring description of the utopian era – the end of days – states that the lion will lie down with the lamb and that war between nations will no longer be possible. Maimonides chooses to view this prophesy in an allegorical sense rather than in a literal sense. He interprets it as stating that large and powerful nations will no longer impose their will and wring unfair concessions from poorer and weaker countries.

This is in line with his statement that nature will not change in any given way even when the messianic era of the end of days arrives. However there are many great scholars and commentators who reject this idea of a rather bland messianic era as foretold by Maimonides. Instead, they state categorically that nature will change and that predators such as the lion and the bear will now revert back to their original state at the time of creation and become wholly herbivorous.

Again that seems to presuppose that humans, when giving up war and violence in the messianic era will no longer eat the flesh of animals, and herbivorous humans will influence the animal world to do the same. There remains the problem of what to do then with animal sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple.

Answers are advanced but as is easily understood, the topic is esoteric and no one really knows what that world of the messiah will look like. But it is clear that Judaism preaches that the animal kingdom follows the behavior of the human race and certainly not vice versa. © 2023 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

Why does the Torah begin with the Genesis story? If it is a book of law, the rabbis ask, why not start with the first commandment (Rashi, Genesis 1:1)?

Speaking to individual readers, perhaps the Genesis story teaches us that just as God first created light and that light came from darkness, so too do all human beings have the power to transform their lives, face all challenges, and turn the deepest night into day (Genesis 1:2, 3). As Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the

first Lubavitcher Rebbe) says, a little bit of light has the power to drive away an abundance of darkness.

Rashi offers a nationalistic message. Having created the whole world, God establishes Himself as its owner. As a consequence, He has the right to give Israel to the Jewish People. Here, Rashi turns a universalistic story into a nationalistic one.

But Nachmanides suggests that we begin with the Genesis story to teach a broader message that ultimately impacts the whole world. Specifically, the story brings ethical monotheism into the world, the very mission of Jewish peoplehood. Note that the recurring theme of the first chapters is that sin results in estrangement from God; as Nachmanides writes, “until his sin expelled him from there.”

- After Adam and Eve disobey God and eat from the tree, the Torah states, “Adam and his wife hid from [mipnei] the Lord God” (Genesis 3:8).

- So, too, after Cain murders Abel, the Torah says, “Cain left the face [milifnei] of God” (Genesis 4:16).

- Again, in the description of the wrongdoings of the generation of the deluge, the Torah proclaims, “the earth was corrupt before [lifnei] God” (Genesis 6:11).

In all these accounts, the word *penei* is used as a metaphor to describe the exile taking place – an exile from God’s presence – turning away from God’s face.

Only after Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden, after Cain is exiled for killing Abel, and after the world is destroyed by the flood do Abraham and Sarah enter the biblical story. Their mandate, and ultimately the mandate of the Jewish People, is to bring God and God’s system of ethics back into the world.

The Jewish People is called Israel (32:29). Israel has many possible meanings, one of them being a composite of *shur* and *El*, meaning to see or perceive God. The name of the Jewish People reflects our ultimate purpose and challenge – to be aware of the Divine and bring His presence back into the world.

No wonder the Torah goes out of its way to record the place where the name Israel was given: Peniel, literally, the face of God (32:31). Prior to Abraham, the generations turned their backs on the face of God. Israel’s task is to turn around and “embrace” God and His teachings fully. ©2023 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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Light

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Certain *mitzvot* are dependent upon light, whether daylight, moonlight, or candlelight. *Mitzvot* which require daylight include a *Kohen* looking at *nega'im* (leprosy lesions) to determine if they are impure, and a rabbi determining whether a particular stain renders a

woman a *niddah* (menstruant). Additionally, rabbinic courts do not convene at night.

There is one mitzva – *Kiddush Levanah* (the prayer sanctifying the new moon) – which requires moonlight.

For some *mitzvot*, we are required to make use of candlelight. For other *mitzvot*, we are not allowed to make use of the light. For still other *mitzvot*, a candle is not required, but it still contributes honor and joy.

Mitzvot for which we are required to make use of candlelight include the search for *chametz* on the night before Pesach. Shabbat and Yom Tov candles are meant to provide useful light. By helping people to avoid tripping and bumping into each other in the dark, the candles contribute to *shalom bayit* (peace in the home). The blessing over the light of the Havdalah candle is not recited unless one needs the light and derives benefit from it. This is one of the explanations for our custom to hold our hands up to the light and look at our fingernails during Havdalah.

In contrast, one may not derive any benefit from the light of a Chanukah menorah. (This is to make it clear that the candles are being lit to publicize the miracle, and not for any other reason.) In earlier times, when the original Menorah was lit in the *Beit HaMikdash*, the *Kohanim* may have avoided using its light. (When guarding the Temple, they would carry torches to light their way.)

Sometimes we light candles to enhance honor and joy. We do this in the synagogue, as well as during celebrations such as weddings, circumcisions, and festive meals.

When studying the laws pertaining to light, an interesting question arises. May we substitute one type of light for another? For example, as we have seen, rabbinic courts convene only during the day. If a room is candle-lit, would the court be permitted to convene at night? Similarly, kosher slaughtering may not be done in the dark. If a room was lit up using a torch, would it then be permissible? *Acharonim* (15th to 20th century rabbis) disagree about this, with some insisting on sunlight for these activities.

Now let us flip the question around. When candlelight is required, may sunlight or moonlight be used instead? May one search for *chametz* during daylight hours?

Nowadays, these questions extend to electric lights as well. Some maintain that lightbulbs may be used as Shabbat “candles.” (This does not necessarily mean they can be used for Chanukah candles or a Havdalah candle, since the reasons for the lights in each case are different.) People relate that Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski (author of *Achiezer*) made a point of using incandescent bulbs for Havdalah (others say it was for Shabbat candles). He did this to demonstrate that electricity is considered fire in *halacha*. People would then understand that turning electric lights on or off on

Shabbat is absolutely forbidden. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"G-d called the light, 'day,' and the darkness was called, 'night...'" (Beraishis 1:5) At the beginning of the creation of this world, Hashem brought light into being. It was so good that it ended up being hidden for the righteous in the future, but a spark of it enlightened the sun and the moon later in Creation, and the light they give is based off that original light. Hashem also did not want it to be mixed with darkness, so He created a distinction between them. They would each have their time of existence and primacy.

The question is, why did Hashem have to name these creations? There was no one else in the world. He knew what they were, so why did they need a designation?

The Chizkuni says there were six things named by Hashem, Himself. These were the light, the darkness, Heaven, Earth, oceans, and Man. Hashem had to name them, he says, because there was no Man to name them. This can be contrasted to the animals of the world, which Adam was invited to name, and the Torah tells us he did so.

The question remains, however, why Hashem needed to name the light, dark, sky, etc., before Man was created. Why not let Adam name them when he experienced them, as he did with the animals? Why did they need a name beforehand?

Perhaps we can suggest that when the Chizkuni says, “there was no man to name them,” it wasn’t merely a practical issue, that Man hadn’t been created yet. Rather, Man is incapable of fathoming certain things, and Hashem wanted us to understand that there are things in the world which are beyond our understanding, yet He created them for a purpose.

Were Man to name these things, the name would fall short of their true essence. Furthermore, these things represent our limited vision vis-à-vis Hashem’s omniscience. Mankind, for all its efforts, has not been able to cross the expanse of space, nor plumb the depths of the sea. We don’t experience all that lies beneath the earth, and certainly, we don’t know the true potential of humankind. People are at once medical marvels, wonders of engineering, and metaphysical bearers of tremendous power.

That is why Hashem, Himself, had to name these things, so we would remain humble and strive for continual growth in our knowledge of Hashem and His ways. When we recognize that there are things we cannot comprehend, we will not question Hashem, and will instead seek to understand the world around us as HE sees it, not as we do.

One day, R' Yehonoson Eibshitz was walking to Shul when the powerful ruler of the region, with whom he

had often conversed, met him in the street. The ruler asked him where he was going. R' Yehonasan replied that he didn't know. Assuming he didn't hear the simple question, the ruler asked again. Once again, R' Yehonasan answered that he didn't know.

The ruler, thinking he was being mocked, got very angry and threatened to throw him in jail if he continued to play games with him. R' Yehonasan apologized, but told the ruler that he didn't know. Incensed, the ruler called his guards and had R' Yehonasan taken to jail.

The next morning, the ruler came and asked, "I don't understand you. You are an intelligent, upstanding, person and I am certain you were not doing anything wrong. Why make a laughing stock out of me and have yourself sent to jail, rather than tell me where you were going??"

R' Yehonasan replied "My presence in jail is precisely why I couldn't tell you where I was going. I set out for the local synagogue, but, ended up here. I can only tell you where I am intending to go but as to where I am really going, only Hashem knows, and apparently, He had other plans for me." ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Different Perspectives in Creation

When we look at the beginning parasha of the Torah, Bereishit, we can see several different approaches in relating the story of the creation of the world. Most people are familiar with only the first statements of the creation, namely the six days of creation followed by the day of rest known as the Shabbat. The retelling of the Creation from a different perspective comes in the fourth sentence of the second perek, chapter. If we examine just a few aspects of both stories, the different perspectives will be obvious.

The Torah begins with the words, "In the beginning, Elokim created the Heavens and the Earth (alt.: In the beginning of Elokim's creating the Heavens and the Earth)." The Torah then continues with the six days of creation, detailing each part of the creation in the order in which it was created and the day on which it was created. As the Torah is precise, the order of words and the sequence of the presentation is important. It must be noted that the term for the Supreme Being used here is Elokim, a term which indicates the quality of judgment and strict adherence to right and wrong. It is also important to note that the Heavens are mentioned before the Earth. This becomes significant when compared to the second rendition of the creation.

In perek bet (Chapter 2), The Creation story begins with a different order: "These are the products (the history) of the Heavens and the Earth when they were created on the day of Hashem's, Elokim's, making

of Earth and Heavens." In this opening sentence, we find that the name of the Supreme Being is modified by another name, Hashem, which speaks of the quality of Mercy. Our Rabbis tell us that this second name, that of Mercy, is the real, major name of the Supreme Being, yet we pronounce it in an abbreviated form meaning "The Name," which refers to the tetragrammaton, the many-syllabled name which was uttered only by the Kohein Gadol in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. It is also important to note that the order of the Heavens and the Earth changes at the end of the sentence.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the name, Elokim, is in the plural, yet is "in some way joined together to form a unit...the One through Whom all the plurality, by everything related to Him, becomes one union, one whole, one world." Judges, human rulers, directors, and law-givers are also called "elohim (a profane use of the same word)." The Pagan world saw a separation of all these forces of creation (a god in charge of the sky and another god in charge of the sea), requiring people to seek out each "ruler" and believing that these forces were not from the same source and acted independently. The Jewish view of Elokim is a unified ruler with a singular, unified truth. The singular truth does not allow for divergent truths; there is no alternative truth, no alternative good. This is the message of justice; one truth guiding the world which is exact in its demands and must punish any transgression as suggesting that there is another truth. This was the desired method of creating the world; all the different creations coming from one source with one, unified control and strict adherence to that control.

The second Creation story introduces another aspect of the Supreme Being which seems to contradict the concept of Elokim, Justice, namely, Hashem, the concept of Mercy. Mercy is based on the strict adherence to the Will of Hashem but it acknowledges that Man will deviate from that adherence and need forgiveness for his transgressions. The concept of Mercy accepts the fact that Man is an imperfect being and could not survive if held to the strict reward and punishment of Justice. The Supreme Being understood that weakness in Man, so the second Creation story has the name of Mercy, Hashem, precede the name of Justice, Elokim.

The reversal of the words Heaven and Earth in the Second Creation story is significant. Order plays an important role in the words of the Torah. Hirsch explains that it was important, in itself, to connect Heavens and Earth as the first words of both versions of the Creation so that it was clear that all that exists in the Heavens and all that exists on the Earth come from the same Creator. Still, that does not answer the reversal of the order in the beginning of the second story. I would suggest that the order has to do with the different emphasis placed by Hashem in the two stories and based on the characteristics of the Supreme Being signified by the

different names.

In the first story of the Creation, the name, Elokim, Justice, is the only deistic characteristic mentioned. Justice is a lofty ideal which is associated with the Heavens more than with the Earth. Heaven is the place of angels, the higher spiritual creations of Hashem. Ya'akov's Dream emphasizes that the angels of the pure Land of Israel ascended the ladder to the Heavens while the angels that were responsible for his well-being outside of Israel descended into an impure land. Angels were capable of being held to the higher standard of Justice which Man found too difficult. When Elokim created the world in the first story, He created it with only the ideal quality which spoke of strict obedience to the Truth. Therefore, the ideal of Heaven preceded the less-than-ideal Earth.

In the second story, Hashem's Mercy and Forgiveness were the necessary modifiers of Justice that would enable Man to survive. One should note that the second story involves the entire story of the Garden of Eden, culminating in the sin of eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the expulsion from the Garden. Hashem understood that giving any limitation to Adam and Chava would demand that they choose between Good and Evil. Man, in his weakness, made the wrong choice. The Supreme Being told them in advance that the punishment for eating would be that they would die. Yet, the characteristic of Mercy, which was mentioned first in this second story, modified the punishment, took away the decree of immediate death, and gave Man the opportunity to regret his actions and do Teshuvah.

There is one final message from our discussion which involves Teshuvah. Teshuvah expresses regret for one's transgressions and includes facing the consequences of one's actions, whether through compensation to one who lost money financially or punishment and fine for any misdeed. When we seek the strength to repent for our actions, we are told to grab hold of the throne of Hashem. The Bal HaTurim tells us that the numerical equivalent of the name Elokim is the same as HaKisei, the throne. Thus, grabbing hold of the throne demonstrates a willingness to accept the full, strict judgment and punishment of Elokim. When one does Teshuvah, he accepts that judgment while hoping for the forgiveness and mercy of Hashem. May we have the strength to return to Hashem even if we may face the punishment from Elokim. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

Parashas Bereishis... again. The cycle begins... again. The amazing thing, at least for me, is how there is a whole new excitement... again. Usually, I cannot read a book twice (and my own books, not even once), except for Torah books. On the contrary, each time I begin the Torah again, it feels like a whole new

opportunity that was previously unavailable.

After all, there are seventy faces to Torah (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:15). Torah can be learned on four levels, Pshat, Remez, Drush, and Sod -- Simple, Hint, Elucidation, and Mystical (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 11). Each time you learn something it is a opportunity to climb to a higher rung of understanding of Torah, and therefore a higher understanding of life. As understanding of life deepens, quality of life increases, and that is exciting.

Here's an idea worth considering. It's called Sheviras HaKeilim in Kabbalah, which means the "Breaking of the Vessels." Two words (in Hebrew) that allude to one of the most fundamental ideas in all of history without which free will could not exist, and therefore neither would Creation. Free will is not eternal, but the brief time we have it is the reason of all of Creation. All of it.

It is too long and complicated to explain here in any detail. For now, I am more interested in some of the mussar behind the idea that everyone can apply in daily life.

Basically, Sheviras HaKeilim was a pre-pre-Creation state of existence. The story of physical Creation with which the Torah begins (on a Pshat level at least), and with which everyone is familiar is closer to the middle of the story. It is also called Tikun Ma'aseh Bereishis, or the Rectification of the Act of Creation, because it was built by God from the spiritual mess ("tohu" in the Torah) that resulted from the shevirah -- breaking. This is what made possible the eventual existence of evil, a crucial component for the existence of man's free will.

This is why the Zohar says that the second verse about the creation of chaos is really the first verse historically (Zohar, Bereishis 16a). It just wouldn't read right if a person didn't know what came before Creation, so the Torah writes it where it makes most sense on a Pshat level. As the Gemora says, chronological order is not top priority in the Torah (Pesachim 6b).

The rest is even deeper kabbalah. But there is still a nice mussar point that can be taken from all of this, especially at this time of year after the Aseres Yemai Teshuvah and Succos. It's another good reason for starting the Torah again from scratch on Simchas Torah.

When you look into the mirror, who do you see? Yourself, of course. The bigger question is, who are you?

A silly question? I would be willing to bet a lot of money that the vast majority of people can't really answer that question, at least accurately. They will tell you who they think they are, but that answer more than likely will just be about who they have become, not who they are... in essence.

The essence of a person is their soul, but a "person," with which we communicate and share lives is a combination of their soul and body. Both are main influencers in a person's life and self-perception, and

their personality at any given moment in time will be the product of the current balance, or imbalance, of the two.

It is easy to tell which is the dominant player in a person's life by what they prioritize. All noble traits and missions in life come from the soul. Material goals are the body's, unless for a spiritual purpose. But unless a person lives on a deserted island by themselves, even the most spiritual person can't help but be influenced by their bodily drives and the world around them, and each thing... and there are many... is like adding more make-up and clothing; it just becomes hard to be the real you.

Some people just go through life like that and never change it or get to the bottom of who they are. They just live as they think they are, as what they have become and not necessarily as what they are supposed to be. Most people probably go their entire lives like this, until their very last when, they say, "they" show a person the difference.

Ouch. Nothing is worse than discovering missed opportunity. And we're not talking about the kind of opportunities that you can afford to have passed up. Getting life right is not one of those kinds of opportunities, no matter how big a blast the wrong life was. What good is a delicious food if the last bite was spoiled and left a bad taste in your mouth.

The same is true about life, and its end. At some point a person has to wake up to the reality of what they were supposed to have been, and what they lost by not making the effort to be it. And that's when Sheviras HaKeilim and the Yemai Norayim come in.

Beginning with Elul, but primarily during the Aseres Yemai Teshuvah, we're supposed to go through our personalized version of Sheviras HaKeilim. It's the time of year to take ourselves a part, to pull off all the superfluous layers of personality to get to our essential self. It is not just a time of introspection, but the time to go inside to become re-acquainted with our most basic spiritual drive.

That's what allows us to become like angels on Yom Kippur. That's what an angel is, just pure good, pure expression of the will of God. Having gotten to our essence during the previous nine days, and then going the final distance on Yom Kippur, we can get in touch with our inner being and restore a more accurate perception of ourselves.

That is the pleasure that we feel, or supposed to feel, after Yom Kippur. Yes, we're happy the fast is over. Yes, we're grateful that we have completed our machzorim for the year. But the real existential pleasure we feel Motzei Yom Kippur is what life feels like when you can feel your essential self.

This is why a tzaddik does not require all the external pleasures of the material world to help them to be happy. Being themselves in essence provides them with more than enough internal joy to forsake the external joy. It is not only superfluous for them; it even detracts from the joy they have.

And that is why Succos is zman simchasaynu -- the time of our joy. As the GR"A says, the walls of the Succah represent the body, and the person living in it corresponds to the soul. The building of the Succah is really the perfect metaphor for the rebuilding of the person after their "shevirah" on a foundation of self-honesty and purity.

There is nothing more joyous than this, than consciously building yourself based upon essence. Most people have a difficult time believing this is the greatest pleasure, especially coming from such a materially-enhanced world, because they have seldom done it, or will ever have done it. Succos, if they celebrate it at all, is just another holiday to be celebrated, endured, and then said goodbye to for another year.

This is why it is so perfect that we close out this series of holidays with Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. The first celebrates the yichud with God achieved by becoming your essential self, and the second, the yichud with Torah which allows us to achieve this and maintain it. Like the Torah, which we begin again with Bereishis, we also begin again with our bereishis, and carry the joy into the rest of the year. ©2023 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“S he took of its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband with her and he ate.” (3:6) The Gemara (Berachot 40a) records an opinion that the Etz Ha'da'at / Tree of Knowledge was an Etrog tree.

We read (Vayikra 23:40), "You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree" -- i.e., an Etrog. Our Sages ask: Why is Sukkot called "the first day" when it actually is the fifteenth of the month? They answer enigmatically: "It is the first day in the accounting of sins."

R' Natan Nota Hanover z"l (1620-1683; Wallachia) writes (among several other explanations): If the fruit involved in the first sin was an Etrog, we can understand the Gemara as saying that the Etrog is reminiscent of [and an atonement for] the first day when a sin was committed. (Ta'amei Sukkah) ©2023 S. Katz and torah.org

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WILL YOU PLEASE PICK UP ALL YOUR CLOTHES?

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