



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>
& Allen Klein <allen.klein@gmail.com>

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BEREISHIS - 5785

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BEREISHIS

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subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 10/22/2024

Three Models of Behavior from Parshat Bereshit

by R. Gidon Rothstein

A New Year, Three New Commentators, Ibn Ezra, Sforno, and Or HaChayim

Welcome to a new year of sampling commentators on the week's Torah portion! A brief introduction to this year's three commentators:

1) Ibn Ezra (more formally, R. Abraham b. Meir Ibn Ezra), who lived from around 1090 to around 1165, born and lived most of his life in Spain, but also traveled widely, known for his mostly plainsense/peshat commentary, although we will see exceptions.

2) R. Obadiah Sforno (really known as Sforno, from around 1470-1549.

While I thought he was known for his rational/philosophical approach, Wikipedia thinks he focuses on the plain sense of the text, with some mystical interpretations. We'll have to see. Finally,

3) Or HaChayim (often called the Or HaChayim Ha-Kadosh), by R. Chayyim ibn Attar, 1696-1743. According to Wikipedia, the commentary stems from his Friday night learning with his daughters. Let's see what his daughters knew!

Taking a Soul

Towards the end of Parshat Bereshit, 5:24, the Torah notes the disappearance of Chanoch at age 365, ki lakach oto Elokim, for God had taken him. Ibn Ezra gives us other examples of "taking" a soul: Yonah asks God to take his soul in his frustration at Nineveh's being spared, Yonah 4:3, Hashem informs Yechezkel He will be taking his wife (machmad einecha, the delight of your eyes) in a plague, Yechezkel 24:16, and she then passes away.

With Chanoch, we hear of neither plague nor death. Ibn Ezra relates it to two verses in Tehillim—deliberately cryptically, because he closes the comment ve-hamaskil yavin, only the enlightened or initiated will understand. In 73:24, a Psalm of Assaf, the verse refers to "after kavod" Hashem will take him. There, Ibn Ezra says more clearly what he means here (and mentions our verse), this taking involves the uniting of the soul with upper beings who have no physicality.

In Tehillim 49:16, where the Psalmist also speaks of Hashem "taking" him, Ibn Ezra says the human soul will be connected to the Higher Soul (ha-neshamah he-elyonah), which is the soul of the heavens. (You can see why it takes a maskil to understand.) I don't think he means the human soul would be linked with Hashem's soul, because I don't think he would say God has a soul in that sense.

I believe he is saying Chanoch didn't die in the sense of the soul leaving the body to go wherever human souls go, he merited a different end, as do other special individuals, where God takes the soul to a higher plane of existence. For the body left behind, the result might be similar; for the soul, it is most certainly not.

Jealousy, a Futile Emotion

God reacts sternly to Kayin's upset over Hevel's sacrifice having been accepted and not his, in Sforno's reading. The verse itself has God saying, in my paraphrase, why are you upset, after all, if you do better, you'll have better outcomes. I could have read it as encouraging, God urging Kayin to see the possibilities for improvement. Sforno thinks, instead, Hashem was admonishing him for his jealousy, for his refusal to admit Hevel's sacrifice deserved to be accepted more (in verse four, Sforno cited a view that Kayin did not think providence extended to individuals, and therefore saw no reason to put effort into the offering, the reason God ignored it).

When the outcome was just, jealousy has no place. When the past can be rectified, sadness and upset are distractions. Kayin failed and reacted humanly, annoyed with his brother who had succeeded, distraught or in despair over his own situation. God calls him out for both, Sforno thinks, makes clear Hevel offered the better sacrifice, and that Kayin's next best move would be to try again.

Which he didn't, as we know.

The Serpent's Cunning

Or HaChayim wonders why the Torah chose to introduce us to the serpent's being arum, 3:1, shrewd or cunning. He does not see a great deal of cunning on the serpent's conduct, simply evil. He begins his answer with the seeming silliness of the serpent's opening salvo, did God really tell you not to eat any of the fruit of the Garden? Only because we know he is arum do we read further, do we expect he has a plan to lure Chavah—whom the Or HaChayim is sure was a God-fearing woman, a comment that takes on more meaning if he was studying these ideas with his daughters.

He spots a three-pronged attack. First, the serpent suggested her right to eat from other trees should seem like nothing if she wasn't allowed to eat from the best tree in the Garden. He sought to give her grounds to be dissatisfied, in the hopes she would agree, would fell God had denied her basically all the fruit of the Garden, since she couldn't have the best fruit.

He adds an instructive aside: this is how the evil inclination works with all those who let themselves fall prey to it. It lures us to denigrate what we do have, to whet our appetites for the forbidden.

Second, he works to convince her she may not eat from any of the other trees, since they were all planted after the Etz Ha-Da'at, were offshoots from it.

Such trees have the halachic status of having grown from the original, are not fully independent. When God prohibited that Tree, the others should be swept along.

Last, Or HaChayim thinks the serpent claimed to know Adam misrepresented God's command, he, the serpent, had heard God actually banned all the fruit of the Garden. He did not need Chavah to believe him, he only wanted to have contradicted Adam, putting her in an halachic quandary. After he wrote his idea, he tells us, he found Tikkunei Zohar 59, which characterized the serpent as having borne false witness, in line with what he just said.

This is the way of the evil inclination, to lie, engender false beliefs and character traits, God forbid, or to lure people to sin by making something seem enticing and then declare it impossible. Its being taken away will make them want it all the more, the point all along.

God put the serpent there, Or HaChayim says, to heighten the reward for those who successfully repel the blandishments of the evil inclination (for the rest of us...well...).

Three examples of success and failure. Chanoch reaches the point where his soul elevates without a usual death, Kayin faces a choice of whether to try to improve himself or take down his brother (and chooses unwisely), and the serpent uses his sharpness for evil instead of good. Models to emulate and shun, as long as we know which are which.

from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <info@rabbisacks.org> date: Oct 22, 2024, 10:41 PM subject: Why were we created? (Bereishit)

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZT”L

There is a deep question at the heart of Jewish faith, and it is very rarely asked. As the Torah begins we see God creating the universe day by day, bringing order out of chaos, life out of inanimate matter, flora and fauna in all their wondrous diversity. At each stage God sees what He has made and declares it good.

What then went wrong? How did evil enter the picture, setting in motion the drama of which the Torah – in a sense, the whole of history – is a record?

The short answer is: man, Homo sapiens, us. We alone of the lifeforms thus far known to us have freewill, choice, and moral responsibility. Cats do not debate the ethics of killing mice. Vampire bats do not become vegetarians. Cows do not worry about global warming.

It is this complex capacity to speak, think, and choose between alternative courses of action that is at once our glory, our burden, and our shame. When we do good we are little lower than the angels. When we do evil we fall lower than the beasts. Why then did God take the risk of creating the one form of life capable of destroying the very order He had made and declared good? Why did God create us?

That is the question posed by the Gemara in Sanhedrin:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create man, He created a group of ministering angels and asked them, “Do you agree that we should make man in our image?” They replied, “Sovereign of the Universe, what will be his deeds?” God showed them the whole future of humankind. The angels replied, “What is man that You are mindful of him?” [i.e. Let man not be created]. God destroyed the angels. He created a second group, and asked them the same question, and they gave the same answer. God destroyed them. He created a third group of angels, and they replied, “Sovereign of the Universe, the first and second group of angels told You not to create man, and it did not avail them. You did not listen. What then can we say but this: The universe is Yours. Do with it as You wish.” And God created man. But when it came to the generation of the Flood, and then to the generation of those who built the Tower of Babel, the angels said to God, “Were not the first angels right? See how great the corruption of humankind is.” And God replied, “Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient” (Isaiah 46:4).

Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38b Technically the Gemara is addressing a stylistic challenge in the text. For every other act of creation in Genesis 1, the Torah tells us, “God said, ‘Let there be’ ... And there was.” In the case of the creation of humankind alone, there is a preface, a prelude. “Then God said, ‘Let us make humanity in our image, in our likeness ...’” Who is the “us”? And why the preamble?

In their seemingly innocent and childlike (but in actuality, subtle and profound) way the Sages answered both questions by saying (to quote Hamlet) that with an enterprise of this pith and moment, God consulted with the angels. They were the “us”.

But now the question becomes very deep indeed. For in creating humans, God brought into existence the one life form with the sole exception of Himself, capable of freedom and choice. That is what the phrase means when it says, “Let us make humanity in our image after our likeness.” The salient fact is that God has no image. To make an image of God is the archetypal act of idolatry.

This means not just the obvious fact that God is invisible. He cannot be seen. He cannot be identified with anything in nature: not the sun, the moon,

thunder, lightning, the ocean or any of the other objects or forces people worshipped in those days. In this superficial sense, God has no image. That, wrote Sigmund Freud in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, was Judaism’s greatest contribution. By worshipping an invisible God, Jews tilted the balance of civilisation from the physical to the spiritual.

But the idea that God has no image goes far deeper than this. It means that we cannot conceptualise God, understand Him, or predict Him. God is not an abstract essence; He is a living presence. That is the meaning of God’s own self-definition to Moses at the Burning Bush: “I will be what I will be” – meaning, “I will be what I choose to be.” I am the God of freedom, who endowed humankind with freedom, and I am about to lead the children of Israel from slavery to freedom.

When God made humanity in His image, it means that He gave humans the freedom to choose, so that you can never fully predict what they will do. They too – within the limits of our finitude and mortality – will be what they choose to be. Which means that when God gave humans the freedom to act well, He gave them the freedom to act badly. There is no way of avoiding this dilemma even for God Himself. And so it was. Adam and Eve sinned. The first human child, Cain, murdered the second, Abel, and within a short space of time the world was filled with violence.

In one of the most searing passages in the whole of Tanach, we read at the end of this week’s Parsha:

God saw that humanity’s wickedness on earth was increasing. Every impulse of his innermost thought was only for evil, all day long. God regretted that He had made man on earth, and He was pained to His very core.

Gen. 6:5-6 Hence the angels’ question, which goes to the ultimate question at the heart of faith. Why did God, knowing the risks and dangers, make a species that could and did rebel against Him, devastate the natural environment, hunt other species to extinction, and oppress and kill his fellow man?

The Talmud, imagining a conversation between God and the angels, is suggesting a tension within the mind of God Himself. The answer God gives the angels is extraordinary: “Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient.” Meaning: I, God, am prepared to wait. If it takes ten generations for a Noah to emerge, and another ten for an Abraham, I will be patient. However many times humans disappoint Me, I will not change. However much evil they do in the world I will not despair. I despaired once and brought a Flood. But after I saw that humans are merely human, I will never bring a Flood again.

God created humanity because God has faith in humanity. Far more than we have faith in God, God has faith in us. We may fail many times, but each time we fail, God says: “Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient.” I will never give up on humanity. I will never lose faith. I will wait for as long as it takes for humans to learn not to oppress, enslave, or use violence against other humans. That, implies the Talmud, is the only conceivable explanation for why a good, wise, all-seeing and all-powerful God created such fallible, destructive creatures as us. God has patience. God has forgiveness. God has compassion. God has love.

For centuries, theologians and philosophers have been looking at religion upside-down. The real phenomenon at its heart – the mystery and miracle – is not our faith in God. It is God’s faith in us.

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Oct 20, 2024, 11:23 PM

subject: Rav Frand - The Clothes Make the Man After Man Makes Amends

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Bereishis

The Clothes Make the Man After Man Makes Amends

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1308 – Can You Make Kiddush for Someone If It Is Not Shabbos for You? Good Yom Tov & Good Shabbos!

The story of the nachash seducing Chava to eat from the etz ha'daas is well known. "And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable for comprehension, and she took of its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. And the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized that they were naked; and they sewed together a fig leaf and made themselves aprons. They heard the sound of Hashem walking in the garden toward the direction of the sun; and the man and his wife hid from Hashem among the trees of the garden. Hashem called out to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I am naked, so I hid.' And He said, 'Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me – she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'" [Bereishis 3:6-12].

For the first time in human history, the answer was: "It is my wife's fault!" This is an excuse that we have been using for the last 5785 years! Rashi comments on this pasuk: "Here (Odom) denied a favor (that the Ribono Shel Olam did for him)." Odom had felt he was lacking something. Hashem did a great favor for him and created an ezer k'negdo (help-mate) for him, and now that he has this ezer k'negdo, all he can do is say "It's her fault!" First the nachash is punished, then Chava is punished, and finally Odom is punished. Odom is punished with the words: "...Accursed is the ground because of you; through suffering shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to the ground from which you were taken..." [Bereishis 3:17-19] We have all suffered with this punishment for almost 5800 years now – we all need to work for a living!

What is Odom's reaction to the terrible curse he received from the Almighty? "And Odom called the name of his wife Chava, for she is the mother of all the living." [Bereishis 3:20]. Suddenly, Odom is motivated to not call his wife "isha" (the generic term meaning that she has been taken from man), but rather to call her the prestigious name of Chava, indicating that she will be the progenitor of all human life.

Is this not a strange reaction? He just told the Ribono Shel Olam "It's all her fault!" The Ribono Shel Olam curses him with the curse "... by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread" and what is Odom's reaction? "You know what? This wife of mine is the greatest thing on earth!" It does not make any sense! He didn't call her "Mother of all life" when he first named her. Why is he suddenly calling her that, now of all times? [Bereishis 2:23].

At this point, the pasuk says, "And Elokim made kosnos ohr (garments of skin) for Odom and his wife and dressed them." [Bereishis 3:21]. Now, the garments Elokim made for Adam and Chava were not just ordinary items of clothing. We don't know exactly what these "kosnos ohr" were, but whatever they were, they were extremely special. The Medrash mentions that after the passing of Odom, these garments were transferred to his son Shais. After Shais, they were passed down, and eventually they belonged to Noach. From Noach, they were passed to Malki-Tzedek, who gave them to Avraham and from Avraham, they went to Yitzchak, and from Yitzchak they went to Yaakov. They were a very unique set of garments!

It seems somewhat incongruous that this great gift came to Odom and Chava immediately after they were cursed. Hashem did not just give them some wool and say, "Now make some garments to clothe yourselves. You messed up; now take care of yourselves!" Instead, He gave them a priceless and magnificent gift!

How do we explain the sequence of these pesukim? Over (a previous) Simchas Torah, someone told me what I think is the true interpretation: When the Ribono Shel Olam comes to Odom and asks "What did you do?" Odom responds "My wife made me do it." Here Rashi explains that Odom was an ingrate! Hashem's reaction is: "Odom, you don't appreciate what I gave you? Then guess what? You are not going to have any of this. You are out of Gan Eden because you are ungrateful. From now on, you are going to work for a living and you are going to shvitz for your food." Someone who is ungrateful for what he is given, loses it! "Odom, you are out of here!"

That hit Adam like a ton of bricks. His response: "I am sorry, Ribono Shel Olam. You are right!" How does Odom show that he in fact appreciates what he was given? He renames his wife "Chava," indicating her prestigious status as "Mother of All Life." Once Odom acknowledged that he had been a kafui tov by not appreciating what he had been given, then Hashem was prepared to give him something else that was special.

Okay, you need to leave Gan Eden. That decree was sealed because you made a serious mistake. However, Hashem gave them something else to show that they would still merit Divine Protection: He gave them and dressed them in kosnos ohr.

An Insight Which Can Be Appreciated by Those Old Enough to Remember Watergate

We all know the story of Kayin and Hevel. Kayin kills Hevel and the Ribono Shel Olam curses Kayin: "Therefore, you are cursed more than the ground, which opened wide its mouth to receive your brother's bloods from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall not continue to yield its strength to you..." [Bereishis 4:11-12] In effect, the Ribono Shel Olam curses the land. Why does He curse the land? What happened here? Kayin committed fratricide, and then he buried his brother in the ground. Which is the bigger aveira (sin) – killing his brother or burying his brother in the land? Obviously, the indictment against Kayin should be for murder, not for burial! Why, then, is the focus of the Almighty's curse against the land that swallowed up the blood of Hevel?

The sefer Avir Yakov makes an observation, to which Americans with a good sense of history can relate. For those of us old enough to remember "Watergate" (June 17, 1972) – what was the big mistake of that infamous political scandal which led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon? The big mistake was not the breaking into the Democratic National Committee Headquarters. The big mistake was the cover-up that followed the burglary! Kayin's burial of Hevel in the ground is the first "cover-up" in world history!

When Hashem asks Kayin "Why did you kill your brother? What did you do?" Kayin could have explained "It was a crime of passion." Most murders are crimes of passion. The murderer is so angry at his victim that he kills him. So for the act of murder, there may be somewhat of a "teretz" (an excuse): I was overcome by the passion of the moment. But after the fact, when a person attempts to cover up his crime, it indicates that he has no remorse. He thinks he can get away with his crime. Burying the victim and covering him up in the ground is no longer an act of passion. That is an act of denial – denying the crime.

The Ribono Shel Olam focuses on the essence of the crime: The essence of the crime is the cover-up, the denial that a crime ever took place. People make mistakes. People momentarily lose control. That we can understand. But to go ahead and cover up a crime, indicating a total lack of remorse, that is unforgivable. Therefore, the curse starts with the ground, before it continues with Kayin himself.

Shlomo Katz <skatz@torah.org>

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To: hamaayan@torah.org

Hamaayan

By Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bereishis Then and Now

BS"D

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Sponsored by the Parness family in memory of Anna Parness a"l
Our Parashah opens: "In the beginning of Elokim's creating the heavens and the earth . . ." (We have translated the verse as it is explained by Rashi z"l.)
Rashi comments: The verse does not use the Name "Hashem," because at first the Creator intended the world to function using the attribute of Din / Justice, which is commonly denoted by the Name "Elokim."
However, He realized that the world could not thus endure and, therefore, He allied Din with the attribute of Rachamim / Mercy, which is commonly denoted by the Name we pronounce "Hashem," but He gave precedence to

Rachamim. Thus, we read (Bereishit 2:4), “On the day that the Hashem Elokim made earth and heaven”—using both Divine Names, representing Rachamim and Din, respectively. [Until here from Rashi] It goes without saying that Hashem did not obtain new information and change His mind!

What then does Rashi mean? R’ Chaim Friedlander z”l (1923-1986; Mashgiach Ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) explains:

Rashi does not mean to imply that a change happened over time. Rather, Rashi is teaching that the world as we know it is not the ideal. Hashem “wanted” to create the world with Din— i.e., that would have been the ideal—so that mankind would be judged by the letter of law and, therefore, would truly deserve reward for its good deeds. That would have been the greatest kindness, and Hashem never abandoned that plan; He will implement it in the ideal world of the future. In the meantime, however, Hashem knows that we are too imperfect to exist in a world where Din stands alone. Therefore, He created the world as we know it such that, for now, Rachamim prevails over Din. (*Sifsei Chaim: Mo’adim* I p.57) ***** **“Elokim saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. . .” (1:31)** Targum Onkelos translates the phrase, “It was very good,” into Aramaic as, “It was very well made.” In contrast, earlier in the chapter (verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25), Onkelos translates, “It was good,” literally. Why the difference? R’ Gershon Edelstein z”l (1923-2023; Rosh Yeshiva of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) explains: Only when something is complete can one attest that it is “very well made.” Thus, this could have been said only on the sixth day. R’ Edelstein continues: Midrash Rabbah teaches that the phrase, “Behold, it was very good,” refers, in particular, to the creation of death. Why? Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z”l (1210-1263; Spain) explains that the existence of death is very good because it humbles a person. R’ Edelstein elaborates: This is part of what makes the world complete, for the world is not complete unless man is complete, and man is not complete without Yir’at Shamayim / fear of Heaven, which comes from humbling oneself before G-d. (*Sha’arei Teshuvah Im Pininei Chizuk* II 25) ***** **“Of the fruit of the tree which is in the center of the garden, Elokim has said, ‘You shall neither eat of it nor touch it, lest you die.’” (3:3) “And the woman perceived that the tree was good for eating and that it was a delight to the eyes . . .” (3:6)** Midrash Rabbah relates that, just before the Exodus, Moshe Rabbeinu commanded Bnei Yisrael to circumcise themselves in preparation for eating the Korban Pesach, but many hesitated. What did Hashem do? He caused all the winds in the world to blow through Gan Eden, and from there to waft over Moshe’s Korban Pesach, bringing its enticing aroma to Bnei Yisrael. After smelling the Korban, Bnei Yisrael agreed to circumcise themselves. Why specifically did the aroma of the Korban Pesach persuade Bnei Yisrael, and what is its connection to Gan Eden? R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap z”l (1882-1951; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) explains: Mankind was expelled from Gan Eden for eating the fruit of the Etz Ha’da’at, a sin that involved all of man’s senses except the sense of smell. Chava listened to the snake, she looked at the tree, she touched the fruit, and she tasted it. She also misused her power of speech when she said that Hashem had commanded them not to touch the tree, which He had not done. (This enabled the snake to argue, “Just as you did not die when you touched it, so you will not die when you eat it.”) These actions weakened the spiritual power of man’s senses. The only sense that remained unscathed was the sense of smell. Therefore, that sense could be a catalyst for the Exodus, the beginning of the process of repairing the sin that occurred in, and returning mankind to, Gan Eden. Therefore, Gan Eden had a role to play in the Exodus. [Notably, the Prophets and Gemara speak of Mashiach as being able to distinguish between truth and falsehood using smell.] (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom* p.40) ***** **“Hashem said to Kayin, ‘Why are you annoyed, and why has your face fallen?’” (4:6)** One of the most prized students of R’ Yitzchak Isaac Sher z”l (1875-1951; Rosh Yeshiva of the Slobodka Yeshiva in Lithuania and Bnei Brak) was R’ Shlomo Hoffman z”l (1922-2013; Torah scholar and educator noted, among other things, for his 40 years working in the Israeli prison system). The latter relates that the first time he met the Rosh Yeshiva who would ultimately become his primary teacher, R’

Sher asked him: “Why are you sad?” “I’m sad?” the future R’ Hoffman asked. R’ Sher replied that he did indeed look sad. The young man then questioned what was wrong with looking sad, and R’ Sher responded, “Bring me a Chumash.” Upon receiving the Chumash, he opened to the story of Kayin and Hevel and asked, “What was Kayin’s sin?” “Murder!” the young man responded, in a tone that suggested the answer was obvious. “Pay attention!” replied R’ Sher, showing the Chumash to the future R’ Hoffman. “The first question Hashem ever asked Kayin (after Kayin’s sacrificial offer was rejected) was, ‘Why has your face fallen?’” In other words: Why do you look sad. We learn from this, concludes R’ Hoffman in retelling this story, that Kayin’s first sin was allowing himself to remain sad. (He should have learned a lesson from Hashem’s rejection of his offering and then moved on.) Because of his sadness, Kayin descended down a slippery slope until, ultimately, he committed the first murder in history. (*She’al Avicha V’yagedcha* p.8)

A related thought: We read (Mishlei 15:13), “A glad heart cheers the face, but a despondent heart [causes] a broken spirit.” R’ Eliyahu z”l (1720-1797; the Vilna Gaon) explains: When someone is happy with the work he is doing, it brings cheer to his face. A person’s yearning to perform Mitzvot or anything else worthwhile comes from a spirit that rests on him after he does other good things. (This is what our Sages mean when they teach, “A Mitzvah brings another Mitzvah in its wake.”) But, when a person’s heart is sad, that spirit is broken, and he becomes unable to accomplish anything. (*Be’ur Ha’Gra Al Mishlei*) R’ Aryeh Finkel z”l (1931-2016; Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Modi’in Ilit, Israel) adds: Very often (as in Kayin’s case), that sadness comes from a feeling that one was short-changed. (*Har Yera’eh*)

from: Chabad.org <learntorah@chabad.org>

reply-to: feedback@chabad.org

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subject: TORAH STUDIES: Parshat Bereishis

Tishrei 20, 5785 · October 22, 2024

Bereishit

Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

In the chronicling of creation, one detail strikes us with the force of mystery: Why was light created before everything else, when there was nothing to benefit from it? The Rabbinical explanation only adds to the mystery, for we are told that the light was immediately “hidden for the righteous in the world to come.” The Rebbe explains the difficulty and elucidates the implications of the creation narrative for the individual and the conduct of his life.

1. The First Creation

“And G-d said, Let there be light, and there was light.”¹ This was the first of the utterances by which G-d created the world, and light was the first of all creations.

But why was this? For light has no value in itself; its usefulness depends on the existence of other things which are illuminated by it or which benefit from it. So why was light created when nothing else existed?

One cannot say that this was simply a preparation for the things which were later to be made (in the way that the Talmud² says that man was created last so that all should be in readiness for him). For if so, light should have been created just before the animals (which can distinguish between light and darkness), or at the earliest just before the plants (which grow by the help of light), on the third day of creation.

2. The Hidden Light

The Rabbis³ explain that the light made on the first day was “hidden for the righteous in the world to come.” But this is paradoxical. Since the whole purpose of light is to illuminate, why should it have been hidden immediately after it was created; the very denial of its *raison d’être*? And even though the Rabbis explained why the light should have been hidden, we still need to understand why, if G-d foresaw this, He still created it at the outset.

A further comment requiring explanation is that of the Zohar,⁴ which points out that the Hebrew words for “light” and “secret” are numerically equivalent.⁵ Numerical equivalence is a sign that the two things are related to one another (for since things were created through the permutations of the letters of the Divine utterances, two things whose names are comprised of letters of the same value share a common essential form). But again we have a paradox: Light is, of its essence, a revealed thing, and a secret is necessarily hidden. How can two opposites share a common form?

3. The Architecture of the Universe

To resolve these difficulties we must consider a remark made by the Midrash:⁶ “Just as a king wishing to build a palace does not do so spontaneously but consults architect’s plans, so G-d looked into the Torah and created the world.”

In other words, by examining the order in which a man sets about making something which requires planning and forethought, we can learn something of G-d’s order in bringing the world into being.

First, he fixes in his mind the purpose which he desires his work to achieve. Only then does he begin the labor.

This, as it were, was G-d’s procedure. And the purpose of the world that He was to create (a place where the Divine light would be hidden⁷ in the heavy shrouds of material existence) was that it should be purified and the pristine light of G-d restored. He sought, ultimately, a “dwelling place in the lower world,”⁸ meaning that His hiddenness (darkness) be transformed into a revealed presence (light).

Since light was thus the purpose of the creation, and the purpose is the first thing to be decided on in the order of a work, light was created on the first day. The intention of all the subsequent creations was captured in that opening phrase, “Let there be light.”

4. The Implicit Light

There is, however, an allusion to light in each of the subsequent days of creation. For each day’s work concluded with the pronouncement “And G-d saw that it was good.” And the word “good” alludes to light, as it is written “And G-d saw the light⁹ that it was good.” It follows that light was present on each day of creation, but how can this be, if light is the purpose of creation, and as such explicit only at the outset?

The answer is that purpose manifests itself in two ways:

- (i) explicitly at the start of a labor; and
- (ii) implicitly at every stage of the work, guiding each endeavor in a pre-arranged pattern, so that it conforms to the original design.

It follows that there were two aspects to the primeval light: Firstly as it was revealed, as the purpose of creation, on the first day, prior to any other existing thing; and secondly, as it was felt indirectly (and hence only alluded to) on the other days, shaping the remainder of creation towards its function.

5. Revelation and Fulfillment

Now we can understand why the Zohar points out the connection between “light” and “secret,” and why the Rabbis said that it was hidden for the righteous in the world to come.

While a building is under construction, its final shape is not apparent, except in the mind of the architect. Its ultimate form is disclosed only when the work is completed.

So with the world: Only when it has been brought to its perfection, by our service during the 6,000 years¹⁰ which precede the Messiah, will its purpose (“light”) be revealed.

The light now is hidden, but in the world to come (when our worldly service has been completed) it will once again shine as it did on the first day. But anything which is hidden, is hidden somewhere. Where is the light hidden? The Rabbis say:¹¹ in the Torah. For just as an architect’s drawings guide the builders’ hands, so Torah guides us—through learning and the performance of the commandments—in shaping the world to its fulfillment.

6. From World to Man

Each person is a microcosm of the world, and its destiny is his. So that this order of spiritual history is also an order of individual service.

“Light” is the purpose of each Jew: That he transforms his situation and environment to light. Not merely by driving out the darkness (evil) by

refraining from sin, but by changing the darkness itself to light, by positive commitment to good.

And his order must be that of G-d’s in the act of creation: First he must formulate his purpose. Immediately, as he awakes from sleep (when he is a “new creation”¹²)—indeed at every moment, for the world is continually created anew,¹³ he must recognize that his task is “Let there be light.” Then he must let this purpose be implicit in each of his actions—by aligning them with Torah, the blueprint of creation.

7. Darkness Into Light

If light is the purpose of every created thing, it follows that it must also be the purpose of darkness itself. For darkness has a purpose, not merely that it should exist to be avoided (should present man with a choice between good and evil), but that it should be transformed into light.

And if a man should sometimes despair, in the oppressive darkness of a wayward world,¹⁴ of making light prevail, let alone of turning the bad itself into good, he is told at the very outset: “In (or, for the sake of) the beginning, G-d created. . . .” And the Rabbis translate it as: “For the sake of Israel, who are called ‘the beginning of (G-d’s) produce’, and for the sake of Torah, which is called ‘the beginning of (G-d’s) way.’”¹⁵

The world was made so that Israel through Torah should turn it into the everlasting light of G-d’s revealed presence, in the Messianic fulfillment of Isaiah’s words,¹⁶ “The sun shall no more be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light: But the L-rd shall be for you a light everlasting.”

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. X pp. 7-12)

FOOTNOTES 1. Bereishit 1:3. 2. Sanhedrin, 31a. 3. Chagigah, 12a. Bereishit Rabbah, 3:6. 4. Part III, 28b. 5. The derivation of associations of meaning by utilizing numerical values of the Hebrew letters is known as “Gematria.” Cf. Tanya, Part II, ch. 1. 6. Bereishit Rabbah, beginning. 7. “World” and “hidden” are semantically related in Hebrew (olam—he’elam). 8. Cf. Tanya, Part I, ch. 36. 9. Bereishit 1:4. Cf. Sotah, 12a. 10. Corresponding to the Six Days of Creation. 11. Midrash Ruth, in Zohar Chadash, 85a. 12. Yalkut Shimoni on Psalms. 13. Tanya, Part II, beginning. 14. “Waste and void, and darkness was on the face of the murmuring deep.” Bereishit 1:2. 15. Cf. Rashi, Bereishit 1:1. 16. Isaiah 60:19.

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Why Was Humanity Created Last?

Language of Tomorrow

by Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein

Bereishit (Genesis 1:1-6:8)

In Bereishit, we read about the creation of the universe. The entire early history of creation is covered in just a few short passages, and every small detail is of seminal importance. One detail that demands particular scrutiny is the order of creation. And perhaps the most glaring question of all – why were humans created last? Why did we only appear on the scene late on the Friday of creation?

It’s a question that the sages of the Talmud engage with. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 38a) presents a number of different answers.

The first is that human beings were created last in order to establish God as the sole author of creation. If people were around from the beginning, says the Talmud, later generations might be swayed to regard creation as a partly human undertaking, rather than a wholly Divine endeavour. They might come to believe that we were God’s co-creators, so to speak, in the work of creating the world.

That presumption itself is an extraordinary statement about the greatness and creative genius of human beings. And indeed, just by looking around us, we see how so many wonders of our world are man-made. Buildings and infrastructure, electricity, running water, cars, the internet – the sheer scale and scope of human ingenuity is breathtaking.

It is also true that, as our Sages state, human beings are called on to be God’s “partners in creation” – partners in creating a better world, and in bringing

the world to its perfected state. Ultimately, though, it's important to acknowledge God as the One who created the universe alone, who set everything in motion, who created the framework within which human creativity can be unleashed. We need to acknowledge that we live in a world created, *ex nihilo*, *yaish m'ayin*, by God – that we ourselves are His creations, and that all of our amazing creative powers are God-given.

Our sages teach us to embrace this dual nature of humankind. That on the one hand, we have this awesome creative potential, but on the other, we are not self-made; we are, in a fundamental sense, entirely indebted to and reliant on God for both our existence and our amazing gifts and abilities. Later on in the parsha, we learn that human beings are created in God's image, which touches on this dualism. Being created in God's image means we all have a Divine soul within us. So we have this almost supernatural greatness, but it's a gift from the One who made us.

This relates to the second answer the Talmud provides to the question of why humans were created last – to instil in us a sense of humility. Because of the awesome Divine greatness within every human being, there is a natural tendency to be arrogant, and so we need to be reminded that we are God's humble creation. As the Midrash says, even the mosquito was created before us.

A third reason is that God wanted Adam and Eve to walk into a world which was ready and waiting for them. Human beings are the purpose of creation. Why? Because we alone – among all of God's creatures – are blessed with the gift of free will. We have the ability to do good, to do what's right, to fulfil God's will, not because we have to, but because we choose to.

None of the other creations of this world possess free will. The animal kingdom operates on instinct – animals do not and cannot make moral choices. Even the lofty angels are beings without free choice. They are pre-programmed to praise God and carry out His will. Human beings, on the other hand, have free will. We can make moral decisions and choose between right and wrong. Though our instincts and impulses are extremely powerful, through the force of our will, we are able to rule them – or at least channel them in positive directions. This is the qualitative difference between human beings and any other creature that God has created. Indeed, the Rambam (The Laws of Repentance, Chapter 5) says this ability to choose freely is the defining characteristic of a human being.

So, all of creation in its balance and beauty and perfection is but an elaborate stage for human beings to live a meaningful life, making moral choices aligned with the will of our Creator. And of course, free will is also the foundation of the Torah, the blueprint for living a moral, meaningful, Godly existence.

The fourth reason that Adam and Eve were created last on the Friday of creation, says the Talmud, so they would enter straight into Shabbat. God orchestrated creation in such a way that the mitzvah of Shabbat – a full, complete 'day of rest' – would be one of humankind's first experiences on this earth. Why does Shabbat occupy such a central place in the human experience, going back to the beginning of the world? Why is it that Shabbat had to lay the foundation for human development?

The answer to this question, as we shall see, ties together all three of the other answers provided by the Talmud.

Firstly, Shabbat touches on the very purpose of creation, which is, as we have discussed, to exercise our free will in fulfilling God's will. We do so by performing the mitzvot of the Torah, which is a revelation of his will. And Shabbat, we know, is one of the Torah's central mitzvot. This is why one of the first experiences humanity entered into was Shabbat. One of the first things we did in this world was to perform a mitzvah. We were born into mitzvah. The very purpose of creation was that we should become the loyal servants of God.

And by beginning human life on earth with a mitzvah, this idea is conveyed in the most powerful way.

Our sages teach that with the creation of Adam and Eve, God becomes a king for the very first time. As our sages explain, there is no king without a nation – meaning that you cannot be described as a king unless there are free-willed subjects who acknowledge your kingship. So with Adam and Eve

entering into the mitzvah of Shabbos at the very beginning, they were, in fact, acknowledging God as King, and we do the same each week when we keep Shabbos.

Human history begins with Shabbos and ends with Shabbos. Our sages compare the messianic era to a great Shabbos that arrives at the world after no longer than 6 000 years – the seventh millennium is the great Shabbos of human history. And so human history begins with Shabbos and ends with Shabbos. It begins with a connection and an acknowledgement of God as King through the very first Shabbos, and ends with an acknowledgment of God as King with the final Shabbos of the world, when the entire world will recognise the kingship of Hashem.

Shabbos is also a testimony to our faith in God as the Creator of the universe. This is crucial. Although Adam and Eve had an intimate knowledge of God and understood that He was the Creator of the universe, with each passing generation, this knowledge and understanding faded. Shabbos is our weekly reminder that God created the world. When we recite Kiddush on Friday night, we testify to God's existence and His sovereignty over all things, and we make explicit mention of His "Acts of Creation".

Shabbos is also an act of humility and restraint on the part of human beings. As we have mentioned, it is the very Divine greatness that God has blessed us with that can lead us away from Him as we get caught up in our own abilities. Shabbos helps dispel that sense of arrogance that can creep into our hearts. On Shabbos, we cease imposing our will on the world around us. On Shabbos, we step back from all our creative endeavours, and acknowledge that God is the ultimate creative force in the universe. On Shabbos, we remind ourselves that our greatness comes from God.

Ultimately, we see that being created last and then stepping straight into Shabbos equips us with so much: a sense of purpose, a sense of humility, a sense of our place in creation, and ultimately, a recognition that God is the Source of it all.