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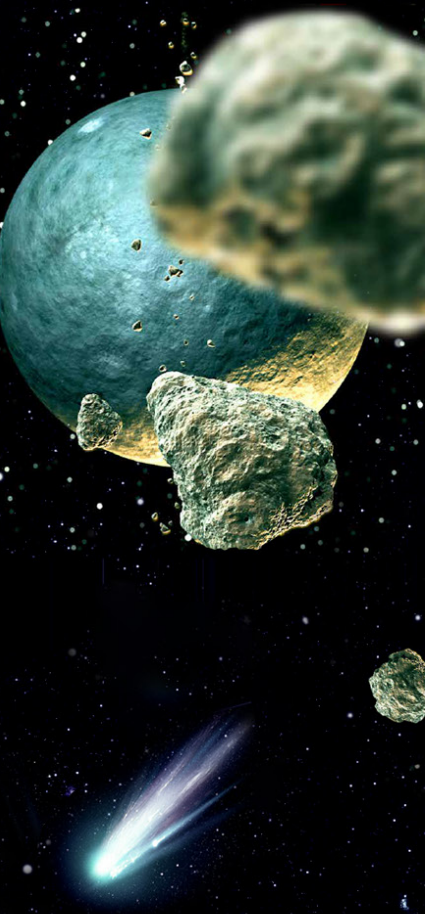
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One who visits a friend before his prayers makes him into idolatry. One should start his day confronting the Creator as his reality, not the social world. The Rabbis teach, "Cease from man who has his breath in his nostrils, for what (bameh) is he considered? Don't read "bameh," but "bammah"—an altar."

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

THE LAND

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

The Jew & Israel

The strength of His works He has told to His people, to give them an inheritance of nations" (Psalms 111:6)

We inherited Israel that we might share with mankind knowledge of creation, Maaseh Beraishis. [This is the meaning of this verse above: God revealed to His people His principles in creation, giving the Jews a land of inheritance from the nations, that we might teach mankind about God's creation]. Without this explanation there is no justification why the Jew is entitled to Israel. Secular Zionism is unthinkable.

Knowledge of creation is the highest level of perfection; no Torah authority argues. We were heirs to it. This lost knowledge embodied principles of physics; we had our own science of creation. It embodied knowledge of the universe in a certain way, where a person with this knowledge would

know both ethics and physics. Studying the natural world alone cannot teach man ethics. At the end of his Guide, Maimonides cites Jeremiah 9:22,23:

Thus said the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the strong man glory in his strength. Let not the rich man glory in his riches. But only in this should one glory: become wise and know Me, for I the LORD act with kindness, justice, and charity in the world, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

God desires man to act with ethics [which comprised part of the knowledge of creation we lost]. Chazal allude to this in the midrash about God shrinking the moon's size.

Our understanding of God and the universe is completely different from the [other] religions.

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THE LAND

Science says that religions are in a “retreating” position [religions cannot answer scientific questions and avoid the question]. All other religions are actual idolatry or follow the path of thinking of idolatry, derech avoda zara. Other religions seek miracles and wishful fantasies. Their idea of God is distorted; a wishful thing. They wish God would come down from heaven and do whatever they want. But no such God exists.

But according to Judaism, we would never be satisfied by praying to something we don't understand. In our morning prayers we say the words, “How great are Your works God; all of them You performed with wisdom” (Psalms 104:24). Religionists are happy with a God that satisfies their wishes. According to us, however, if a scientist could not explain something, we would not be happy to say, “That's just God's will,” as our prayer above says that God performs everything with wisdom. While it is true that nothing exists without the Creator, without wisdom, we are not satisfied. The difference between scientists and us is the nature of the wisdom that we seek. Scientists believe all can be explained through studying the universe [alone] without recourse to an external Designer [prophetic knowledge]. But we say that is not so and that ultimately all wisdom reflects wisdom of God which is external to the [observer or the observed].

Our religion is diametrically opposed to the position scientists impute to other religions [cultures retreating from wisdom].

Through God's will we were given the ability to share the idea of creation. Idol worshipers will never combine their idea of God with the Creator of the universe, as they seek fantasy and illusion, while the universe is natural law which contradicts the idolater. But to us, both Judaism and science embody wisdom. Scientific investigation is not contrary to our idea of God. Rather, our idea of God propels us further and deeper in that direction. ■

PHILOSOPHY

Proof of the Soul

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Recorded by a student 10/7/21

We can prove the human soul by comparing an animal to a human. When an animal sees a plank of wood, it views it merely as an obstacle to avoid. But man sees a series of points, length, breadth...an ideational concept. He can create a triangle and theorems. Man sees an ideational entity. Similarly this is seen from equality: we see two things only “nearly” equal. Yet we imagine a “perfect” equality, although never seeing perfect equality in nature.

Plato's theory of remembrance is relevant here. Because in the soul there is the ideational quality of perfect equality. And when we see near equality, the soul remembers perfect quality. The same is true regarding a straight line: the soul knows the idea of a straight line, which is an ideational concept, but never seen in reality.

Chazal seem to have a formula similar to Plato. They teach, “An angel teaches the embryo all of Torah before it is born. It then punches the embryo and all is forgotten,” and the infant must relearn it. The question of course is, what is the purpose of teaching the embryo if he will forget it? The answer is that the angel teaches the embryo the underlying methods of Torah She’Baal Peh (Oral Law) which is embedded in his soul. That is why one can relearn Torah, because he has the methods.

The last line in Halachic Mind says as follows: “*Out of the sources of halacha, a new world view awaits formulation.*” I believe this is what the navi means by “*And you will draw waters joyfully, from the wells of salvation*” (Isaiah 12:3). Rashi says this refers to Torah's secrets, and this is what the angel teaches the embryo. The angel teaches the embryo the fundamental principles of halacha, meta-halacha. When the embryo grows up, he always has access to this intuitive field of halacha...much as Plato describes the intuitive mathematical sense. In studying Torah we are drawn by this wellspring of halachic intuition.

As a funny aside, Rav Aharon Soloveitchik used to give a shur in Rambam Mesivta. I was there when a young boy asked him this: “When the angel teaches the embryo, is this understood literally?” Rav Aharon Soloveitchik answered: “It's not literal. Everyone knows an embryo knows nothing.”

In his Peirush Hamishnayos on Chagiga (chap. 2) Maimonides says, “Man should praise the soul” [he should view it as valuable]. Maimonides quoted Chazal: “One who has no pity on the honor of his creator, it is better that he never existed.” Maimonides says, “One who has no pity on the honor of his creator” refers to one who has no pity or mercy on his intellect, for the intellect is God's honor.” Maimonides says that due to the importance of the high level of the soul, disrespecting the soul is disrespect of God. ■

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

GOD'S FIRST WORDS

Genesis is God's first communications with mankind. But by no means does Genesis cite a complete history. Thus, God must deem these selected stories more crucial than all other events. What are their vital lessons?

6 "Days" of Creation

As the sun was not set in place until "day" 4, we are forced to interpret the word "day" as not referring to 24-hour periods. Rather, "day" refers to this: a "significant phase in creation." Significance in creation is given to heaven and earth, land and oceans, luminaries, vegetation, animal life and finally, humans. With these phases, God highlights creations of importance. But what is the importance of each?

As God instructed man to dominate Earth (Gen. 1:28), we understand why Rashi explained (Ethics 2:8) that if mankind would abandon knowledge (Torah), God would revert the world to primordial chaos. Man is the only earthly creature that can perceive the creator, and is therefore the goal in the creation of Earth. Just as a rock or a plant does not exist for itself as they are inanimate, animals too which process no soul, exist only

for man, just like all else on Earth. The only creation existing for itself is man. This is because the purpose in creation is the recognition of the creator; on Earth only man can perform this. God needs nothing, so His creations must be for something outside himself. Purpose exists only in a being that can perceive God's wisdom. This expresses God's kindness in creating angels and man.

We must now ask why is it that only that which perceives God has purpose, while inanimate and soulless creations do not have a purpose of themselves? We ask this as we already understand that God is behind all creation, and all which God does reflects great wisdom and purpose. Therefore, God intentionally embedded His wisdom into all creation, but not for naught. The depth of wisdom displayed in all His creation must be made observable with intent for a being to observe, and appreciate. Those beings are only man and angels. As we cannot conceive of any purpose in a flower existence—if that was the only thing that God created—we would call this purposeless and not something which God would perform. Therefore a flower must exist for another creation's purpose. Even an inanimate entity like a rock must have a purpose. The wisdom embedded

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in minerals, botany, zoology and all sciences cannot be perceived by rocks, plants or animals. And as does God does not perform futile actions, God expressed His wisdom for intelligent beings to observe and appreciate. Earth exists for man to discover God's wisdom.

Day & Night

God changed the names of 5 phenomena. On day 1, God called light "day," and darkness He called "night." On day 2 He called the firmament "heavens" and on day 3 He called the dry Earth "land," and the collection of waters He called "seas." However, God does not rename the substance of water, mountains, sun, moon, stars, man, animals, vegetation or any other creation.

Interestingly, these five names relate again to heaven (day, night, heavens) and Earth (land and seas): His first [primary] creations. Furthermore, these 5 are prioritized, addressed first before all other creations. Also, what is the concept of "renaming" one thing and not another: Is the renamed thing thereby highlighted as more significant, and if so, in what manner?

"And it was evening and it was morning, day X," is repeated many times. Why this emphasis of night transitioning into day? Primarily, what is the purpose of day and night? What in man's path towards perfection demands this regulated transition between light and darkness? Why must night exist?

These phenomena of light and darkness and day and night are highlighted by the Shima's blessings:

Blessed are you God, King of the world, forming light and creating darkness...

Blessed are you God, King of the world, with His word He sunsets the evenings...with understanding He changes times, and exchanges the moments...creating day and night, You expire day and bring night, and divide between day and night...

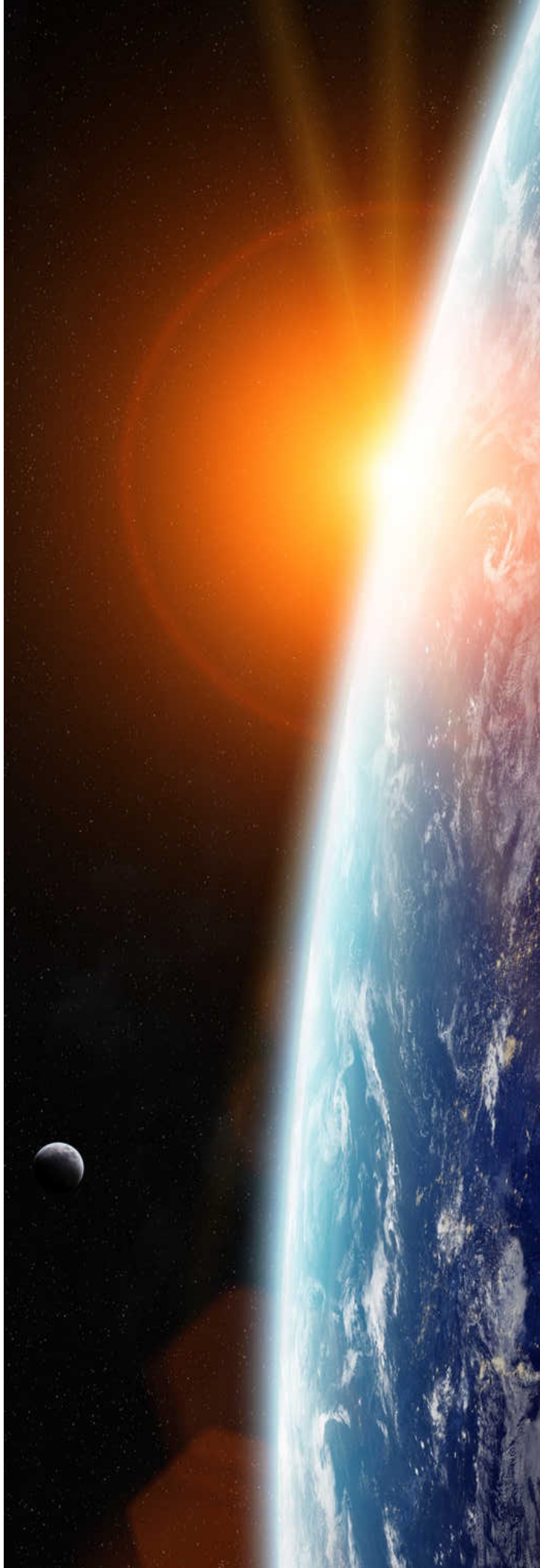
With "day," "night," "heavens," "land" and "seas" God renamed these—and no other creation—to focus man on the purpose of creation, and our purpose in life. Constraining our ambitions (through darkness) and our geographical confinement (land—not water or heaven) intend to constrain our involvement in a purely physical life—time and space—and steer us towards the higher pursuit of Torah and perfection, matters of the soul. The physical serves only to enable the perfection of our souls. Day and night differ from light and dark, in that day and night are "human measurements of activity," not visual phenomena of light or dark. God renames light and dark as "day and night" to impose this perspective upon us, preventing our lives from being spent on only physical pursuits. Not only due to lack of light, but night also effects us psychologically, when we recoil from our endeavors. Maimonides says that whomever desires to attain the crown of Torah should not let his nights go without Torah study. This is because with fewer distractions at night, we have greater focus on knowledge and gain so much more wisdom during these hours.

Thus, God organized creation to restrict man from overindulging worldly pursuits and travel, thereby directing him towards greater wisdom.

Eden & Human Nature

Once we have earth, man and all creations, what need is there for this garden? This question is compounded by the discussion of a river which exited the Garden of Eden and then separated into four individual rivers, with great detail of their names and where they traversed. We never again hear about these rivers in the rest of Bible (Torah). Therefore they must be germane to Adam who was placed in the Garden of Eden. In a separate essay in this issue entitled "Have we found Eden?" I suggest

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the meaning of these rivers and their names. But briefly, these rivers allude to the human mind, for it is only with this knowledge that we can truly understand our make up, manage our personalities, fulfill our purpose, avoid fantasy and attain happiness. What is a marvelous parallel, we see that King Solomon too commenced his book about attaining happiness (Koheles) with the discussion of “rivers.” Man’s energies flow like rivers. King Solomon also refers to the sun shining and then setting, i.e., as Rabbi Israel Chait explained, paralleling man’s search for happiness, chasing one fantasy after the next:

King Solomon continues his illustration of man’s psyche, now engaging metaphor. The metaphor of the sun describes man’s search for lusts. Man obtains the object of his desires, “the sun rises.” But then the experience passes, “the sun sets.” Man then chases the desire again, “and hastens to its place where it rises again.”

Adam, Eve, the Snake, the Sword and the Cherubs

God then teaches us about our subservient role to Him, expressed in his command that Adam and Eve abstain from that one tree. We are taught that initially, Adam and Eve did not possess a conscience, explaining why nudity was not a concern. God did not wish man to be distracted by morality: thoughts only possible with a conscience. He wished that man be solely involved in higher knowledge, of truths and rejecting falsehoods (not morality: good vs. evil). God’s desire that man pursue scientific and philosophical knowledge is expressed in God bringing the animals to Adam for him to study and classify: naming the animals. It was only due to man’s inability to control his desires that the conscience was created and placed in man’s mind, generating feelings of guilt, to avert man’s self-destruction through sinning. After this we see nudity became a concern which is an expression of morality and guilt. God’s concession to man of the conscience intends to help man continue life; guilt helps one refrain from what he deems as evil. And with the punishment of mortality for man’s violation and man’s immediate desire for the Tree of Life, we see the dominant role that the fantasy of immortality plays in man. This fantasy again is addressed by King Solomon in his great work Koheles. As Rabbi Chait explained, all human fantasy is appealing only due to man feeling immortal, that his fantasies could be endless.

The story of the snake is also a metaphor. Maimonides states that the snake never spoke to Adam:

It is especially of importance to notice that the serpent did not approach or address Adam, but all his attempts were directed against Eve (Guide, book iii, chap. xxx).

This indicates that the snake was not a physical creature. For if it was, it could address Adam too. But the snake is in fact Eve’s instincts, explaining why her “snake” cannot appeal/talk to Adam; our instincts entice only ourselves.

Sforno follows this metaphor explaining man’s “crushing of the snake’s head” to mean that man conquers his instincts at the “head” of the battle. But if man allows his instincts to go unopposed, they eventually swell and overcome man drawing him to sin, the meaning of the snake “biting man’s heel” — i.e., at the “heel” of the battle, the instincts overcome man.

The spinning flaming sword is an allusion to the threat of mortality and the childlike cherubs give man a sense of immortality. This means that man senses both immortality and mortality, thereby creating a balance to keep man equidistant from both damaging poles: with the punishment of death, man can no longer fantasize that he is immortal, and with a sense of immortality, man will not feel morbid that he’s dying tomorrow.

Cain and Able

Now we learn of religion and competition. Cain was jealous that God favored his brother’s sacrifice. Thereby, we learn that man seeks validation for his religiosity, and that he is intolerable towards those whom God favorites; Cain murdered Abel...the seeds of anti-Semitism. From God’s punishment of Cain, we derive that no prohibition against murder was needed: morality and the evil of murder can be derived from God’s creation of a species. As God made many men, His will is disregarded when we treat others worse than ourselves. A species means God desires multiple beings to exist. Therefore we cannot mistreat them.

Although not commanded in sacrifice, Cain and Abel recognized man is subservient to God and that it is proper to embody this in sacrifice: the giving of our efforts to God, who gave us the fruits of our efforts. God responding to their sacrifices teaches that it is necessary for man’s dignity that God validates man’s proper actions. Similarly we read “Fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces” (Lev. 9:24). Here too, God endorsed man’s upright acts.

Additionally God’s response to Cain that he can overcome his sinful nature rides on the coattails of Adam’s sin, teaching that sin is not something coerced or inevitable.

As we progress in our Torah studies, we must be sensitive that all stories and laws target vital lessons. We must not dismiss a story or a single detail as minor. Maimonides taught that in some Torah accounts, each item in a section teaches something new, while in other cases, many particulars may be providing context, without new lessons for each word or phrase. We must discern when to apply each rule, but recognize that all that is written in Torah is for a purpose. ■



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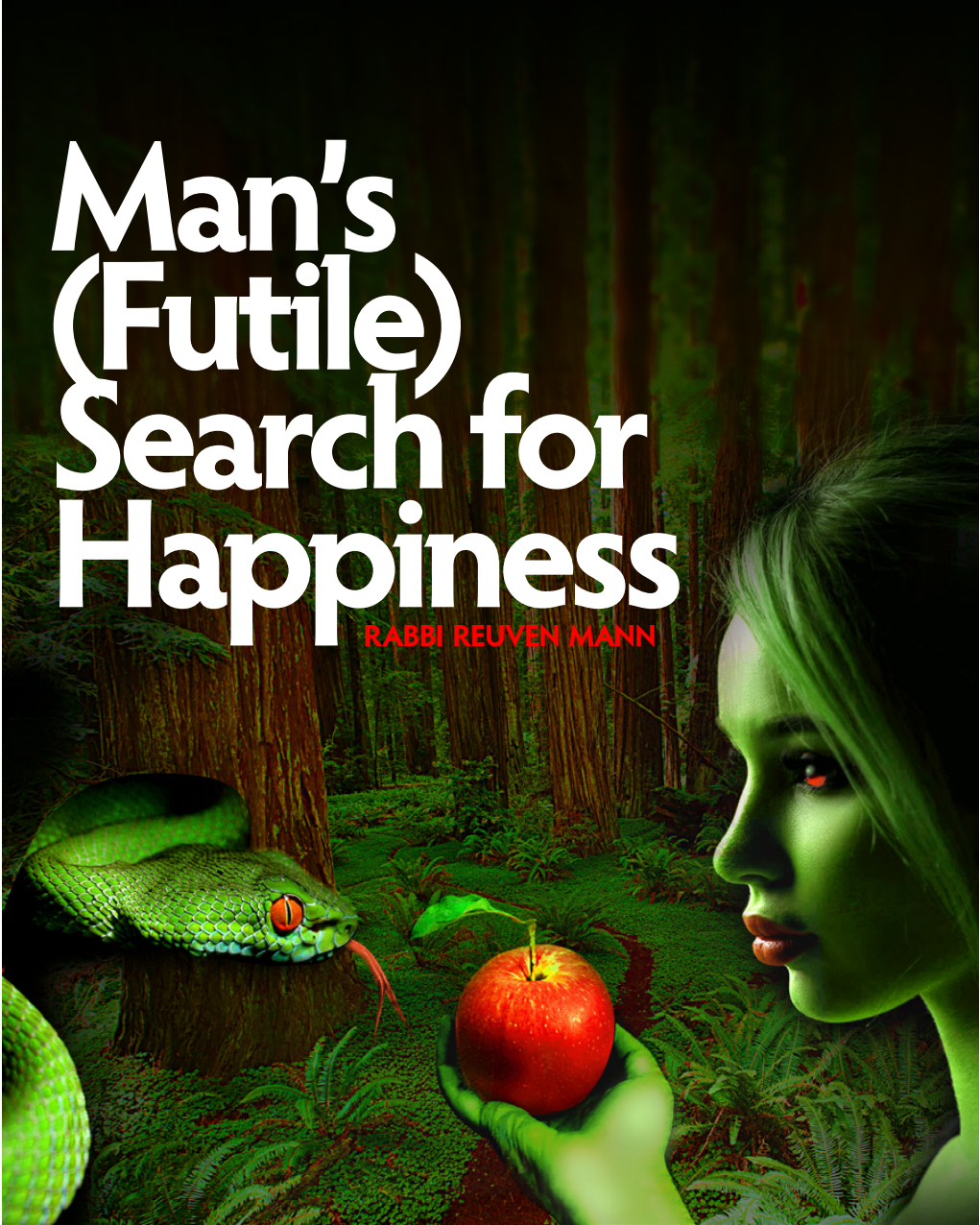


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Man's (Futile) Search for Happiness

RABBI REUVEN MANN



The Book of Bereishit which we have just begun to read describes the creation of man and the development of human society. It contains the story of human failure and sinfulness.

From the very outset we encounter man's disobedience even in the paradisiacal habitat in which he was placed. Virtually all of the players are guilty. This can be seen in the Garden of Eden where man had everything that he needed at his disposal. He did not have to toil to earn his bread but could spend all his time and utilize all his energy in the pursuit and enjoyment of G-d's infinite wisdom which was incorporated into the natural order. In fact he studied the various animals and "named" them which means he classified them according to their nature and character.

Still the life of man was not perfect or idyllic for he lacked a "helpmate opposite him." That is to say he had an unfulfilled need for a certain type of relationship which was essential to his attaining a state of happiness. The satisfaction of this need

required a new act of creation which was willingly obliged by "He who had spoken and the world came into being."

In effect, "man needs and Hashem creates." This teaches us about the importance of human fulfillment in the scheme of things. It is the Will of the Creator as manifested in the Creation that man should have all that he requires in order to achieve the purpose for which he was given life.

However, the satisfaction of man's need for the woman carries with it a great danger. By virtue of this relationship he becomes vulnerable to her influence. This can have tragic consequences as can be seen in the story of the first sin which is all about seduction.

The woman's encounter with the snake led to disaster. This primitive creature had great intelligence but no moral compass and sought to destroy mankind. He managed to seduce the woman to partake of the sensuous pleasures contained in the forbidden fruit and she ate of it and "she gave it to the man with her and he did eat."

When Hashem confronted Adam and asked if he had eaten the prohibited food he replied, "The woman that You placed here with me, she gave me if the fruit and I did eat."

The Rabbis asserted that this statement contains the sin of "Kaffuy Tov" denial of the good. Indirectly, Adam blamed Hashem for his own moral failure and displayed ingratitude for the "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" whose advent he had originally greeted with such enthusiasm.

In considering the first sin one must ask, what made the forbidden so alluring? Or perhaps we should inquire, why couldn't they be happy with all the things that were permitted? After all there was no shortage of things they could enjoy as Hashem had said: "From all the trees of the Garden you may eat but from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the Gan do not eat from it..." Yet it seems that instead of focusing on the many items that they were allowed to partake of they became fixated on the single object that was rendered off limits.

The inability of man to find contentment in the multitude of opportunities available to him haunts the human race to this very day. We live in the most advanced material and technologically-adept civilization in human history. But has this led to an increase in human contentment?

It does not seem so if the proliferation of drug and other addictions as well as psychological illness, depression and suicide are valid indicators. Mankind especially in the advanced western societies is in the grip of a misery crisis in which people are dissatisfied with every significant aspect of life. Why is man so unhappy in the midst of supreme material wealth and endless opportunities for carnal indulgence?

The antediluvian world was similar to our own. The Rabbis assert that prior to the Flood, man was the most powerful creature on earth living close to a thousand years and never suffering illness. The superior climatic conditions caused the earth to yield fruits and vegetables far superior in nutritional qualities to anything we have known. Man could travel great distances in a short time and reigned supreme over all the beasts of the field.

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But this did not lead to a state of satisfaction. Rather the strong exploited the weak, even though there was more than enough for everyone. And there was a breakdown of the basic sexual restrictions that were the hallmark of civilized society. Scripture aptly characterizes the spiritual corruption of the generation of the Flood: “The Land became corrupted before Hashem and was filled with violence.” Blessed with great power and the richest resources the society of the Flood could not find genuine human contentment without exercising dominion over others and exploiting them.

This runs counter to contemporary liberal left-wing philosophy which is rooted in the Marxist doctrine. That gloomy ideology deludes itself into believing that material improvement of the human condition is the key to societal perfection. That is certainly not the message that emerges from a study of Bereishit which clearly associates material abundance with moral decay and corruption.

The approach of the Torah to the matter of Tikkun Olam can be found in the verse regarding the creation of man: “And G-d created the human in His image, in the image of Hashem created He him, male and female created He them.” The mistake of Marxism is that it

defines man as an instinctual animal with a superior intelligence whose happiness consists in the provision of his physical needs.

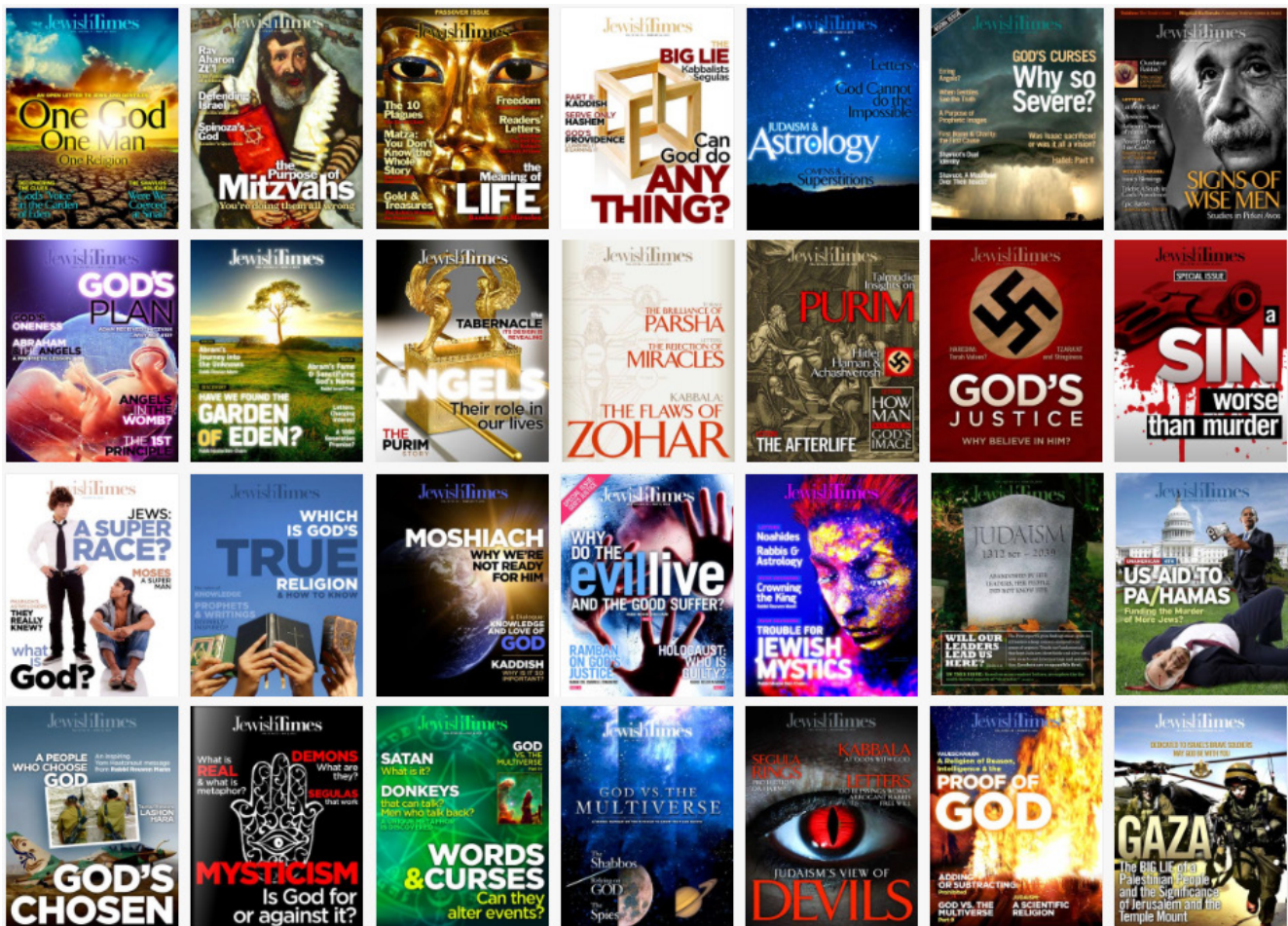
But the Torah rejects this dreary outlook and asserts that the physical is but a means to an end which is the perfection of his soul. The path to happiness lies with the nurturing of the Neshama through learning, pursuit of justice and righteous deeds. The more man diminishes his need of the physical and pours his energy into spiritual pursuits the happier he becomes.

And one who views all his fellow humans as beings who have been created in Hashem’s image has an intense respect for all people and a desire to help them. They are repelled by the notion of exploiting or harming them.

The Bereishit narratives and the history of the human race make it clear that for all the progress mankind has made it has failed completely to discover what is the purpose of human life. Instead it has established false ideals which when pursued leads to great harm and dissatisfaction. The Torah ideals of wisdom, mastery of the emotions and humble Avodat Hashem are the avenues of peace and the well-being of man and society. May we merit to attain them. Shabbat Shalom. ■

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CONDÉ NAST





And the L-rd said, "Let there be luminaries in the firmament of the heavens to separate between the day and night and to serve as signs, measures of time, and to count through them the days and years." (Sefer Beresheit 1:14)

I. Reading the Torah with an open mind

The Torah opens with its creation narrative. These passages have been frequently characterized as a primitive mythical explanation for the origin of the universe. Much of the evidence for this contention is based on the contention itself. If one reads the account as a myth, it seems mythical. An open-minded reader will not be so quick to dismiss the account as a fanciful mythology.

Let us consider one example of the evidence supporting the contention that the account is mythical. In the narrative, the creation takes place in six days. On the first day, light is created. Each day new components of the universe emerge. On the final day, humanity is created. Science has proven that the universe evolved over billions of years and not in a period of a few days. The story of G-d creating the universe in a period of days has the character of mythology.

This analysis is based upon a biased and careless reading of the text. It assumes that the days of creation are composed of twenty-four hours. This assumption is precluded by the text. Consider the above passage. It is translated according to Unkelus who lived during the first century of the common era. The passage explains that the luminaries were created on the fourth day. These luminaries served two main functions. They shed light upon Earth. They provided a means for measuring the passage of time. This second function would become important when humanity emerged. Humanity needs a measure of time to order its affairs. Before these luminaries were created, three days of creation passed.

The luminaries are the periodic phenomenon by which time is measured. The narrative uses the term "day" before their creation. In other words, the days of creation could not be measured by the periodic rising and setting of the sun before the

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Creation's Narrative: Fact or Fantasy?

RABBI BERNIE FOX

sun was formed. This means that the term “day” in the narrative does not mean our twenty-four-hour unit. It doesn’t describe a measurement of time. It describes a discrete step in the process of creation. (1)

This does not mean that the narrative does not present problems; it does. One interesting and confusing aspect of the creation narrative is the order in which the elements of the universe emerge. Let us consider two examples and the comments of the commentators.

In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth. Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of G-d hovered over the face of the waters. (Sefer Beresheit 1:1-2)

II. Poor translation of the Torah

The above is basically the JPS translation of the first two passages of the Torah. The translation creates a problem. According to it, the passages are describing the order in which the universe was created. First, the heaven and earth were formed. The next passage explains that water covered the earth. When was water created? If the first step of creation was the forming of heaven and earth, then water must have been created after them. Why is the creation of water not mentioned?

Rashi responds that this translation of the first passage is incorrect. The proper translation is, “In the beginning of the L-rd’s creation of the heaven and earth, and the earth was unformed and void...” According to Rashi, the passage is not saying that heaven and earth were the first objects formed in the creation process. It is introducing the creation narrative. It is saying that in the beginning of the process that resulted in the creation of heaven and earth, these were unformed. The earth was surrounded by water and the heavens were not yet fashioned. (2) The narrative proceeds to describe the unfolding process. First, light was created. Then, the firmament was formed, and the heavens emerged. Next, the water that covered the earth was pooled to form the oceans. The land that had been submerged was transformed into dry land. Earth took form. Vegetation was created and it covered the newly revealed earth. The narrative continues and concludes with the creation of humanity.

In short, Rashi unravels the confusion in the order of the narrative by explaining that the Torah is not saying that heaven and earth were created before water. The narrative begins after water was already created and covered the yet unformed earth. It describes how the primordial void was fashioned into the heaven and earth that we know.

III. Torah and Science

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno discusses another confusing element of the narrative. Let us return to and further consider the creation of the luminaries. According to the Torah, these were formed on the fourth day. Science tells us that the stars were formed before our planet. Sforno was not aware of this and did not address this issue. But his comments are relevant.

Before considering his comments, let us learn more about him. Sforno was an Italian Torah scholar and lived from approximately 1470 to 1550. His observations of the stars and planets were made with the unaided eye. The telescope was invented by Galileo who lived from 1564 to 1642.

Sforno explains that the passage is not describing the creation of the sun, moon, and stars. It is describing the creation of the lights that we observe from Earth and that illuminate our planet. He explains that the light that reaches us from these bodies passes through Earth’s atmosphere. There it is filtered and refined so that the light that reaches us is nourishing and not destructive. Without Earth’s atmosphere, the light reaching our planet would be different. It would not be nurturing; it would be harmful. The Torah is describing the creation of the light that reaches and illuminates our planet.

He adds that we can observe an analogous process to the atmosphere’s transformation of the light from these distant luminaries. If we observe a light source separated from us by water, we will note that the light rays are altered through their passage through the water. The light we observe before its passage through the water differs from the light we observe after its passage. Sforno asserts that the atmosphere has an analogous effect on the light passing through it. (3)

Two points emerge from Sforno’s interpretation. First, the Torah’s objective is not to describe the creation of the universe. Its aim is to describe the steps that led to the emergence of our Earth. It is describing the creation of the universe from the perspective of Earth. It deals with issues that are relevant to Earth and it frames its narrative from this perspective.

Second, because of this perspective, the Torah does not discuss the creation of the sun, moon, and stars. It deals with only the light from these bodies that reach and illuminate our planet. From the narrative’s perspective, fixing the time at which they were created is irrelevant.

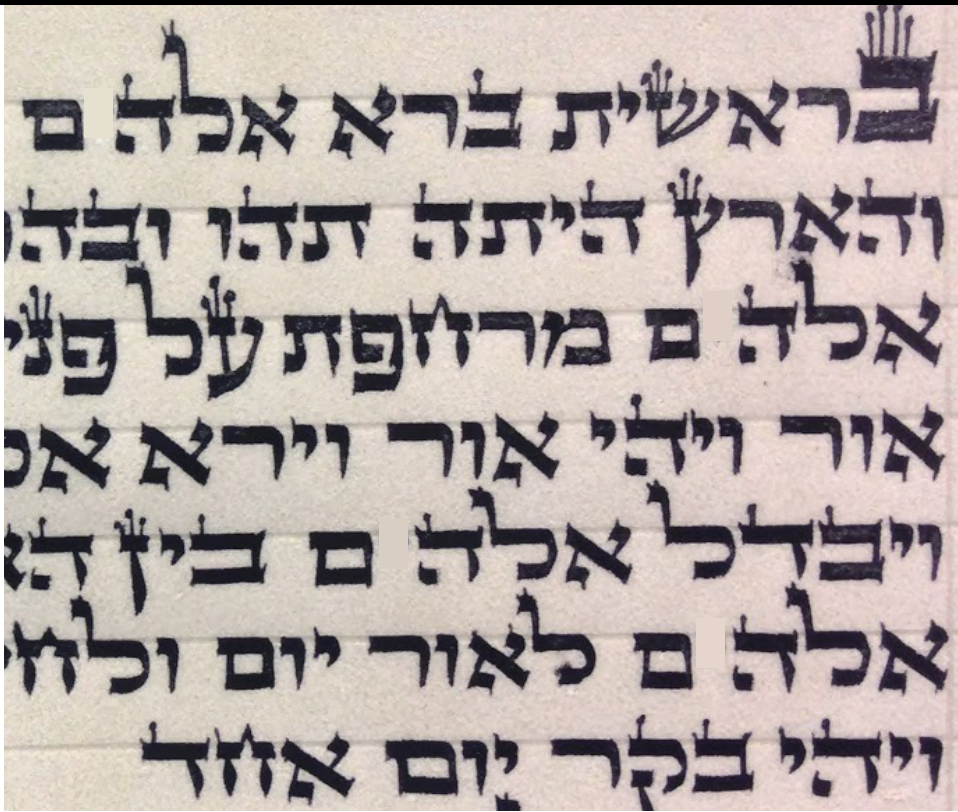
This resolves the contradiction between science and the Torah. The Torah is not saying that the sun, moon, and stars were created before Earth. It does not discuss when they were created.

When the reader carefully considers the Torah’s narrative without prejudice and without an agenda, it is an amazing account! ■

(1) Rav Yisroel Chait. My personal notes.

(2) Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 1:1.

(3) Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 1:14-16, Cooperman edition.



With an Open Probing Mind

Rabbi Reuven Mann

The annual Torah reading cycle is concluded on the 2nd day of Shmini Atzeret with the reading of the last portion of the Book of Devarim, V'Zot Habracha. This triggers a great celebration known as Simchat Torah (rejoicing with the Torah) which is a unique feature of the Jewish religion.

Religions in general do not emphasize the importance of joy in their theological approach but Judaism is different. That is because the goal of this religion is to direct man to live the most perfected type of life possible. If one observes the Mitzvot properly he will thereby obtain mastery of his emotions, enhancement of his understanding and elevated character and behavior. He will find great happiness in the study of Hashem's Torah and will rejoice in what he will come to regard as "G-d's greatest gift to mankind".

On Simchat Torah all Jews, including children are called up to the Torah and even get to carry this treasure and dance around with it. However, there are two major Aliot which are regarded as great honors, Chatan Torah (which concludes the Book of Devarim) and Chatan Bereishit (the opening section of the first Book of the Torah). In Judaism we never actually "complete" our studies but as soon as we finish one cycle we immediately begin the next to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to Talmud Torah.

But there is an additional feature to the honor of Chatan Bereishit. We should not imagine that we are just going to recite all the portions of the Torah "one more time". Rather this is supposed to constitute a new

and fresh learning experience because we bring to it all the knowledge we have acquired in the past year and we read the same things we have studied in the past with an open mind.

The significance of studying Torah with a sense of intellectual curiosity can be illustrated by a learning habit of the great sage, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchick which was revealed by his son, Chaim, in a eulogy he gave for his father which I attended. He recalled that one time he was studying a tractate with his father which they had learned once before. At one point they came upon a difficult gemara which stumped them. Everything came to a halt as the Rav went into deep thought. Chaim, however, remembered how his father had explained this text before and as he began to communicate this the Rav gave him a look which clearly told him not to go any further. The Rav did not want to hear what he had said before but wanted to look at the matter with a completely fresh perspective.

Perhaps this was not just a peculiarity of the Rav but reflected his understanding of the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah. The verse in the Shma says, "and these things that I command you this day shall be on your heart..." and Rashi explains that one should not regard the Torah as though it was old but as something new. This means that one should study with a certain vigor and freshness looking to discover new insights and ideas.

Now that we have concluded the Torah reading cycle and are about to commence a new one this message has great relevance. In the coming weeks as we read the portions of Bereishit we should not just take out our notebooks and review what we have learned in years past.

Rather we should have the capacity to think originally on matters that we have have given much thought to before. And even if we retain the "old" explanation we can enhance it and clarify it to greater degree. The celebration we experienced on Simchat Torah was not primarily for having concluded the Torah but to express our joy in being able to participate in the great adventure of Torah study itself. May we merit to obtain a proper appreciation of the great gift which the Creator of the universe has bestowed on His very own nation. ■

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OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

[MORE BELOW](#)

Kindness: As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecc. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:17). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

EMAIL



ASK THE RABBI

MAN CREATING MAN

RABBI
MOSHE
BEN-CHAIM

Sabbath is the day of Creation. As such, the Rabbis were accustomed to study areas of Creation on sabbath, as they always studied “matters of the day.” On one such Sabbath eve, Rava studied man’s creation, and felt he had a new understanding about how God created man, as if Rava “could create a man” himself. Rava did not send a “man” to Rav Zeira, but rather, he sent his findings from his studies, asserting he obtained a new insight. His sending must have been out of some doubt, so he desired his teacher’s analysis. Rav Zeira asked a question to Rava, to which Rava had no answer. Rav Zeira said “return to the dust” meaning, return to studies about dust (lower matters), and not man (a higher level being). Rav Zeira was saying that we cannot know so much about how God created beings with a soul: metaphysics is difficult. “Return to the dust” is Rav Zeira’s ridicule that Rava should return to studying lower areas within his grasp, i.e., “dust.” However, Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah studied matters of biology alone, well within their abilities. “Creating” a calf and “eating” it mean, “understanding biology” and “enjoying” it, respectively. But even in the more approachable area of biology, we read that Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah were only able to create a “third-grown” calf. This means that human knowledge, although grasping some amount, is still incomplete.

Perhaps also explained, is that Rava’s independent studies resulted in errors, while Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah who studied together were successful. This illustrates how essential it is to test one’s ideas on another, removing the possibility of errors generated by overestimation of the self and personal infallibility. Gaining a critique almost always minimizes mistakes, “...in a multitude of counselors there is safety.”[4] And as a Rabbi once taught, the very first verse of Proverbs also teaches this idea: “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, King over Israel” was stated by King Solomon to teach that he had a great teacher, and the environment that fostered wisdom. The King wished to express that his work Proverbs was substantiated by great minds who influenced his thinking.

Due to the problem regarding man “crossing the line” and being a creator like God, one must not accept a literal understanding of this and all such Midrashim. Avraham ben Rambam’s intro to Ein Yaakov warns against literal understandings of Midrash. Chazal were very wise and didn’t write stories of monsters...with nothing else deeper than spooky fables. Chazal always taught deep concepts, so one must dig for the ideas like silver and buried treasures, as King Solomon taught in Mishlei. Other Rishonim too talked about how Chazal wrote in metaphors like Mishlei, so as to hide ideas from the masses until they matured their intellects and could realize such stories could not be literal. ■

[1] Isaiah 59

[2] Talmud Sanhedrin 67b

[3] Isaiah 59

[4] Proverbs 11:14

Rava said, *‘If one is righteous, he could create worlds [like God]. As it says, “For your sins separate you from your God”[1]. Rava thereby created a man, and sent him to Rav Zeira. He spoke to him but he did not answer. Rav Zeira said, “You are from the chavrei [sorcerers], return to your dust.” On each Friday evening Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah would indulge in Sefer Yetzira [book of Creation] and would create a third-grown calf and eat it.’[2]*

That is some portion of Talmud! Over the years, we hear others recite such metaphors with literal acceptance. However, we know God is the only creator, so this dismisses any literal interpretation. As always, we must ask what are the questions that can unravel metaphors.

What strikes us first, is that Rava “created” a human being, and others created an animal. Such stories must be metaphoric, and perhaps the Talmud commences with the most glaring impossibility, to set the tone that the entire story is metaphoric. Why did Rava send the man he created to Rav Zeira, and about what did Rav Zeira disapprove? Also, what is the flow of the quote from Isaiah? What is the connection between the two acts of creation of a man, and a calf? And why were Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah apparently successful, as they enjoyed their creation, while Rava was not?

Comparing the two creations, the second one is animal, not a man, and that it had a positive outcome. My understanding of this story follows.

The Talmud cites a quote from Isaiah that might be misunderstood, “For your sins separate you from your God”[3]. It appears that only our sins separate us from God, otherwise, we would not be separated, and perhaps similar. But this is not so, as we recite numerous times daily that God is “Kadosh”—unlike anything He created. The Talmud then goes on to show how man cannot even understand human creation, let alone perform creation. But the Talmud does so in a metaphor.



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