

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

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Covenant & Conversation

It is the most famous, majestic and influential opening of any book in literature: "In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth." What is surpassingly strange is the way Rashi-most beloved of all Jewish commentators-begins his commentary: "Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah should have begun with the verse (Ex. 12:1): 'This month shall be to you the first of the months', which was the first commandment given to Israel."

Can we really take this at face value? Did Rabbi Isaac, or for that matter Rashi, seriously suggest that the Book of books might have begun in the middle-a third of the way into Exodus? That it might have passed by in silence the creation of the universe-which is, after all, one of the fundamentals of Jewish faith?

Could we understand the history of Israel without its prehistory, the stories of Abraham and Sarah and their children? Could we have understood those narratives without knowing what preceded them: G-d's repeated disappointment with Adam and Eve, Cain, the generation of the Flood and the builders of the Tower of Babel?

The fifty chapters of Genesis together with the opening of Exodus are the source-book of biblical faith. They are as near as we get to an exposition of the philosophy of Judaism. What then did Rabbi Isaac mean?

He meant something profound, which we often forget. To understand a book, we need to know to what genre it belongs. Is it history or legend, chronicle or myth? To what question is it an answer? A history book answers the question: what happened? A book of cosmology-be it science or myth- answers the question: how did it happen?

What Rabbi Isaac is telling us is that if we seek to understand the Torah, we must read it as Torah, which is to say: law, instruction, teaching, guidance. Torah is an answer to the question: how shall we live? That is why he raises the question as to why it does not begin with the first command given to Israel.

Torah is not a book of history, even though it includes history. It is not a book of science, even though the first chapter of Genesis-as the 19th-century sociologist Max Weber pointed out-is the necessary prelude to science, because it represents the first time

people saw the universe as the product of a single creative will, and therefore as intelligible rather than capricious and mysterious. It is, first and last, a book about how to live. Everything it contains-not only commandments but also narratives, including the narrative of creation itself-is there solely for the sake of ethical and spiritual instruction.

It moves from the minutest details to the most majestic visions of the universe and our place within it. But it never deviates from its intense focus on the questions: What shall I do? How shall I live? What kind of person should I strive to become? It begins, in Genesis 1, with the most fundamental question of all. As the Psalm (8:4) puts it: "What is man that You are mindful of him?"

Pico della Mirandola's 15th century Oration on Man was one of the turning points of Western civilization, the "manifesto" of the Italian Renaissance. In it he attributed the following declaration to G-d, addressing the first man:

"We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine."

Homo sapiens, that unique synthesis of "dust of the earth" and breath of G-d, is unique among created beings in having no fixed essence: in being free to be what he or she chooses. Mirandola's Oration was a break with the two dominant traditions of the Middle Ages: the Christian doctrine that human beings are irretrievably corrupt, tainted by original sin, and the Platonic idea that humanity is bounded by fixed forms.

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It is also a strikingly Jewish account-almost identical with the one given by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in *Halakic Man*: "The most fundamental principle of all is that man must create himself. It is this idea that Judaism introduced into the world." It is therefore with a frisson of recognition that we discover that Mirandola had a Jewish teacher, Rabbi Elijah ben Moses Delmedigo (1460-1497).

Born in Crete, Delmedigo was a Talmudic prodigy, appointed at a young age to be head of the yeshiva in Padua. At the same time, he studied philosophy, in particular the work of Aristotle, Maimonides and Averroes. At the age of 23 he was appointed professor of philosophy at the University of Padua. It was through this that he came to know Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who became both his student and his patron. Eventually, however, Delmedigo's philosophical writings-especially his work *Bechinat ha-Dat*-became controversial. He was accused, by other rabbis, of heresy. He had to leave Italy and return to Crete. He was much admired by Jews and Christians alike, and when he died young, many Christians as well as Jews attended his funeral.

This emphasis on choice, freedom and responsibility is one of the most distinctive features of Jewish thought. It is proclaimed in the first chapter of Genesis in the most subtle way. We are all familiar with its statement that G-d created man "in His image, after His likeness". Seldom do we pause to reflect on the paradox. If there is one thing emphasized time and again in the Torah, it is that G-d has no image. "I will be what I will be", He says to Moses when he asks Him His name.

Since G-d transcends nature-the fundamental point of Genesis 1 -- then He is free, unbounded by nature's laws. By creating human beings in His image, He gave us a similar freedom, thus creating the one being capable itself of being creative. The unprecedented account of G-d in the Torah's opening chapter leads to an equally unprecedented view of the human person and our capacity for self-transformation.

The Renaissance, one of the high points of European civilization, eventually collapsed. A series of corrupt rulers and Popes led to the Reformation, and to the quite different views of Luther and Calvin. It is fascinating to speculate what might have happened had it continued along the lines signalled by Mirandola. His

late 15th century humanism was not secular but deeply religious.

As it is, the great truth of Genesis 1 remains. As the rabbis put it (*Bereishith Rabbah* 8:1; *Sanhedrin* 38a): "Why was man created last? In order to say, if he is worthy, all creation was made for you; but if he is unworthy, he is told, even a gnat preceded you." The Torah remains G-d's supreme call to humankind to freedom and creativity on the one hand, and on the other, to responsibility and restraint-becoming G-d's partner in the work of creation. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and *torah.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Our nation, Israel, has just concluded a most intensive festival period which encompasses a rollercoaster of religious emotions. We have moved from the intense soul searching of Rosh Hashanah to the heartfelt prayers for forgiveness of Yom Kippur. We have built and dwelt for seven days in a makeshift house reminiscent of the booths in the desert, as well as of the "fallen sukkah of King David," the Holy Temple. We have punctuated our prayer for rain with joyous and sometimes even raucous dancing around the Torah, whose reading we conclude just at festival end. After a full month of festivities, we are now entering our first post-festival Sabbath, on which we shall read of the creation of the world.

Although these segments seem disparate, I truly believe that there is a conceptual scheme which connects them all. I also believe that many observant Jews miss the theological thread which magnificently unites this particular holiday period because the religious establishment does not sufficiently stress the real message which Judaism is trying to teach.

Despite the hundreds of years between them, two great theologians - Rav Yosef Albo (1380-1444), in his *Sefer Ha'ikkarim* - "Book of Essential Jewish Beliefs" and Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) in his "Star of Redemption"- insist that the fundamental principles of Jewish faith are outlined in the three special blessings of the Rosh Hashana Musaf amidah. Conventional wisdom sees the High Holy Days as frightening days of judgment, but Rosh Hashana actually teaches us that a major function of the Jewish people in this world is to establish the Kingship of our G-d of love, morality and peace throughout the world. Indeed, the Hasidim - and especially Habad - refer to the night of Rosh Hashanah as the Night of the Coronation.

Yom Kippur is our Day of Forgiveness. In order for us to dedicate ourselves to the task of bringing the G-d of compassionate righteousness and justice to the world in the coming year, each of us must take to the task with renewed vigor. We can only muster the necessary energy if we have successfully emerged from

our feelings of inadequacy resulting from improper conduct towards humanity and to G-d.

Yom Kippur is not only a day of forgiveness for Jews. Our reading of the Book of Jonah with G-d's command that the prophet bring the gentile Assyrians to repentance and the refrain which we iterate and reiterate during our fast, "for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations," (Isaiah 56:7) demonstrate that G-d desires repentance and forgiveness for all of humanity.

The Mussaf amidah on Yom Kippur describes in exquisite detail every moment of the Temple service for forgiveness; indeed it transports us to the Holy Temple itself. Our sukkah represents the Holy Temple, or at least the model of the sanctuary in the desert after which it was crafted. The guests of the sukkah (ushpizin) are the great personalities of Biblical history, and the most fitting decorations for the sukkah are scenes from the Temple service (so magnificently reproduced by Machzor Hamikdash). It is not accidental that the depiction of the Temple service of the Mussaf amidah in the Yom Kippur service begins by invoking the creation of the world. The Temple should somehow serve as a magnet for all nations and the conduit through which they will accept the Kingship of G-d and a lifestyle reflecting His morality and love.

Please note the following amazing parallels when the Bible describes the building of a sanctuary; it uses the following words: "Behold I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri the son of Hur from the tribe of Judah and I have filled him with the spirit of G-d: with wisdom (Hakhmah), with understanding (Tevunah) and with knowledge (Daat)" (Exodus 31:2,3).

In the Book of Proverbs, which invokes G-d's creation of the world, a parallel verse is found: "The Lord founded the earth with wisdom (Hakhmah), fashioned the heavens with understanding (Tevunah) and with knowledge (Daat) pierced through the great deep and enabled the heavens to give forth dew" (Proverbs 3:19,20).

Apparently, the Bible is asking us to recreate the world with the Holy Temple from whence our religious teachings must be disseminated throughout humanity. From this perspective, we understand why our rejoicing over the Torah takes place at the conclusion of this holiday season rather than during the Festival of Shavuot. Pesach and Shavuot are national festivals on which we celebrate the founding of our nation from the crucible of Egyptian slavery and our unique status as the chosen people resulting from the revelation at Sinai.

The Tishrei festivals are universal in import, focusing on our responsibility to be a Light unto the Nations. This is why on Simchat Torah, we take the Bible Scrolls out into the street, into the public thoroughfare and dance with them before the entire world. From this perspective we can well understand why Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah move

seamlessly into the reading of Bereishit of the creation of the world. © 2012 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the heaven and the earth and all of their armies were completed" (B'raishis 2:1). Radak explains "their armies" to mean "their offspring," i.e. everything that exists in heaven and on earth were completed by the end of the sixth day of creation. Radak continues: "and from then on, there is nothing new except for the things that were done miraculously." In other words, G-d created the laws of nature, which the creations must adhere to, except when G-d decides it is necessary to temporarily suspend them. However, even these exceptions were included in the world's bylaws (so to speak); "and even so, during the creation of the things during the six days of creation G-d put in their nature to put their nature aside or to initiate a [different] nature for those days that each [deviation from nature] was initiated in its time. And so they (our sages, of blessed memory) said in B'raishis Rabbah (5:5); 'Rabbi (Yonasan) [Yochanan] said: G-d made a condition/stipulation with the sea that it should split before Israel... Rabbi Yirmiyah bar Elazar said not only with the sea was the condition, but with all that G-d created during the six days of creation... [He] commanded the sea to split before Moshe, [He] commanded the sun and the moon to stand still before Yehoshua, [He] commanded the crows to sustain Eliyahu, [He] commanded the fire not to harm Chananya, Misha'el and Azarya, [He] commanded the lions not to harm Daniel, [He] commanded the fish to spit out Yonah.' And the same is true for rest of the miracles."

Others seem to understand miracles slightly differently, that they are not "exception to the rule" (the "rule" being the laws of nature), but were included as part of the laws of nature. Rabbeinu Bachye (Sh'mos 14:27) quotes the same Midrash as Radak, but comes away from it with this conclusion: "This Midrash proves that all the miracles and wonders that G-d did in all the generations through the prophets were already placed, during the six days of creation, in the nature of the things that were created." He continues, "and based on this, there was no change in nature via a new creation for anything from the six days of creation and onward, for all of the miracles and the signs and the wonders that were done afterwards, all of it was already put into nature, and what appeared to be a change [from nature] to those who saw it happening was not a new creation [differing] from nature." Whereas Radak understood miracles to be exceptions to the rule (of natural law), Rabbeinu Bachye understands them to have been included as part of the rule (see also Rambam, Moreh N'vuchim 2:29). This is how he explains those things

that were created as the sixth day (of creation) became the seventh day (Avos 5:5, see Rambam there as well), as these were things that would at some point be needed, and had to be made part of "nature" before the window when nature was set (the six days of creation) closed.

[Even so, it would be difficult to assert that these "miracles" were preset to occur at a specific time, as the exact timing of their being necessary was very dependant upon human choices. Although G-d knew what those choices will be, He doesn't make decrees based on future choices because it would appear to contradict the ability to choose-see Rashi on Sotah 2a, d"h "Aini."]

Whether miracles work within the laws of nature or outside of them, that discussion only applies to those things that seem to defy nature. What about non-miraculous divine intervention? If, without G-d making any adjustment, a certain thing would have happened, wouldn't any adjustment that would change that outcome necessarily mean that G-d had to adjust the laws of nature in order for there to be a different outcome? How could prayer work if without G-d answering the prayer the laws of nature would dictate one outcome, thereby necessitating an adjustment to those laws in order to bring about a different outcome? If G-d does not deviate from His laws of nature, and those laws dictate that a disease would be fatal, how can our prayers change that?

The Talmud (B'rachos 60a) discusses which prayers are worthless/futile, and therefore should not be made. For example, if someone is entering a town and sees a house burning, he should not ask G-d that it not be his house; the house (whichever one it is) is already burning, and G-d will not change that retroactively. [This also shows that G-d doesn't intervene based on His knowing what the person will do; if He did, the fact that the prayer will be made when the fire is seen could have been the reason that G-d made sure it wasn't his house burning down, and the prayer would not have been useless at all.] Similarly, someone who is expecting should not ask G-d to make the baby a specific gender, as that has already been decided and implemented, even if the mother doesn't know what the outcome was. The Talmud asks how such a request could be considered inappropriate/worthless if Leah made such a request when she was expecting her seventh child (as she didn't want her sister Rachel to be the matriarch of fewer Tribes than their maidservants were). The Talmud answers that she offered her prayer before the fetus was 40 days old, and since this is before the gender had been determined, it was a valid prayer. Had such a prayer been made after 40 days, after the gender was already determined, it would have been a worthless/futile one. Putting aside (for now) the medical science issue (of the gender not being determined until 40 days after conception), by operating within the Talmud's perspective of when the gender is determined,

we can try to understand the Talmud's perspective on when prayer works.

Obviously, prayer must work, or there wouldn't be any more of a reason to pray before the gender was determined than there is after it had already been determined (the Talmud says it worked for Leah). Yet, even though the "default setting" (the gender the child would have been without the prayer) is the result of how G-d created (and constantly maintains/renews) the laws of nature, somehow the prayer causes divine intervention and changes which gender the child ends up being. "Nature" is overruled! However, as we have seen, G-d does not overrule nature (even though He can)! It would therefore seem that nature is not deterministic, with one set outcome, but has multiple possible outcomes. Through the divine intervention brought about by prayer, G-d adjusts which outcome happens, changing it from one of the possible outcomes to another of the possible outcome-in this case changing the gender of the child.

Although a literal reading of the creation narrative would seem to negate the possibility of the world having evolved over billions of years, suggestions have been made to reconcile the Torah's description with what scientists have observed (see <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/beraishis.pdf>, pg. 3). Included in the scientific description of evolution are random mutations. Rather than every step of evolution occurring in only one possible direction, multiple changes occur (and can occur), but only those that survive the process of natural selection endure. This randomness cannot be predicted by any known model, and appears completely random to the human observer. By creating the world with randomness as part of the laws of nature, G-d left plenty of room for His involvement in a way far beyond just maintaining/renewing creation. Because there are multiple possible outcomes built into nature, G-d can intervene as needed without compromising His own laws of nature. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In the beginning, starts the Torah in Bereishit, G-d created the heaven, earth, and everything in between, all by Himself. Then, when it came time to create man, G-d asked his council about it, as it says "Let US make man in our image, after our likeness" (1:26). Just as we see a problem with the idea of G-d needing to confer, Moshe noticed the same problem as he was dictating the Torah from Hashem. The Midrash goes on to explain that G-d insisted on the text, accentuating the importance of conferring with others regarding all major aspects of life (as Jews, a spouse and a personal Rabbi is especially emphasized), and that those who wish to misunderstand the sentence will do so. Rav Wasserman raises a good question, though: Although

the lesson is a good one, is it really worth the risk? Doesn't the potential for negative (people thinking there are multiple gods) outweigh the potential for positive?

Rav Wasserman answers that there really isn't any potential for negative. After all, generation after generation of children and adults have learned this verse and have understood it correctly. The only ones that will err are the ones that want to. Should we be deprived of an important lesson on account of those who want to find a fault? In a way, we just learned two lessons out of one. Not only is it important to listen to the advice of our peers, but it's equally important to separate ourselves from the advice of those that aren't our peers. Listening to others is the hardest thing to do, especially when you know you should, or when you know they're right. It's our own ego that rejects it, yet we're the ones that would gain from it. We should take the advice of the Parsha, and rather than just agreeing with its insight, actively start seeking and listening to others' worthy advice. © 2012 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

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. © 2012 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 is it that in the first account of creation in Genesis Chapter One, male and female are described as being created together, (Genesis 1:27) while in Genesis Chapter Two, Eve emerges from Adam's rib? (Genesis 2:21-23)

Rashi suggests that Genesis Chapter One is a general story of creation. The reader is told that male and female were created on the sixth day; Genesis Chapter Two then details how and in what sequence Adam and Eve came into being (Rashi, Genesis 1:27)

The Talmud records that Adam and Eve were originally created with "two faces." The rib narrative concerns the bifurcation of Adam into two distinct beings, male and female. (Ketubot 8a)

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, in "The Lonely Man of Faith," suggests that Adam of Genesis Chapter One portrays majestic and creative characteristics of the human being. This human is capable of accomplishing virtually everything he/she desires. Male and female are therefore created together as Adam requires a work partner to collaborate with him in controlling the world.

While Adam in Genesis Chapter One is concerned with how to conquer the world, in Genesis Chapter Two he deals with the existential questions as he asks, "Why, for what purpose?" Adam in Genesis Chapter Two senses his own finitude and loneliness. (Genesis 2:18) It is in response to this loneliness that G-d creates Eve. Together, Adam and Eve give each other the comfort and love they desperately need.

In the end, the two chapters reflect different aspects of the human condition. The goal is to integrate these aspects into an entire personality.

I would like to offer another possibility. I presented this idea in my book "Women at Prayer." Genesis Chapter Two may be seen as the story of how the human being was first formed; it is an "external" and quantitative description of the mechanical process of creation. Genesis Chapter One, on the other hand, deals with the essence of humanity; it is "internal" and qualitative, concentrating on the value of the human persona.

What makes the human being superior to the rest of creation is that every person is created in the image of G-d. The image of G-d (tzelem Elokim) goes well beyond the ability to think, speak, and choose, but reflects the inherent potential of the human being to emulate G-d. It reflects the ability to transcend limitations and reach nobly to attain G-dly heights. Tzelem Elokim is not the monopoly of one gender; it is the common heritage of all humankind.

Hence, Genesis Chapter One which emphasizes the inestimable value of human beings states, "male and female created He them." (Genesis 1:27) This underscores the fundamental principle that male and female are of equal importance, neither one greater than the other.

When we encounter injustice and inequality in the world, we should remember that all of us, male, female, black, white—emerge from the same source—in short, we are all equal in value. (Sanhedrin 37a)

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RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG

The Eternal Embrace

“For on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die" (2:17) Adam is warned that on the day he eats from the Tree of Knowledge, he will die. The commentaries explain that the death to which Adam was subjected, was the loss of his immortal status; after Adam ate from the forbidden fruit, man became mortal. (Ramban 2:17) The punishment visited upon mankind for Adam's disobedience appears to be vastly disproportionate to the transgression. What is the correlation between the transgression and the punishment? The very notion that Hashem meted out such a severe punishment evokes images of the

vengeful and punitive G-d. How do we reconcile this event with the description of Hashem being a loving and merciful G-d?

The thought of one's own mortality or the mortality of a loved one often leaves a person feeling depressed. Therefore, we frequently block out all thoughts of death because of the morbid feelings it evokes. How does a person view death with a healthy attitude?

Among the nations of the world respect to the deceased is shown by burying the body in a fancy casket. This also offers solace to the mourners. The most durable and impenetrable coffin is sought out. In some cases hermetically sealed containers are acquired to retard the decomposition process. In contrast, Halacha dictates that the coffin should be easily decomposable. (Rambam Hilchos Avel 4:4, Shach Y.D. 236:1) The custom in Eretz Yisroel is to bury without a casket, placing the body directly into the soil. Seeing a loved one placed ignominiously into the earth is among the most excruciating experiences a person will endure in his lifetime. Why would the Halacha appear to be insensitive to these feelings?

The Midrash states that Hashem created the potential for death in the world even before Adam transgressed. Commenting on the verse describing the sixth day of creation "And Hashem saw that it was very good", the Midrash relates that "good" refers to the potential for life, while "very good" refers to the potential for death. (Zohar Parshas Bereishis) How can death be described as "very good"?

The verse records that Hashem created man from the dust of the earth. Rashi cites two opinions as to the source of this dust. According to one interpretation, Hashem gathered dust from all the corners of the earth to ensure that "kol makom sheyamus sham tihyeh koltaso lekevurah"—"wherever man dies, the earth will absorb his remains after burial." (2:7) The simple reading of the text implies that had man not been formed in this manner, his corpse would be rejected by the earth. Decomposition is a function of the soil interacting with organic matter. All creatures decompose in the soil, irrespective of whether they were created from the dust of the four corners of the world. What then does Rashi mean when he says "so the earth will absorb man's remains"? The second interpretation is that man was formed from earth which was taken from the place where the Altar would rest in the Temple. Axiomatic to the study of Rashi's commentary to the Torah is the rule that whenever Rashi offers more than one interpretation, the interpretations coalesce with each other; they are different perspectives of the same concept. How can these two interpretations be reconciled?

The Talmud records that Cleopatra asked Rabbi Meir whether man will emerge clothed after the resurrection. He answered her that if a simple seed of grain planted in the ground emerges layered with many

husks, surely man will emerge well attired. Rabbi Meir was revealing to us the Jewish definition of burial. (Sanhedrin 90a) The purpose of burial is not to dispose of the corpse; rather, burial is the beginning of the recreation process. Just as a seed flourishes and blossoms after being planted, the burial process reconnects man to his source, allowing him to be recreated and emerge in a perfected manner determined by his actions when he was alive.

Soil in each part of the world reacts differently to various types of seeds. Hashem created man from all the types of soil to ensure that the planting of his body would not be inhibited by the soil of the place where he would be buried. Rashi's words are that man should be "niklat" in the soil. This term is used to describe the successful implanting of a seed or conception. Burial is not just a process that allows for the disintegration of the body; it is the process that allows the perfected body to sprout, ready to accept the soul at the resurrection.

The Hebrew word for grave is "kever", which is also the Talmudic term for the womb. The grave represents the beginning of eternal life in the same manner as the womb is the home for a new child. The two interpretations as to where the dust used to create man came from are offering the same insight. The Altar on the Temple Mount was the place through which man connected to his Creator. Man was formed from the same place through which he connects to his source. Similarly, man is created from the four corners of the earth in a manner which allows him to reconnect back to his source.

Adam was created with the perfect body and soul, allowing him to experience an unparalleled relationship with his Creator. The sin distanced him from Hashem and imbedded imperfection within both his body and soul. Death was not a punitive act by a vengeful G-d. On the contrary, death is the process by which we can once more reconnect to our Creator and remove the imperfections that hinder our relationship with Him. Allowing man to reconnect is the ultimate chesed. Hence, Hashem saw that it was "very good" for this process allows both our souls and our bodies to reconnect.

The burial is the process by which we recreate the body, divesting it of all impurities. Therefore, Halacha does not allow for the preservation of the body in its current state, for this would deprive a person of the great chesed that Hashem has given us. The nations of the world who view death as the final step in a person's life attempt to preserve the dead body, thereby maintaining the last vestiges of his existence.

The Jewish perspective on death is comforting to a person for it diminishes the fear we have of the finality of death. Instead of being disconnected, we are actually reconnecting. The Torah appropriately refers to death as "asifa"-ingathering". (25:8) This sense of reconnection is borne out by those who have been present at the time of a person's death. It is common for

a person to exclaim "I am coming father" or "I am coming mother" for the feeling of reconnection prevails upon the soul as it is departing. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Zweig and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

“**A**nd Zion said, G-d has abandoned me, and G-d has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her child, have pity for the child of her womb? Even these can forget but I will never forget." [Yeshayahu 49:14-15]. The Talmud sees this as a dialogue between Yisrael and the Holy One, Blessed be He. "The community of Yisrael said: Since there is no forgetfulness before Your Throne of Glory, perhaps You will not forget the sin of the Golden Calf? He replied: Even 'these' can be forgotten (Rashi sees this as a reference to the Calf, about which the people said, 'These are your gods, Yisrael' [Shemot 32:4]). They said to Him: Since there is forgetfulness before the Throne of Glory, perhaps You will forget our participation at Sinai? And He replied, 'I will never forget' (Rashi: this refers to the first word of the Ten Commandments, 'Anochi')." [Berachot 32b].

Is this not preferential treatment, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, to forget the Golden Calf but to remember the giving of the Torah?

To answer this question, we should note that there is a difference between something which is intrinsically holy (kedushat haguf) and something which is holy for its monetary value (kedushat damim). Intrinsically holy objects, such as a sacrifice or the teruma given to a kohen, do not lose their holiness even if they are used for unholy purposes. On the other hand, something that is holy for its monetary value becomes profaned if it is used for secular purposes, since its sanctity merely envelopes it from the outside and can therefore be easily harmed.

People of Yisrael are intrinsically holy, and therefore, "Even if a person from Yisrael sins he remains a member of Yisrael" [Sanhedrin 44a]. Even the sin of idol worship by Bnei Yisrael is considered external and incidental. However, the receiving of the Torah is an intrinsic change that can never be revoked. This is how the sages saw the verse, "You, who cling to your G-d" [Devarim 4:4], which at first glance contradicts the verse about Yisrael, "who are attached to Baal Peor" [Bamidbar 25:5]. Something that is attached, like a bracelet, can be removed, but clinging to G-d is absolute and can never be broken. (See Sanhedrin 64a.)

It is written in the Midrash: This can be compared to a king who divorced his wife and then went to a jeweler and told him to make her an ornament. A friend of the king went to the queen and told her not to

worry, since the king was obviously planning on taking her back and had therefore ordered new jewelry for her. Similarly, Yirmiyahu scolds Bnei Yisrael by saying, "The evil will begin from the north" [1:14]. But he then interrupts his scolding by saying, "Here is what G-d said: I remember the kindness of your youth... Yisrael is holy, the first of His crop." [2:2-3]. Thus, the sages teach us that the people of Yisrael are like teruma, and they cannot be defiled by sin, just like teruma cannot be defiled.

This same idea closes a circle, joining the end of the Torah to its start. At the end, it is written, "and for the entire hand of strength... before the eyes of all of Yisrael" [Devarim 34:12]. The sages viewed this verse as a reference to the shattering of the Tablets, and we might have thought that the link to the Holy One, Blessed be He, was severed. But immediately we start to read, "In the beginning, G-d created" [Bereishit 1:1], which the sages said means that creation "was for Yisrael, who are called 'reishit'- first"-as is written, "Yisrael is holy, the first of His crop."

It is written in the poetic liturgy introducing the man called up to read the first passage of the Torah, "For this reason the end is always linked to the beginning, so that no lies should be said about this nation (am zu)." That is, the end of the Torah and its beginning are read together so that no lies will be told about the high status of Yisrael, who are described by the verse, "I created this nation for me" [Yeshayahu 43:21].

Note that the last word of Rashi's commentary on the Torah is "sheshavarta"- which you shattered. This has the same numerical value as the phrase "In the beginning G-d created"-a value of 1202. © 2012 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

R'Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (the Shelah Ha'kadosh; died 1630) writes: Know that Shabbat alludes to the foundation of our emunah and the foundation of the Torah, for it alludes to the beginning of existence, which, in turn, alludes to the presence of a Creator. That Creator is none other than He Who always existed and always will exist, and Who caused everything else to exist, as alluded to in His Name, Y-K-V-K, which (in Hebrew) hints at the statements: He is, He was, He will be, and He causes everything to be.

The Shelah Ha'kadosh continues: How does Shabbat allude to the beginning of existence? Shabbat marks the end of Creation, when G-d "rested." If G-d had not rested on the seventh day, He would have gone on creating forever. This would have suggested that He similarly had been creating forever and that there was no beginning to existence [as some Greek philosophers believed].

But, since He did stop creating new things, everything that exists is merely a re-creation of what He created during the six days of Creation. Each week is like the week before, which was like the week before it. In truth, G-d creates everything anew every day, but that is only a repetition of the act of Creation which He did in the beginning. This re-creation occurs constantly under Hashem's hashgachah / direction.

The Shelah Ha'kadosh concludes: Thus, Shabbat testifies to the world having a beginning, as we read (Shmot 31:17), "in a six-day period Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." (Shnei Luchot Ha'brit: Masechet Shabbat, Torah Ohr)

"Kayin left the presence of Hashem..." (4:16) The Midrash Rabbah comments: After Kayin finished his discussion with Hashem, he met Adam, who asked the outcome of Kayin's judgment. Kayin replied, "I did teshuvah and a compromise was reached [i.e., the decree that he would have to wander for the rest of his life was softened]."

Adam replied: "Is the power of teshuvah that great?" [Until here from the midrash]

R' Moshe Roberts shlita (Chicago, Illinois) asks: Our Sages teach that teshuvah was created before the rest of the world, and R' Moshe Tirani z"l (1500-1580) explains this to mean that the possibility of teshuvah is necessary for the world's existence, since it is inevitable that mortal man will sin (see Bet Elokim: Sha'ar Ha'teshuvah, ch.1). If so, how could Adam not have been aware that teshuvah atones?

R' Roberts explains: There are three kinds of teshuvah-repentance motivated by love of Hashem, repentance motivated by fear of Hashem, and repentance motivated by suffering. Adam was aware of the existence of teshuvah, but only the first two types. Kayin's teshuvah, however, was of the third type, which is the lowest level. When Adam heard that even teshuvah motivated by suffering is accepted to some degree, he exclaimed, "Is the power of teshuvah that great?!" (Beit Moshe: Sha'ar Ha'teshuvah, p.14) © 2012 S. Katz and torah.org

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