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subject: Rav Frand - If He Couldn't Eat from the Tree, Why Was It There?

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Bereishis

If He Couldn't Eat from the Tree, Why Was It There?

The Torah says, "And Hashem Elokim commanded the man saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad, you must not eat thereof; for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.'" [Bereshis 2:16-17] Hashem [G-d] places Adam in Gan Eden and makes everything accessible to him – with one exception: The fruit of the "Etz Ha'Daas." The Torah immediately continues: "And Hashem Elokim said 'It is not good that man be alone; I will make him a helper against him.'" [Bereshis 2:18]. Thus, immediately after the warning to distance himself from the Tree of Knowledge, the Almighty establishes the institution of marriage as part of Creation.

What is the lesson of this juxtaposition?

We may answer this question by asking another question: If Hashem did not want Adam to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, why did He put it in Gan Eden? If there needed to be a Tree of Knowledge, let the Almighty plant it somewhere on the other side of the world where it would not tempt man! Had He done that, Adam could have been given carte blanche – eat whatever you want from the Garden – no exceptions! What would have been wrong with that?

The answer is that the Hashem is teaching humanity a lesson. Every human being must learn that there are certain things in this world that are off limits. Man needs to confront limitations. Not everything in the world should be accessible. The Almighty knew exactly what he was doing. He wanted something to be placed within man's reach that would be "off limits" precisely so that man would recognize that certain things are "off limits."

The Tiferes Shlomo (Rav Shlomo Hakohen Rabinowicz [1801-1866], the first Rebbe of the Radomsk Hasidic dynasty) makes an interesting point. The pasuk cited above reads, "And Hashem Elokim commanded upon man saying (al ha'Adam leimor)." The Torah commonly uses a slightly different terminology, for example, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe (el Moshe)…" The Tiferes Shlmo asks, why doesn't the pasuk here also use the expression "And Hashem Elokim commanded to man (el ha'Adam leimor)"? The Tiferes Sholmo answers that al ha'Adam – upon man – means this defines humanity. This commandment (regarding limitations) is what makes a mensch! Humanity needs to recognize that there are moral borders in this world – up until this point and no further! Man cannot have everything he desires. There needs to be something that man cannot have, so that he can learn the concept of restraint.

This is why when we look at the world around us and we see sports stars or we see the menuvalim who populate Hollywood, etc., we notice that everything is accessible to them. Whether legal or illegal, moral or immoral, they feel they must have everything. Nothing is off limits. What happens to such people? They inevitably, invariably, sink to the depths. It is because they have no limits, and can get away with everything, that they self-destruct – morally and even physically. When you can say whatever you want to whomever you want and can do whatever you want anytime you want, you stop being a human being.

The sefer Milchamos Yehdua writes that this is why the pasuk introducing marriage comes immediately following the pasuk introducing limitations. After "Hashem Elokim commanded upon man…" then "Hashem Elokim stated, 'It is not good for man to be alone…'" For a person to live with another human being, each party needs to know that there are limits. There are some things you can do and there are some things you cannot do. There are lines that you cannot cross. A person who learns that lesson easily and learns it early will have a successful marriage. A person who never learns that and has no borders and has no restraints – not in the way he talks, not in the way he acts, and not in the way he eats – is not going to have a successful marriage.

Only after the concept of limitations was established into the world, could the institution of living with another person and the concept of marriage be successfully implemented for man.

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http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/reading-modern-science-into-genesis/4/

Reading Modern Science into Genesis

Contemporary approaches to reconciling discrepancies.

By Matt Plen

Current Scientific Theory

According to modern physics, the universe sprang into existence 15 billion years ago in the Big Bang. During the first fragment of a second, the universe expanded from a singularity–an infinitely small, dense point–into a

primeval fireball, a chaotic storm of energy out of which the first fundamental particles began to form.

After three minutes, protons and neutrons began sticking together, forming hydrogen and helium nuclei, but only after another 300,000 years had the universe cooled enough to allow these nuclei to bind with electrons, creating the first atoms. As the atoms formed, photons were released and electromagnetic radiation was able to travel for the first time, flooding the previously opaque universe with light.big band

As a result of gravity, atoms began falling together and forming clumps. It took 300 million years for this process to give birth to the first stars and galaxies, and another nine billion years before our solar system came into existence. The earth was formed around 4.5 billion years ago, and the earliest fossil evidence of life on our planet is dated to a billion years (one aeon) later.

Contrasting Biblical Account

The Bible presents a radically different account of the beginning of the world. The first chapter of Genesis describes what seems to be a flat earth, geocentric story in which God takes six days to create–in the following order–light and darkness, the sky, land and sea, plants, the sun, moon and stars, marine life, birds, land animals and, finally, the first human beings. Calculations based on later biblical genealogies indicate that this process took place less than six thousand years ago.

For modern Jews, this discrepancy poses a problem. The Torah, traditionally held to be an accurate record of divine revelation, flat out denies the best of contemporary scientific research. Does this necessitate making a choice between tradition and science, or is it possible to negotiate the contradiction? Many modern Jews either dismiss the traditional creation story, interpreting the opening chapter of Genesis as myth or metaphor, or reject the scientific account as incompatible with the incontestable truth of Torah. Others prefer to compartmentalize, utilizing a kind of doublethink to apply scientific narratives in some areas of their lives and religious ones in others. Making the effort to synthesize Genesis and science is only one option among many, and far from the simplest.

Drawing Connections

In one way, modern physics has made the challenge easier. Medieval thinkers were forced to grapple with the tension between the Torah's creation story and Aristotle's notion that rather than having been created in time, the world had always existed. Today there is no dispute that the universe came into being at some point in the past. This apparent commonality has provided motivation for some writers to take up the challenge of proving that modern physics merely points to the timeless truths which are clearly described in the book of Genesis.

One such writer is Nathan Aviezer, Professor of Physics at Israel's modern-Orthodox Bar Ilan University. The thesis of Aviezer's book, In the Beginning… Biblical Creation and Science, is that contrary to common misconceptions, cutting edge scientific developments have actually brought physics into closer harmony with Genesis than ever before.

Aviezer analyzes the biblical days of creation one at a time, matching up the events described with elements of the scientific theory of the universe's origins. But first he makes one proviso upon which the rest of his hypothesis depends: the "days" referred to in Genesis should not be understood as 24 hour periods but as important stages in the development of the world. This interpretation is drawn from many traditional Bible commentaries, based on the fact that before the creation of the sun on the fourth day, the terms day and night could not possibly have carried their commonplace meanings.

Filling the Gaps

Aviezer's premise is that the Big Bang theory confirms the first verse of the Bible, but that in contrast to modern physics, which by its own admission is unable to discern what happened before the Big Bang, Genesis clearly describes the cause: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." God's command "let there be light" refers to the appearance of the primeval fireball, containing all the matter and energy of the present-day universe, and the chaos–tohu va-vohu–described in the Bible matches the random and chaotic condition of the universe in its initial state. Finally, "God separated the light from the darkness" refers to the formation of atoms, the consequent freeing of photons and the flooding of the universe with electromagnetic radiation.

Aviezer analyzes the subsequent days of creation along the same lines, generally interpreting the Bible in line with scientific knowledge, sometimes having to depart from the plain meaning of the text in order to deal with problems such as the fact that according to Genesis, the sun was created on day four, after the emergence of plant life on earth.

The argument of In the Beginning is less straightforwardly scientific than it seems. Aviezer is at pains to emphasize the statistical improbability of those details of the universe's development which laid the groundwork for the appearance of life and the ultimate evolution of human beings, arguing that these processes could not have taken place in the absence of purposeful (divine) intervention. But this is, of course, a theological argument, not a scientific one.

Although many physicists agree that scientific knowledge cannot explain everything, being limited to the period beginning a split second after the Big Bang, evolutionary biology is affected by no such sense of modesty. In his book The Blind Watchmaker, for example, well known atheist biologist Richard Dawkins robustly dispenses with Aviezer's claims as to the improbability of life and advances the argument that the theory of evolution can explain the origin of life with no need for recourse to supernatural interference.

If Aviezer begins by suggesting that the Bible can be read in such a way as to bring it into line with scientific knowledge, a statement at the end of his book implies that in the event of a clash between the two systems, religious faith must take priority: "If I were to find that traditional Judaism appeared to be inconsistent with certain aspects of modern science, this would in no way weaken my [religious] commitment."

Radical Interpretation

The case carefully advanced by Aviezer hit the headlines with the publication of Gerald Schroeder's bestselling Genesis and the Big Bang, a more radical book in terms of both style and content. Since Schroeder advances essentially the same ideas as Aviezer, I'll focus on two key differences between the writers' arguments.

First: Aviezer was content to interpret the "days" of creation figuratively. Not so Schroeder. For him, Genesis is a literal account of the scientifically established process of creation. He resolves the contradiction between six days and 15 billion years by invoking Einstein's theory of relativity, which asserts that rather than being an absolute value, the flow of time is influenced by motion and gravitational force.

Time being relative, six days in one frame of reference could well be equivalent to 15 billion years in another. Since there was no possibility of objectively measuring the time involved in the creation process, Schroeder draws the audacious conclusion that six days represented the elapsed time from none other than God's perspective.

This claim raises difficult religious questions. Since relativistic time dilation is a function of motion and gravity, are we to understand that these forces operate on God, in other words that God is part of the physical universe? It seems that in an attempt to extricate himself from an annoying textual problem (the discrepancy between the age of the universe according to Genesis and the Big Bang theory), Schroeder has opened the door on a much more significant theological one.

Second: Schroeder claims that people who think that Genesis clashes with modern physics have not read the Bible carefully enough–the Torah must be understood through study of the canonical commentaries: Onkelos, Rashi, Maimonides and Nahmanides. On the face of it, for example, the Bible contains no hint that the creation of the universe was a process of expansion from an initial singularity.

However, Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 1:1 implies exactly that: "At the briefest instant following creation, all the matter of the universe was concentrated in a very small place, no larger than a grain of mustard…. From the initial concentration of this intangible substance in its minute location, the substance expanded, expanding the universe as it did so." In Schroeder's view, this kind of in-depth reading of the Torah will always tend to reveal the consonance between two sources of truth–revelation and science.

Weaknesses

Schroeder's argument that physics and biblical scholarship are methodologically compatible is weakened, however, by his approach to Jewish texts. He reads the Bible through the lens of the rabbis, medieval commentators and kabbalah, assuming that their homiletical and midrashic perspectives are identical to the plain meaning of the original text.

However, it is difficult to characterize this approach as scientific when it ignores academic bible critics' linguistic and archaeological contributions. In other words, Schroeder's commitment to scientific methodology has a clear limit: he does not apply it to the study of Torah.

Schroeder's attitude to religion itself is no less ambiguous. One of his arguments is that whereas once the facts about the universe's origins could only be accessed via revelation, modern physics has given us the tools to confirm these facts. While medieval thinkers like Nahmanides reached their insights by means of faith, modern Jews are only able to grasp the truth of the Torah through recourse to science. If so, the true Genesis narrative has only been available to us since the Big Bang theory was substantiated in the 1960s.

By implying that the Torah's deep insights cannot be accessed unless we have already discovered them by scientific means, Schroeder may, ironically, undermine his own position, making the Torah redundant as an independent source of truth.

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Creation: A Convergence of Torah and Science
by Prof. Nathan Aviezer

Once unthinkable, the accounts of creation by Torah and science are converging.

Where did the universe come from? A person of faith would probably answer that the universe was created out of nothing, as stated in the first verse of the Torah. Such an answer was long considered a scientific impossibility, because it contradicted the law of the conservation of matter and energy. According to this law of science, which was established in the middle of the nineteenth century, matter and energy can be changed from one form to another, but something cannot come from nothing. Therefore, scientists viewed the universe as eternal, thus neatly avoiding questions regarding its origin. The Torah assertion that the universe was created, presumably from nothing, became an area of conflict between Torah and science. That is how matters stood for many years.

This situation has now completely changed. The twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented explosion of scientific knowledge, which was nowhere more dramatic than in cosmology, the discipline that deals with the origin and development of the universe. Astronomers had been studying the heavenly bodies for thousands of years, but their studies dealt exclusively with charting the paths of the stars, planets, and comets, and determining their composition, spectrum, and other properties. The origin of the heavenly bodies remained a complete mystery.

Important advances in cosmology during the past few decades have, for the first time, permitted scientists to construct a coherent history of the origin of the universe.

Today, an overwhelming body of scientific evidence supports the "big bang" theory of cosmology.1 There are four major pieces of evidence: (1) the discovery in 1965 of the remnant of the initial ball of light, (2) the hydrogen-to-helium ratio in the universe, (3) the Hubble expansion of the galaxies, and (4) the perfect black-body spectrum of the microwave background radiation measured by the COBE space satellite in 1990.

Only the big bang theory can account for all these observations, and therefore this theory is now accepted by all mainstream cosmologists.

The most surprising assertion of the big bang theory is that the universe was literally created from nothing. It is instructive here to quote the world's leading authorities:

"It seems certain that there was a definite time of creation."2 Professor Paul Dirac, Nobel laureate from the University of Cambridge

"The instant of creation remains unexplained."3 Professor Alan Guth, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

"The creation lies outside the scope of the known laws of physics."4 Professor Stephen Hawking, University of Cambridge

"The big bang is the modern version of creation."5 Professor Joseph Silk, University of California

Today, it is not possible to carry on a meaningful discussion of cosmology without the creation of the universe assuming a central role. Professor Brian Greene, a theoretical physicist at Columbia University, wrote in 1999: "The modern theory of cosmic origins asserts that the universe erupted from an enormously energetic event, which spewed forth all space and all matter."6

When cosmologists use the term "creation," to what are they referring? Precisely what object was created? Scientists have discovered that the universe began with the sudden appearance of an enormous ball of light, commonly called the "primeval light-ball." This "explosion of light" was dubbed the "big bang" by British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle. The remnant of the initial ball of light was detected in 1965 by two American physicists, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, who were awarded the Nobel Prize for their discovery.

People sometimes ask what existed before the big bang, the event that marked the creation of the universe. Professor John Wheeler of Princeton University explains that the very concept of time did not exist before the creation. "There was no 'before' prior to the Big Bang. The laws of nature came into existence together with the Big Bang, as did space and time."7 Wheeler emphasizes that scientists view space and time as the "stage" upon which events take place. If there is no physical world – if the universe does not exist – then neither time nor space can exist. "Time" and "space" are not independent entities; these concepts have meaning only after the creation of the physical universe.

This property of time and space can be illustrated by analogy to the concept of color. "Red" or "black" are not characteristics that are independent of any physical object. Only if macroscopic objects exist, such as grass, rocks, or houses, can one speak of these objects as being red or black. If nothing but atoms and molecules existed, then there would be no meaning to "red" or "black," or to the entire concept of colour. There is no such thing as a red molecule. In the same way, there were no concepts of time and space before the universe came into being.

Creation and the Torah

In addition to confirming the creation of the universe, the discovery of the initial primeval light by Penzias and Wilson also answers another long-standing puzzle regarding the Torah account of creation. It is written in the Torah on the First Day of Creation: And there was light (Genesis 1:3). But at that time, there existed neither stars, nor sun, nor moon, nor people, nor any other known source of light. Therefore, how can one understand this "light"? Scientists have now discovered that there was light at the very beginning of time: the primeval light-ball whose appearance heralded the origin of the universe. The creation of light did not occur within the existing universe. Rather, the creation of light was the creation of the universe. In other words,

the Torah does not record two separate creations on the first day – the creation of the universe and the creation of light – but only one.

We now turn to the question of the time scale. How much time was required for all the cosmological events that took place at the creation of the universe? How many millions of years had to elapse before the universe was complete and assumed its present form?

The remarkable answer is that all the cosmological events involved in the creation of the universe occurred within a very few minutes. This fact is emphasized by the dramatic title that Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg chose for his famous book on modern cosmology: The First Three Minutes.

Nowadays, cosmological events – events that alter the structure of the universe – require millions of years to occur. How could such events have occurred within just a few moments? The answer is that during the period of creation, the temperature of the universe was extremely high. Just as food cooks much more rapidly in a pressure cooker than over a low flame, in the same way, events occurred with amazing rapidity in the blazing universe at the origins of time. Professor Greene explains: "The newly borne universe evolved with phenomenal haste. Tiny fractions of a second were cosmic epochs during which the features of the universe were first imprinted. During the first three minutes after the big bang, as the simmering universe cooled, the nuclei emerged."8

Thus, the formation of the first atomic nuclei – the basic building blocks of every material – was completed within three minutes after the instant of creation.

Faith

The comprehensive agreement between Torah and science described above does not prove that the Torah is of divine origin, nor does it prove that God exists. However, as we begin the twenty-first century, the person of faith is not forced to choose between accepting the latest scientific discoveries or accepting the Torah account of creation. All leading cosmologists now discuss the creation of the universe, while the Torah discusses the Creator of the universe. It is not unreasonable to assume that science and the Torah are both referring to one and the same subject. It is a pleasure for a person of faith to be living in this day and age!

The current harmony between science and faith was not always the case. Only a few decades ago, the outstanding Torah scholar Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik expressed the then-existing dichotomy between science and faith in a classic essay entitled "The Lonely Man of Faith."9 Using the word "lonely" to describe the feelings of the man of faith who lives in a scientific world, Rav Soloveitchik wrote:

"Being people of faith in our contemporary world is a lonely experience. We are loyal to visionary expectations which find little support in present-day reality... Religious faith is condescendingly regarded as a subjective palliative, but is given little credence as a repository of truth."10

Now, only half a century later, in one scientific discipline after another, the words of the scientist can hardly be distinguished from the words of "the man of faith." Professor Stephen J. Gould of Harvard University tells us that "human intelligence is the result of a staggeringly improbable series of events, utterly unpredictable, and quite unrepeatable."11 The term "luck" is now commonly used by evolutionary biologists like Professor David Raup, past president of the American Paleontological Union, to "explain" the existence of human beings.12 Archaeologists express their amazement at the "radical and sudden changes, with no premonitory signs"13 that mark the appearance of civilization, and they speak of a sudden "quantum leap in mental abilities"14 that appears in the archaeological record of human cultural behaviour. Scientists in a wide variety of disciplines discuss the "anthropic principle," which states that the universe looks as if it had been specifically designed to permit the existence and promote the welfare of human beings.15 The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Astronomy expresses this idea in the following poetic words: "In truth, we are the children of the Universe."16

The scientific discoveries recorded above are exactly what one would expect if the Torah account of the origin of the universe was correct. Therefore, such harmony between Torah and science constitutes an important argument in support of our religious belief. Modern science has become a significant element in strengthening our ancient faith.

Reprinted from Jewish Life magazine. Download the free Jewish Life app on iOS and Android Notes 1. See N. Aviezer, 1990, In the Beginning (Ktav Publishing House: New York). 2. P. A. M. Dirac, 1972, Commentarii, vol. 2, no. 11, p. 15. 3. A. H. Guth, May 1984, Scientific American, p. 102. 4. S. W. Hawking, 1973, The Large Scale Structure of Space-Time (Cambridge University Press), p. 364 5. J. Silk, 1989, The Big Bang (W. H. Freeman: New York), p. xi. 6. B. Greene, 1999, The Elegant Universe (Jonathan Cape: London), pp. 345-346. 7. J. A. Wheeler, 1998, Geons, Black Holes, and Quantum Foam (W. W. Norton: New York), p. 350. 8. Greene, pp. 347, 350. 9. J. B. Soloveitchik, Spring 1965, Tradition, pp. 5-67. 10. See the adaptation of the 1965 Soloveitchik essay (especially p. 8) by A. R. Besdin, 1989, Man of Faith in the Modern World (Ktav: New York), pp. 36-37. 11. S. J. Gould, 1989, Wonderful Life (W. W. Norton: New York), p. 14. 12. D. M. Raup, 1991, Extinctions: Bad Genes or Bad Luck? (Oxford University Press). 13. N. Eldredge, 1985, Time Frames (Simon and Schuster: New York), p. 87. 14. N. Eldredge and I. Tattersall, 1982, The Myths of Human Evolution (Columbia University Press: New York), p. 154. 15. G. Gale, December 1981, "Anthropic Principle," Scientific American, pp. 114-122. 16. S. Mitton, editor-in-chief, 1987, The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Astronomy (Jonathan Cape: London), p. 125. This article can also be read at: http://www.aish.com/ci/sam/Creation-A-Convergence-of-Torah-and-Science.html Make a secure donation at: https://secure.aish.com/secure/campaign.php or mail a check to Aish.com, c/o The Jerusalem Aish HaTorah Fund PO Box 1259 Lakewood, NJ 08701

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Weekly Parsha BERESHITH
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

There is a tendency to look at the narrative that appears in this first portion of the Torah as being a description of the past – the story of the beginnings of creation, the planet and universe and of the story of civilization. However, we are taught in the traditions of Judaism that the Lord, so to speak, creates our universe and world anew each day. Thus, the narrative contained in this week's beginning portion of the Torah is not only a story of the past, but it is just as importantly a description of our present world and society. We should not be surprised to find that human rivalries and disagreements often lead to murder and then to deep regret. The animalistic nature of humans leads them to sin and depravity.

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

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

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

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

But we can also learn that we have enormous qualities of greatness built within us and that we alone are able to conduct conversations with our Creator and are equipped to rise above the physical and intellectual challenges that surround us.
More importantly, we can learn that these fateful choices are given to us and, to a great extent, are the masters of our destiny and the shapers of our current world and future generations. This first portion of the Torah stands not only as the beginning of the holy words of God but also as representative of the entire story of human kind for all time.
Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Bereishit: Creation of the Universe – Twice
Rav Kook Torah

The Torah introduces the creation of the universe, not once, but twice. In the first chapter of Genesis, it says:
"In the beginning, God (Elokim) created heaven and earth." (Gen. 1:1)
And in chapter two, it says:
"These are the chronicles of heaven and earth when they were created; on the day that the Lord God (Hashem Elokim) made earth and heaven." (Gen. 2:4)
Two Accounts of Creation
When we examine these two verses, the most prominent difference between them is the name used for God. The first chapter uses the name Elokim - a name that corresponds to the Divine attribute of Justice (Midat Ha-Din). This aspect of creation is also called Gevurah (Strength), as the ability to meet the strict standards of unmitigated justice provides strength and legitimacy. If we can measure up to the attribute of Divine justice, we deserve to live.
The second chapter uses a combination of two names for the Creator: Hashem Elokim. The Torah precedes the name Elokim with the Tetragrammaton. This ineffable Divine name signifies the Divine trait of Mercy (Rachamim). It indicates that the world did not deserve to exist on the basis of its own merits. Creation of the universe required that the attribute of Justice be tempered with a measure of Mercy.
Combining Mercy and Justice
Why this change in God's name? The Midrash explains that a fundamental shift took place during the process of creation:
"Initially, God intended to create it with the attribute of Justice. But then He saw that the world cannot exist [with only Justice], so He gave priority to the attribute of Mercy, and joined it with the attribute of Justice." (Pesikta Rabbati 40)
The combination of two opposing traits, Mercy and Justice, is the foundation for the middle path that enables the universe to exist. The admixture of Mercy permitted free choice and the possibility that we may fall under the influence of evil. It created a reality where human frailties and foibles are tolerated.
When did this compromise become necessary? And why not create the world from the start with both attributes? Did God not know that the world cannot survive according to the judgement of unmitigated Justice?
The Inner Unity of the Garden of Eden
Corresponding to these two Divine traits, we may classify all mitzvot as either positive and negative commandments. At the heart of all positive commandments are the attributes of love for God (Ahavah) and Mercy. The negative commandments, on the other hand, are rooted in awe of God (Yirah) and Justice.
According to the Zohar, God instructed Adam regarding both categories of mitzvot in the Garden of Eden. Man was placed in the Garden "to work it and watch over it" (Gen. 2:15). "To work it" (le-ovdah) refers to fulfilling God's positive commandments, while "to watch over it" (ul-shomrah) refers to observing the negative precepts.
In the Garden of Eden, however, there existed an underlying unity encompassing both of these Divine attributes. There is an inner connection between the qualities of Justice and Mercy. While all negative precepts are based on Yirah, the actual command to feel awe and reverence for God is itself a positive mitzvah (see Deut. 10:20). Deep within the attribute of Yirah lies hidden the attribute of Ahavah. Just as there is Love concealed within Awe, so, too, there is Mercy concealed within Justice. This form of Justice, containing a hidden measure of Mercy, was the original master-plan for creation.
Also the Tree of Knowledge combined two opposing qualities; it contained knowledge of good and evil. Adam could not grasp how one tree could encompass two contradictory traits. In truth, this combination is the very foundation of our world. The universe could not exist without combining Justice with Mercy. Adam's sin was that he separated between the two, thus transforming the Garden of Eden into a broken, disjointed world.
Return to the Garden of Eden
What about the original plan for the world, to exist exclusively by Justice? This level of creation will be attained in the future, as the world is repaired. (Thus there is a tradition that in the future the Halachah will be decided according to the more stringent opinion of Beit Shammai.) Since the universe will return to the original design of Justice, the term "Gan Eden" refers both to the past and the future. The Garden of Eden was the pristine, integrated world that existed before Adam's sin; and it is also the future place of reward.
In our divided reality, deed and reward are separated in time and place:
"Today [this world] is for keeping the commandments; and tomorrow [the world to come] is for receiving their reward." (Eiruvin 22a)
In the Garden of Eden, on the other hand, there is no dichotomy between action and reward, no confusion between good and evil, and no divide between the traits of Justice and Mercy. In the future, the universe will return to the Divine attribute of Justice, with Mercy concealed within, thus uniting all apparent opposites.
(Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah 8, Bereishit 5690 (1929))
See also: Breishit: The Torah of Eretz Yisrael
Illustration image: Izaak van Oosten, 'The Garden of Eden' (between 1655 and 1661)

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The Three Stages of Creation (Bereishit 5779)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

"And God said, let there be… And there was… and God saw that it was good."

Thus unfolds the most revolutionary as well as the most influential account of creation in the history of the human spirit.

In Rashi's commentary, he quotes Rabbi Isaac who questioned why the Torah should start with the story of creation at all.[1] Given that it is a book of law – the commandments that bind the children of Israel as a nation – it should have started with the first law given to the Israelites, which does not appear until the twelfth chapter of Exodus.

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

One of the most striking propositions of the Torah is that we are called on, as God's image, to imitate God. "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2):

The sages taught: "Just as God is called gracious, so you be gracious. Just as He is called merciful, so you be merciful. Just as He is called holy, so you be holy." So too the prophets described the Almighty by all the various a tributes: long-suffering, abounding in kindness, righteous, upright, perfect, mighty and powerful and so on – to teach us that these qualities are good and right and that a human being should cultivate them, and thus imitate God as far as we can.[2]

Implicit in the first chapter of Genesis is thus a momentous challenge: Just as God is creative, so you be creative. In making man, God endowed one creature – the only one thus far known to science – with the capacity not merely to adapt to his environment, but to adapt his environment to him; to shape the world; to be active, not merely passive, in relation to the influences and circumstances that surround him:

The brute's existence is an undignified one because it is a helpless existence. Human existence is a dignified one because it is a glorious, majestic, powerful existence…Man of old who could not fight disease and succumbed in multitudes to yellow fever or any other plague with degrading helplessness could not lay claim to dignity. Only the man who builds hospitals, discovers therapeutic techniques, and saves lives is blessed with dignity…Civilised man has gained limited control of nature and has become, in certain respects, her master, and with his mastery he has attained dignity as well. His mastery has made it possible for him to act in accordance with his responsibility.[3]

The first chapter of Genesis therefore contains a teaching. It tells us how to be creative – namely in three stages. The first is the stage of saying "Let there be." The second is the stage of "and there was." The third is the stage of seeing "that it is good."

Even a cursory look at this model of creativity teaches us something profound and counter-intuitive: What is truly creative is not science or technology per se, but the word. That is what forms all being.

Indeed, what singles out Homo sapiens among other animals is the ability to speak. Targum Onkelos translates the last phrase of Genesis 2:7, "God formed man out of dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living creature," as "and man became ruaḥ memallelah, a speaking spirit." Because we can speak, we can think, and therefore imagine a world different from the one that currently exists.

Creation begins with the creative word, the idea, the vision, the dream. Language – and with it the ability to remember a distant past and conceptualise a distant future – lies at the heart of our uniqueness as the image of God. Just as God makes the natural world by words ("And God said…and there was") so we make the human world by words, which is why Judaism takes words so seriously: "Life and death are in the power of the tongue," says the book of Proverbs (18:21). Already at the opening of the Torah, at the very beginning of creation, is foreshadowed the Jewish doctrine of revelation: that God reveals Himself to humanity not in the sun, the stars, the wind or the storm but in and through words – sacred words that make us co-partners with God in the work of redemption.

"And God said, let there be…and there was" – is, the second stage of creation, is for us the most difficult. It is one thing to conceive an idea, another to execute it. "Between the imagination and the act falls the shadow."[4] Between the intention and the fact, the dream and the reality, lies struggle, opposition, and the fallibility of the human will. It is all too easy, having tried and failed, to conclude that nothing ultimately can be achieved, that the world is as it is, and that all human endeavour is destined to end in failure.

This, however, is a Greek idea, not a Jewish one: that hubris ends in nemesis, that fate is inexorable and we must resign ourselves to it. Judaism holds the opposite, that though creation is difficult, laborious and fraught with setbacks, we are summoned to it as our essential human vocation: "It is not for you to complete the work," said Rabbi Tarfon, "but neither are you free to desist from it."[5] There is a lovely rabbinic phrase: maḥashva tova HaKadosh barukh Hu meztarfah lema'aseh.[6]

This is usually translated as "God considers a good intention as if it were the deed." I translate it differently: "When a human being has a good intention, God joins in helping it become a deed," meaning – He gives us the strength, if not now, then eventually, to turn it into achievement.

If the first stage in creation is imagination, the second is will. The sanctity of the human will is one of the most distinctive features of the Torah. There have been many philosophies – the generic name for them is determinisms – that maintain that the human will is an illusion. We are determined by other factors – genetically encoded instinct, economic or social forces, conditioned reflexes – and the idea that we are what we choose to be is a myth. Judaism is a protest in the name of human freedom and responsibility against determinism. We are not pre-programmed machines; we are persons, endowed with will. Just as God is free, so we are free, and the entire Torah is a call to humanity to exercise responsible freedom in creating a social world which honours the freedom of others. Will is the bridge from "Let there be" to "and there was."

What, though, of the third stage: "And God saw that it was good"? This is the hardest of the three stages to understand. What does it mean to say that "God saw that it was good"? Surely, this is redundant. What does God make that is not good? Judaism is not Gnosticism, nor is it an Eastern mysticism. We do not believe that this created world of the senses is evil. To the contrary, we believe that it is the arena of blessing and good.

Perhaps this is what the phrase comes to teach us: that the religious life is not to be sought in retreat from the world and its conflicts into mystic rapture or nirvana. God wants us to be part of the world, fighting its battles, tasting its joy, celebrating its splendour. But there is more.

In the course of my work, I have visited prisons and centres for young offenders. Many of the people I met there were potentially good. They, like you and me, had dreams, hopes, ambitions, aspirations. They did not want to become criminals. Their tragedy was that often they came from dysfunctional families in difficult conditions. No one took the time to care for them, support them, teach them how to negotiate the world, how to achieve what they wanted through hard work and persuasion rather than violence and lawbreaking. They lacked a basic self-respect, a sense of their own worth. No one ever told them that they were good.

To see that someone is good and to say so is a creative act – one of the great creative acts. ere may be some few individuals who are inescapably evil, but they are few. Within almost all of us is something positive and unique, but which is all too easily injured, and which only grows when exposed to the sunlight of someone else's recognition and praise. To see the good in others and let them see themselves in the mirror of our regard is to help someone grow to become the best they can be. "Greater," says the Talmud, "is one who causes others to do good than one who does good himself."[7] To help others become what they can be is to give birth to creativity in someone else's soul. This is done not by criticism or negativity but by searching out the good in others, and helping them see it, recognise it, own it, and live it.

"And God saw that it was good" – this too is part of the work of creation, the subtlest and most beautiful of all. When we recognise the goodness in someone, we do more than create it, we help it to become creative. This is what God does for us, and what He calls us to do for others.
Shabbat Shalom,

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Who drinks the Kiddush wine in Shul?
By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In honor of Parshas Bereishis and the first Shabbos…

Drinking in shul

Why is the Kiddush wine in shul given to a child? If an adult is not permitted to drink before he has personally fulfilled Kiddush, can we cause a child to drink?

Background:

The underlying question here is the following: The Torah commands us not only to observe the mitzvos of the Torah, but also not to cause someone else to violate the Torah. This law prohibits even causing a child to violate the Torah, notwithstanding that a child himself is not required to observe the mitzvos. Furthermore, it applies even when the child is, unfortunately, not being raised in an observant way. It is therefore forbidden for someone who has a babysitting job to feed a Jewish child non-kosher food, or to serve non-kosher food to a Jewish adult in a nursing facility or to a Jewish child in a school cafeteria.

The source

There are three different places from which we derive that it is prohibited to cause a child to violate commandments of the Torah (Yevamos 114a). These hermeneutic allusions are in the context of the following three mitzvos:
(1) The prohibition against eating sheratzim, tiny creatures.
(2) The prohibition against eating blood.
(3) The prohibition for a kohen to come in contact with a corpse.
We will soon see the significance of the three sources.

What age child?

This law applies even to a child too young to understand what a mitzvah is (Magen Avraham 343:2). Therefore, one may not use a baby blanket or baby clothes made of shatnez (Shu"t HaRashba HaChadoshos #368; Shu"t Beis Yehudah, Yoreh Deah #45; Eishel Avraham [Butchatch], Orach Chayim 343:1). Similarly, one is prohibited to feed a newborn infant non-kosher food, unless it is a life-threatening emergency (Magen Avraham 343:2).
Based on the above sources, we can now appreciate our opening question. "Why is the Kiddush wine in shul given to a child? If an adult is not permitted to drink before he has personally fulfilled Kiddush, can we cause a child to drink?" To explain this topic better, let us examine its halachic background.

Friday night Kiddush in shul

At the time of the Gemara, Kiddush was recited in shul Friday night because of visitors who would eat their meals in guest rooms that were located adjacent to the shul (see Pesachim 101a and Tosafos s.v. DeAchlu). The fact that the guests ate their meals nearby is significant because of the principle, ein Kiddush ela bimkom seudah -- one fulfills the obligation for Kiddush only when it is recited or heard in the same place where one intends to eat one's Shabbos repast. Someone who hears Kiddush but does not eat a "meal" where he heard it does not fulfill the mitzvah of hearing Kiddush. Discussing the details of ein Kiddush ela bimkom seudah requires a separate, lengthy article; but, for our purposes, we will say that most authorities conclude that eating a significant amount of food on which we recite a mezonos satisfies the requirement of a seudah.

A bit later in history

In the era of the Rishonim, several hundred years after the Gemara, no one ate Friday night meals in the shul building, yet the custom to recite Kiddush at the end of davening was still commonly observed. Although we find many authorities who ruled that one should not recite Kiddush under these circumstances, most communities continued the practice of reciting Kiddush in shul (Tur and Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 269).

Why do we continue to recite Kiddush?

If no one fulfills the mitzvah with the Kiddush recited in shul, why did the practice continue? This question is discussed by several of the Geonim and the Rishonim, and I will present here some of their approaches.
Rav Naturanai Gaon states that one should recite the Kiddush in shul because of the benefit that hearing Kiddush has for one's vision. This idea is based on the Gemara's statement that taking overly-long strides damages one's vision, and that the Friday evening Kiddush restores the vision that has been lost (see Brachos 43b). Since not every household had wine on which to recite Kiddush, the custom developed to recite Kiddush in shul for this therapeutic purpose. It appears that, according to Rav Naturanai Gaon's reason, no one needs to drink the Kiddush wine in shul, since its purpose is not to fulfill the mitzvah.

The Tur objects

However, the Tur, who quotes Rav Naturanai Gaon, sharply disputes the reason. This is because the Gemara explains that the basis for Kiddush in shul is for guests and not the therapeutic reason of Rav Naturanai Gaon.
Another early authority, Rabbeinu Yonah, presents a different explanation for reciting Kiddush in shul, even though the reason mentioned by the Gemara no longer applies. Rabbeinu Yonah contends that the Kiddush was for the benefit of people who did not know how to recite Kiddush and who would simply not fulfill the mitzvah at all. When these people heard Kiddush in shul, they fulfilled the mitzvah min haTorah, notwithstanding the fact that they did not observe the mitzvah as Chazal instructed, since it was not Kiddush bimkom seudah (Rabbeinu Yonah, quoted by Rosh). Thus, Rabbeinu Yonah assumes that the requirement of Kiddush bimkom seudah is a rabbinic ordinance, and that we would recite the Kiddush in shul for the sake of those who would thereby fulfill the Torah mitzvah.
Not all authorities agree with this approach. The Rosh contends that the requirement of Kiddush bimkom seudah is min haTorah. Thus, simply hearing Kiddush without eating then and there does not fulfill any mitzvah and would, therefore, not provide a satisfactory reason to recite Kiddush in shul.
Other authorities explain that reciting Kiddush in shul has a status of a takkanah, a rabbinically-ordained practice that we continue to observe, even though the reason it was established no longer applies (Rashba and Ran, quoted by Beis Yosef). (We should note that although the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch discuss the practice and logistics of reciting Kiddush in shul, they both state that it is preferred not to recite Kiddush in shul. For this reason, many shuls do not recite Kiddush Friday night. However, where the custom is to recite Kiddush in shul, one should continue the practice.)

Kiddush catch-22

Regardless which rationale we use to explain why we recite Kiddush in shul, the Tur raises the following question: The halachah requires that someone drink from the Kiddush wine (Pesachim 105b; Eiruvin 40b), and also prohibits drinking before fulfilling the mitzvah of Kiddush. Since no one is eating in the shul building, no one fulfills the mitzvah with that Kiddush, because of ein Kiddush ela bimkom seudah. Thus, whoever drinks from the Kiddush wine in shul is drinking before he has fulfilled the mitzvah of Kiddush, which is prohibited; yet, someone must drink from the Kiddush wine.
To resolve this predicament, the Tur recommends that the Kiddush wine in shul be given to a child to drink, which, he notes, fulfills the requirement that someone drink from the Kiddush wine (Tur, Orach Chayim 269).

Kiddush conundrum

However, it is not clear how this innovation of the Tur resolves the predicament in a satisfactory way. How can we give a child the Kiddush wine? As we learned above, we are not permitted to cause a child to violate halachah – and he is drinking without fulfilling the mitzvah of Kiddush!
This difficulty is raised by the Beis Yosef, who suggests three solutions to the problem:
(1) All three sources of the halacha not to cause a child to violate the Torah -- not to eat tiny creatures, not to eat blood, and that a kohein not become tamei from a meis -- are lo saaseh prohibitions of the Torah. There are halachic authorities who rule therefore that the proscription to cause a child to violate the Torah applies only to mitzvos of at least the level of a lo saaseh, but not to any prohibition that is considered halachically a lesser offense, such as an issur aseh or a mitzvas aseh, and that it certainly does not apply to a mitzvah miderabbanan (Hagahos Maimoniyos, Shabbos 29:40). Since Kiddush is a mitzvas aseh and not a lo saaseh, it is permitted to cause a child to violate its laws. As a result. some authorities permit causing a child to eat or drink before he has fulfilled the mitzvah of Kiddush.
Although this approach can be used to justify the Tur's proposal, the Beis Yosef notes that many authorities reject this limitation and contend that one may not cause a child to violate any prohibited action. To justify the practice of giving the wine to a child according to their opinion, we need to find an alternative reason to explain why the shul Kiddush is given to a child. Therefore, the Beis Yosef presents two other approaches to explain the practice.

Not yotzei, but may drink

(2) Although, in general, one may not drink before fulfilling the mitzvah of Kiddush, there is an opinion among Rishonim that one who recites Kiddush to benefit others may drink the wine of Kiddush, even when he is not now fulfilling the mitzvah (Rabbeinu Shemuel in the name of the Sar of Coucy [one of the Baalei Tosafos], quoted by Mordechai, Pesachim, Tosefes

MeiArvei Pesachim, page 35a). The Beis Yosef explains that, although we do not usually follow this position, we may have the children rely on it, as a means of resolving what to do with the Kiddush wine.

A third approach

(3) The Beis Yosef presents a third approach, perhaps the most unusual, to explain why we permit a child to drink the wine of Kiddush. Because we must recite the Kiddush and we do not want the brocha of Kiddush to be recited in vain, we permit a child to drink the wine, even though this is an act that we would otherwise prohibit.

Halachic differences

There are obvious differences in practical halachah between these approaches. The first opinion holds that one may cause a child to do something that an adult may not do, provided that the prohibition is less severe than a lo saaseh (see also Rashba, Shabbos 121a; Ran, Yoma, 1a). (Even according to this approach, because of the laws of chinuch, the child's father, and possibly the mother, may not have him drink, if the child is old enough to be educated. Thus, this heter may not apply if the father gives his own son the wine of Kiddush in shul.) Based on this opinion, some authorities permit directing a child to carry something on Shabbos in an area where carrying is prohibited only miderabbanan, if the child needs the item (see also, Shu"t Rabbi Akiva Eiger 1:15; Biur Halachah 343). However, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 343:1) and the Magen Avraham (343:3) prohibit this.

According to the third approach, only one child should drink the Kiddush wine in order to minimize the amount of violation performed, whereas the other two answers permit serving the Kiddush wine to any child who desires. (I note that I have never seen any place that allows only one child to drink the Kiddush. Customarily, many of the children in shul line up to sip the Kiddush wine. This practice implies that this third approach was not accepted as the reason for the custom.)

Matzoh on Erev Pesach

Here is another case where the above-mentioned approaches may disagree: May I feed a child matzoh on Erev Pesach? The Terumas HaDeshen contends that, according to the answer that the prohibition is only to feed a child something that is prohibited with the stringency of a lo saaseh, one may feed a child matzoh on Erev Pesach, which is not as severe a prohibition (Terumas HaDeshen #125). However, he concludes that if the child is old enough to appreciate the Seder, one may not feed him matzoh on Erev Pesach for a different reason -- because this runs counter to the experience of matzoh being special on Seder night. (Further discussion on this topic can be found in Rama, Orach Chayim 471:2 and the commentaries thereon.)

Yet a fourth approach

Some later authorities did not feel that the approaches suggested by the Beis Yosef explain the Tur's ruling in a satisfactory way. They therefore presented other reasons to explain why it is permitted to give a child the Kiddush wine before he has fulfilled the mitzvah. One approach is that it is forbidden to cause a child to violate a Torah law only when the prohibition applies at all times. However, it is permitted to cause a child to perform an activity that is usually permitted, but that is prohibited at this particular time. Following this reason, one may feed a child on Yom Kippur, since eating and drinking are activities that are usually permitted, even though this is a very severe prohibition for an adult (Sefer HaYashar #52). (There are authorities who rule that, according to the previous answers, one is permitted to feed a child on Yom Kippur only when it is a life-threatening emergency, but a child old enough to feed himself should not be fed by an adult, but instead be told where food can be located [Minchas Chinuch, Mitzvah 313; see also Mikra'ei Kodesh of Rav Pesach Frank, Yamim Nora'im, page 149].) Therefore, there is no problem giving a child wine before he has fulfilled the mitzvah of Kiddush, since drinking wine, in general, is a permitted activity (Magen Avraham 269:1).

Another difference in halacha

This last answer also results in a different halachic practice than that of the previous approaches. According to this last answer, one may feed a child on Yom Kippur, even when the child could feed himself. It is also permitted to feed any child before he has heard Kiddush, as long as the child is below the age of bar or bas mitzvah.

A minor kohen

At this point, I would like to discuss a related question. Rivkah Katz* asks me: "My husband and sons are kohanim. Am I required to be careful where I take my infant son?"

In the first pasuk of parshas Emor, the Torah (Vayikra 21:1) states, Emor el hakohanim benei Aharon, ve'amarta aleihem lanefesh lo yitama be'amav -- Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them, that they shall not contaminate themselves to a dead person among their people. Since the Torah repeats the word say, we derive that there are two levels of responsibility here, and since usually it says the sons of Aharon, the kohanim, and here it reverses the order, the Torah is commanding that an adult must not cause a child kohen to become tamei (Yevamos 114a, as explained by Bach, Yoreh Deah 373). From the wording of the Rambam (Hilchos Aveil 3:12), we see that every adult Jew, even a non-kohen, is commanded not to make a child kohen tamei. This requires everyone to know the halachos of what makes a kohen tamei. One cannot have the attitude that, since I am not a kohen, these laws are not relevant to me. We can therefore answer Rivkah's question: She is, indeed, required to find out all the halachos germane to kohanim becoming tamei, so that she knows where she may bring her son, and where she may not.

An adult kohen

Another related question I was once asked:

"My father-in-law, who is not observant, is a kohen, whereas I am a Yisroel. Are we required to be as stringent about where we go on family outings as we would if I myself were a kohen?"

Answer:

The Rambam rules that it is forbidden for a non-kohen to make an adult kohen tamei (Rambam, Hilchos Aveil 3:5). To quote the Rambam: "If the kohen is unaware that what he did is forbidden, and the adult who made him tamei knows that it is forbidden, then the adult violates the lo saaseh. If the adult kohen knows that it is forbidden, then the other person violates only lifnei iveir lo sitein michshol, do not place a stumbling block before a blind person (Vayikra 19:14)." Chazal interpret this pasuk to mean that one may not give someone bad advice, nor cause him to violate a prohibition (Pesachim 22b).

Thus, we see that, indeed, one must be concerned about where one takes grandpa, even if he himself is not concerned. For a reason that is beyond the scope of this article, this is true even if grandpa is already tamei meis.

Conclusion

Chazal say in Pirkei Avos: "Kol she'ruach habrios nocha heimenu ruach hamakom nocha heimenu," One who is pleasing to his fellowman is pleasing to his Creator. Being concerned that we not harm others halachically is certainly part of both our social responsibility and our halachic responsibility. When we do our mitzvos properly, others will see us and say, "He is a frum Jew -- he lives his life on a higher plane of caring for others."

*Name has been changed to protect privacy.

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Bereishet
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Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

The Other Side of Cable Street
"Bereishet (In the beginning)…" (1:1)

I well remember my grandfather describing the Battle of Cable Street. On Sunday 4th October, 1936, the fascist "Black Shirts" of Sir Oswald Mosley proclaimed that they would march through London's predominantly East End to demonstrate their power. "The Jewish boys," reminisced by grandfather, took up the slogan, "They shall not pass!" and pass they did not. Trucks were overturned. Roadblocks were set up to prevent the march from taking place. An estimated 20,000 demonstrators turned out, and were met by around 6,000 police (including mounted police), who attempted to clear the road to permit the march of 2,000–3,000 fascists to proceed.

The demonstrators fought back with sticks, rocks, chair legs and other improvised weapons. Rubbish, rotten vegetables and the contents of chamber pots were thrown at the police by women in houses along the street. About 150 demonstrators were arrested. Others escaped with the help of fellow demonstrators. Around 175 people were injured, including police, women and children.

Many of the arrested demonstrators reported harsh treatment at the hands of the police.

"History" rhymes with "irony." My grandfather would be speechless at recent events in England. His beloved Left, under its thinly veiled anti-Semitic leader, is marching to the same tune as Mosely. And, unlike Mosley, who was always on the lunatic fringe of the Conservatives, Jeremy Corbyn is the leader of the Labour party.

"In the beginning…" Our Sages understand the word for "In the beginning…" — Bereishet — to contain at least several ideas. The word can be understood as a hint to "bishvil reishit — "on account of reishit"—that the world was created for something called reishit. Reishit has several connotations. One of them is the Jewish People, who are called reishit, as it says in writings of the Prophet Yirmiyahu (2:3), "reshit tevuato" — "the first of His produce."

G-d created everything with its opposite. There is another reishit, an "anti-reishit" — Amalek, the archenemy of the Jewish People. He is also called reishit (Bamidbar 24:) — Amalek is the first of the nations in the queue to try to destroy the Jewish People after we became a nation at Mount Sinai. Amalek takes many guises, and thus his indictment of the Jewish People is almost infinitely elastic: To the Right, we have been the filthy poor; to the Left, the filthy rich. We are both Capitalist pigs and rootless cosmopolitans or Communists. Virtually the only thing that this anti-Semite can agree on is that world would be an infinitely better place without the Jew. Much of the world is prepared to take active steps to effect this, and the rest would be quite happy if they succeed.

So let us not be surprised that Jew-hatred has surfaced in the UK from the other side of Cable Street. Jews and Jew-hatred are coded into the matrix of this world from the very first word of the Torah.

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Bereshit: "If I Am I"

There are many persons in this week's parshah. Chief among them, of course, are Adam and Eve, the very first persons on earth. But the names of quite a few others are listed. Some are obscure, like Kenan and Mahalalel. But two others are very well known, and for interesting reasons. I refer to Cain and Abel.

Regular readers of this column know that I rarely mention sources from the field of Jewish mysticism. Kabbalah is, in my opinion, a body of knowledge which is reserved for people who are especially learned and very pious. The current popularity of Kabbalah among people who lack proper "credentials" is something which I deem inappropriate. Nevertheless, I recognize that the field of Kabbalah bristles with amazing insights into theology, certainly, but also into the human psyche.

One of the insights which is especially meaningful to me is the assertion made in Kabbalistic literature that Cain and Abel represent two of humanity's archetypes. Cain and Abel each have very different souls, different neshamot. Some of us have Cain's soul, and others of us have Abel's soul. Do not mistake those with Cain's soul for the "bad guys," and those with Abel's soul for the "good guys." The distinction is much more subtle than that.

Here is how the distinction was explained to me by a very qualified student of Kabbalah, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, whose source was a Kabbalistic text known as Sha'ar HaGilgulim. Those of us with Abel's soul tend to be contemplative, compliant, and a bit perfectionist. Those of us with the soul of Cain tend to be active, assertive, and creative. In Cain's case, these traits went too far. His active and assertive tendencies led him to murder his brother. But his descendants used their talents in constructive ways, inventing musical instruments, agricultural tools, and, sadly, military weapons.

Abel, on the other hand, was murdered before he had any descendants, so we know nothing about what their contributions to human culture might have been. But what do we know about Abel himself that would help us understand the nature of his "soul?"

Here is what we know about Abel: He was the younger of the two, he was a keeper of sheep, and after "Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil, Abel followed suit and brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock" (Genesis 4:2-4). In the Hebrew original, the phrase which I translated as "followed suit" reads veHevel heivi gam hu, which translates literally as "and Abel, he too brought."

Cain initiated, Abel responded. This brief phrase tells the entire story about Abel's soul. He was a follower, not a leader. He was a "convergent" thinker and not a "divergent" thinker. Creativity was not his thing. Conformity was.

Several questions beg to be asked. Is conformity a fault or a virtue? Is creativity and originality to be valued over obedience and compliance? Are we, as religious Jews, not obligated to conform to the comprehensive set of standards of behavior? Does not excessive creativity clash with traditional values? Are we to find fault with Abel because he "followed suit," because "he too brought" a sacrifice to the Lord?

There is much in our Jewish faith that emphasizes the importance of obedience and admonishes us not to "stray after our hearts and eyes" into new and untested directions. There is no doubt about that.

But blind obedience comes with great spiritual risk. Blind obedience can lead to superficial religious behavior, behavior which is devoid of heartfelt emotion, of a sense of meaning and purpose, of mitzvot performed without proper kavanah, proper motives and proper intent.

One of my own spiritual heroes is the highly original and astoundingly creative nineteenth-century Hasidic sage, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. He taught of the dangers of imitation and artificiality in the practice of religious faith. He was concerned about the developments he noted in the world of observant Jewry during his time. People tended to dress the same, think the same, and act the same in their religious devotions.

He famously said, "If I am I because I am I, and if you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you. But, if I am I because you are you, and you are you because I am I, then you are not you and I am not I."

For the Rabbi of Kotzk, there was something almost sinful in Abel's behavior. To offer a sacrifice because my brother is offering a sacrifice is an empty act, perhaps even a hypocritical act. One must do good deeds because

one feels inwardly inspired to do so, and not because he or she feels compelled to emulate the good deeds of others.

I have often thought that the basis of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk's convictions was the observation made so frequently by the Sages of the Talmud. The Talmud contains many statements to the effect that each of us is different and unique. We were created with different facial features, with different fingerprints, with different emotional sensitivities, and with different intellectual capacities. These differences must find their expression in our religious behavior. I cannot be "I" if I am merely mimicking "you."

Here is one Talmudic passage which contains this theme. It is from the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Avodah Zarah 33: "A human produces a coin from one form, and all the coins are identically alike. But the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He, produces every coin in the form of the primeval Adam, and yet no man perfectly resembles his fellow."

What lesson can be learned from the fact that the Master of the Universe created us so different from each other? This must be the lesson: We must come to know the ways in which we are different from others, we must be thankful for our uniqueness, and we must find ways to serve the Almighty authentically and creatively, for only then will we be actualizing our unique purpose on earth.

There is a prayer we recite on Yom Kippur. It reads: "My Lord, before I was formed I was unworthy, and now that I have been formed it is as if I had not been formed." Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, in Olat Re'iyah, his commentary upon the liturgy, explains: "Each of us is born in one special moment in the course of millenia. Each of us is born into a specific set of circumstances. Before that moment, and in other circumstances, we were not yet worthy of being born. Now that I have been born at this time, and in this place, I have a divinely ordained unique function to perform. On Yom Kippur, we confess to the Almighty, in this prayer, that we have not lived up to the responsibilities of a person born at this specific moment and in this specific place."

As we begin this new year, 5779, let us look within ourselves and discover our own individuality. Let us channel it toward the will of our Creator. This is one of the lessons of this week's weekly portion, Bereshit, "In the beginning."

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Bereishis
פרשת בראשית *תשע"ח*

נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו
And G-d said, "Let us make Man in Our image, in our likeness. (1:26)

We have the ability to perceive and study the most difficult subjects, to plumb the depths of the most intricate areas of science. When it comes to self-knowledge, however, some individuals still believe in the heresy of Darwinism. *Horav Nissim Yagen, zl,* explains it practically: "Because man thinks that he is himself a form of animal, therefore he believes that he descends from a monkey. If he would only recognize his actual inner essence, his extraordinary potential, he would be incapable of ever believing that he has descended from apes!" One who does not know or understand the value and essence of a diamond might be convinced that it is formed from an orange. One who understands what a diamond is – its beauty and value – would never accept the notion that a jewel so perfect and splendid could ever have evolved from an orange. A secular philosopher once hypothesized that Hitler's Nazism was the result of his belief in Darwinism. Thus, as the larger creature overpowers the smaller creature (following the theory of survival of the fittest), it gives members of the master race (in their distorted minds) license to conquer those whom they have deemed inferior.

When Hashem created man, He said, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." Hashem wanted man to be G-d-like. *Rambam* understands this to mean that, from among all of Hashem's creations, it is man that is endowed, like his Creator, with morality, reason and free will. Man can know and love G-d; he can hold spiritual communion with Him; and he can guide his actions by using his G-d-given ability to reason. Being created in His Image and in His likeness grants man enormous, infinite, amazing possibilities to achieve greatness. Being created in Hashem's image means that we are all endowed with many qualities of Hashem. *Sforno* expounds on the concept of *Tzelem Elokim* and its meaning vis-à-vis man.

"The term *Elokim,* used in a comparable sense, may be applied to every intelligent force that is capable of action, that is perfect and is separate from man, and, as such, is everlasting. Thus, this term is applied to Hashem and His *Malachim*, Angels. It is, likewise, used with regard to judges, because of their worthy power of reasoning. Human reason functions without any material medium. It has the ability to extend even to the abstract, and, to a limited extent, it even can process the future. It does not weaken through over-use or with age, but rather, it becomes stronger – all of which demonstrate that man's reason can be distinguished from matter. (Therefore, Adam should also be called *Elokim.*) Nonetheless, until Adam/human being, achieves perfection, the term *Elokim* alludes him, and he remains only *b'tzelem*, in the image of *Elokim*."

Sforno teaches us that anything that is permanent, intelligent and abstract – like angels and judges who carry out Hashem's will – may be described as *Elokim* (because they are G-d-like). Man, however, is described only as being in His image, because potential does not necessarily translate into achievement. Hashem has endowed us with incredible, amazing potential, but, until this potential is realized through development, we stand close, but not yet able to achieve the pinnacle of creation – *Elokim*.

David *Hamelech* says in *Sefer Tehillim* (49:21): *Adam bikar bal yavin, nimshal kabeheimos nidmu,* "Man is glorious, but understands not; he is likened to the silenced animals." *Sforno* explains: "Since man has this extraordinary potential through which he tries to understand the aforementioned wisdom (which could grant him *Elokim* status), but chooses (either actively or by default) not to do so, his intellectual ability remains in the realm of the potential, lacking all perfection in the actual, thus leaving himself devoid and empty." Hashem gave him the acumen, the ability to achieve – but he did not utilize it. Thus, he is no different from an animal.

Being born in the "image of G-d," having the ability to reach the Heavenly Throne, to be even greater than the Angels, is a gift – only if one uses this ability to transition potential into perfection. Otherwise, *V'lo yavin,* "He does not understand!" He remains beast-like. An animal cannot become a *Tzelem Elokim* – but you, man, can. If you have the potential and do not actualize it – you are worse than an animal.

These are strong words, but we see it demonstrated time and again by men who "could, but do not." Thus, they revert to being inferior to those creatures who "could not." *Nimshal ka'beheimos nidmu*, "He is likened to the silenced animals:" We talk about good intentions. Failure to realize our intentions determines whether or not we are bringing out the *Elokim* within ourselves. "At least he meant well" is a common adage, which is our way of belittling the greatness of man's potential. It is like saying, "Well, instead of bringing out the image of G-d within him, he, instead, was satisfied to remain on the level akin to an animal. This may sound like an oversimplification, but, when we view this through the perspective afforded us by *Sforno,* it is what it is – an enormous waste.

I believe it was *Horav Aizik Sher, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Slabodka*, who once stood by the window of his home and stared out at the passersby on the street. His *talmid*, student, with whom he was learning, asked, "What is the *Rosh Yeshivah* looking at that warrants such contemplation?" *Rav* Aizik looked at him and said, "I am looking at the cemetery in front of my window." Obviously, his student was taken aback. "What cemetery?" he asked. "I am looking at the 'living cemetery,' at the people walking by my

window who have not achieved their potential. Above each of their heads is an individual tombstone stating, 'Here lies so and so,' which is actually the title or position which this person could/should have realized – but did not. This is his epitaph. Now, you realize why I call it a cemetery?"

In summation, the potential for greatness is placed within everyone from the moment of birth. We are created in the image of Hashem, so that greatness is our destiny. Sadly, there are moments and incidents in life that attempt to convince us otherwise. Some fall victim to abuse, rejection, shame and depression. Others rise above the speed bumps of life with indomitable strength, achieving restoration and, finally, finding and connecting with their personal greatness. Some do it on their own, others have had the help of someone who believed in them. We all have the potential; we just need to see it – and do something to work towards it. We resist doing so for a variety of reasons, fear being the most common. We claim to be looking for the "right time." The "right time" is now. We must make the "right time."

Some think that greatness is defined by what we become, when, in fact (I feel), it is defined by what we are. Maintaining a status quo in the face of adversity is a sign of personal greatness. True, the individual did not change the world, but the ability to remain stoic and committed, keeping his head "above water" despite a sea of troubles, indicates that one is firmly anchored in his/her faith in Hashem. That is greatness.

An American woman and her friend dreamed for the day when they could stand at the *Kosel* and pray to Hashem. The mere thought of being able to pour out their inner feelings to the Almighty at this holy sight was a dream come true for them. As they stood in silent contemplation, gazing at the stones of the wall, understanding what they represented, their significance, and the power of the moment, they noticed a woman approaching, carrying two worn-out shopping bags. From the appearance of her clothes and the manner in which she dragged her feet, they assumed that she was homeless and dependent on the charity which she was able to beg. This was affirmed when she held her hand out to them for alms. They gave – she took, and went on her way.

The afternoon was passing, so the two women decided to *daven Minchah*. They looked around and noticed that the poor woman had also begun to *daven Minchah*. When they concluded their prayers, they stood for a few moments just staring at the woman, who had also just completed her prayers. They saw her put her hand into one of her bags, rummage around and take out the stub of a pencil. She then ripped off a piece of her bag and began to write a note. After finishing, she folded the paper (of the bag) and wedged it between the bricks of the wall and left.

The woman did not notice, but her note fell out of the crevice and onto the floor. Another woman who saw this bent down to retrieve the note and put it back into the stones. As she held it in her hand, the note unfolded. The American women took all this in and noticed the child-like scrawl (made by the stub of a pencil on the wrinkled paper bag). The letters were ill-formed, but legible. She was shocked to read the words that were written on it: "Hashem, I love you!" The woman had little to nothing in material possessions. She probably did not even have a bed to sleep on. Yet, she was completely content in her relationship with Hashem! I think this personifies greatness.

לא טוב היות האדם לבדו

It is not good that man be alone. (2:18)

This most telling *pasuk* defines the role of a wife in one's life, ie, *tov*, good. When one is alone, he is missing that ingredient that transforms his life to "good." The commentators, each in his own inimitable manner, offer their understanding of the word *tov* and how it affects – and is realized in – marriage. Years ago, I was privy to a conversation between a *gadol*, Torah giant, and a distinguished lay leader. The lay leader was sitting *shivah*, mourning the untimely passing of his wife, and the *Rosh Yeshivah*, who had sadly undergone a similar tragedy a few year earlier, was speaking. The *Rosh Yeshivah* remarked that outside of losing his life's companion, he particularly felt the loss at the end of a day, when he would sit down with his wife and discuss his day's experiences, the ups and downs. When he was on a speaking trip, he would return to his hotel room and immediately call his wife and share with her his speech and the responses to it. In short, he no longer had anyone with whom to talk, to share, who was interested in his success. He felt that without someone to share his joy and sadness, his life was incomplete, his joy was diminished, almost to the point that it did not pertain to him.

Hearing this, my perspective on *tov* changed from (the definition) "good" to "happy" (*tovasi bal alecha*); "I have no claim to your benefit" (*Tehillim* 16:2) and "being purposeful" (t*uv taam v'daas lamdeini;* "Teach me good reasoning and knowledge," (*Tehillim* 119:66). Regardless of the definition we apply, the Torah teaches us that *levado*, being alone (different from loneliness), being for oneself, is *lo tov*.

ויקם קין אל הבל אחיו ויהרגהו

And Kayin rose against his brother Hevel and killed him. (4:8)

The world consisted of four human beings. Kayin killed his brother Hevel. They were reduced to three people. Kayin was the world's first murderer. Hevel was the world's first victim. Without question, Kayin deserved to be punished for wiping out one-fourth of the world population. What about Hevel? One does not become a victim just because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. We do not believe in coincidence or chance. If Hevel was designated to be the victim, there is a reason. Nothing occurs in this world unless it has been Heavenly-decreed. Hevel must have acted in a manner that warranted Divine retribution, which resulted in Kayin becoming the agent of death. What did Hevel do to deserve this "distinction"?

Horav Eliezer Sorotzkin, zl, explains that it was not what Hevel did that earned him the dubious distinction of becoming the world's first victim; rather, it was what he did not do. Once Hashem did not "listen"/accept Kayin's *korban*, sacrifice, regardless of the reason, Kayin became depressed. He had no one with whom to share his feelings of dejection. He walked around, his head down, miserable, lost, broken-hearted. Where was Hevel when his brother needed him? Why did Hevel not go over to Kayin and comfort him, talk to him, listen to him, share his pain? After all, he was his brother. It is not as if Hevel had so many other people with whom he could converse. Kayin was a brother, broken, in pain, with no one to turn to. It was Hashem who asked Kayin why his face had "fallen"?

Hevel did not show empathy for his brother. He was more concerned with himself. One who does not take the time to support his brother, to feel his pain, to listen to his plight, is heartless, insensitive and narcissistic. When it involves a brother who just happens to represent one fourth of the world population, it is unforgivable. Thus, Heaven intervened.

Shlomo *Hamelech* says (*Mishlei* 12:25), *Daagah b'lev ish yashchenah*; "When there is worry in a man's heart, he should suppress it." There is a debate in *Chazal* (*Yoma* 75a) as to how one suppresses his worry. One says to erase it from his mind, not to dwell on worry. The other contends (*yashchenah*) that he should talk it over with others. We should never underestimate the power of talking to someone who cares, who listens. We live in a culture that teaches people to suppress their feelings. Displaying emotions is considered to be a sign of weakness. "Be strong"; "Keep your feelings to yourself"; "Get over it": are catchphrases which can destroy – and have destroyed – people. When one has no one with whom to talk, because no one is willing to listen or empathize, he/she will turn to other coping mechanisms – often resulting in dire consequences. These people could have benefited by talking to someone who listens patiently, non-judgmentally, empathetically. One does not have to solve the problem, but he must be willing to listen. Most often, that is all the person wants or needs.

One last note: There are people in every community who are lonely. Some are alone; others just need someone to whom they can open up, who will make them feel important, who will listen to what they have to say,

regardless of its insignificance. For these individuals, listening to them could be a lifesaver. Let us not forget Kayin. In this manner he, too, was a victim.

זה ספר תולדות אדם

This is the account of the descendants of Adam. (5:1)

The *Midrash* (cited by *Yalkut Shemoni Bereishis* 5:41) relates that Hashem passed all forthcoming generations before Adam *HaRishon*. When Adam saw that David *Hamelech* had been allotted only three hours of life, he asked, "Hashem, is there no remedy for this? (Is there not some way to lengthen David's life?)" Hashem replied, "This is, indeed, what I had in mind (accept the three hours without question). Adam then asked, "How many years of life have I been allotted?" Hashem replied, "One thousand years." Adam asked, "May I give a gift?" Hashem said, "Yes." Adam then bequeathed seventy years of his originally allotted lifespan to David. Adam brought a parchment and wrote down the terms of his gift on it, and it was later signed by Hashem, the *Malach*, Angel M-T-A-T. and Adam. Adam declared, "Master of the World, great will be David's kingdom and the songs that will be rendered during this seventy year (gifted) period that David will live and make music for You."

Chazal are teaching us that the flow of life bequeathed by Adam to David resulted in the existence of the Davidic dynasty and seventy years of song of praise to Hashem. In other words, David *Hamelech's* life was one long, uninterrupted song of adoration to Hashem.

In referring to David *Hamelech's* songs of praise, the *Midrash* uses the word *zemiros*, which is one of the ten forms of song. I find this interesting, especially considering that David's seventy years of life of song was a gift from Adam to Hashem. *Zemer* is different from *shir*. While both mean song, *zimrah* is derived from the word *z'mor*, which means to cut off, to prune. When we sing *zemiros* (on *Shabbos*), we cut off our material selves, allowing our *neshamos*, souls, the freedom to unite with Hashem (*Shlah Hakadosh*). *Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl*, explains that there are two types of song – *shirah* and *zimrah*. When we sing *shirah*, we sing Hashem's praise through a narrative, such as *Shiras HaYam* and *Shiras Devorah* – two songs which relate to various miracles. *Zemirah*, however, is an expression of emotion: when a person wishes to express his gratitude to Hashem; when he is motivated to declare His greatness; when he is filled with overwhelming joy. In such situations, he is so overcome with emotion that words escape him. Instead, he bursts forth into song, and he sings without words. *Shabbos Kodesh* is a day of *zimrah*. It is a spiritual day that is beyond our comprehension. It is *mei'ein Olam Habba*, a taste/a form of the World to Come. What the soul feels and the heart senses is impossible to express with words. Thus, we utilize the sanctity of the *Shabbos* day to express ourselves through *zemiros*.

Zimrah demands an emotional investment through which the singer engages in the song. When one sings *Shabbos zemiros* he is to engage much more than his mind; it calls forth his heart, his passions, his aspirations, as well. *Chazal* (*Sotah* 35a) teach that David *Hamelech* was criticized, his honor diminished, because he referred to the Torah as a *zemer*. He says in *Sefer Tehillim* 119:54), *Zemiros hayu li chukecha*, "Your statutes were as songs to me." David's punishment was that he erred in following a simple *halachah* which demands that when transporting the *Aron HaKodesh*, it should be carried upon the shoulders of the *Leviim*. Instead, David allowed Uzza to transport it in a wagon. This was a dishonor to the Ark. It was this improper mode of transport that caused the oxen pulling the wagon to shake the Ark. The shaking caused Uzza to stretch out his hand in an attempt to prevent the Ark from tipping over – not realizing that the Ark carries its carriers and does not require human support to right it. Had David done things properly, Uzza would not have died. The culpability of Uzza's death (so to speak) rests on David. All of this occurred because David referred to the Torah as a song. While the Torah itself is called a *shirah*, song, because of its perfection in mirroring the whole of human experience, it is not a *zimrah*. The Torah is an expression of intellect, not emotion. It is timeless; its narrative encompasses past, present and future. *Shirah* is a much more all-encompassing term than *zimrah*. *Shirah* is the song of the mind; *zimrah* is the song of the heart, the language of the soul.

The actions of David *Hamelech* may be explained in the following manner. David used the word *chukecha*, Your statutes, by design. He was not referring to the Torah *per se*, but rather, to life's *chukim*. A statute is a *mitzvah* whose rationale defies human cognition. We know that Hashem has a reason for *Parah Adumah*, the Red Cow, but we do not know what it is. Therefore, we observe this *mitzvah* as an *afkaata d'Malkah*, decree of the King/Hashem. We ask no questions. We expect no explanations. We do as we are told. There are also *chukim* in life, challenge, adversity, experiences that are overwhelming, which cause us to wonder, to question. Some are unable to get over the obstacle, which results in impaired faith. David *Hamelech* declared, "Your *chukim* in life are for me a source of *zemer*, a song expressing my overwhelming emotion of gratitude and love." David was not reducing the Torah. He was elevating the process of confronting adversity.

As the *Naim Zemiros Yisrael*, Sweet Singer of *Yisrael*, David demonstrated his ability to traverse through challenge and adversity, to overcome the debilitating pain that takes its toll on people. He perceived inspiration and song in challenge. Only good comes from Hashem. Our inability to see this, our obstinacy in not accepting this verity, does not alter its essence and purpose. This is the role of the faith which we must develop. David *Hamelech's* faith in Hashem was so perfect, so wholesome, that it engendered an expression of song. Furthermore, he was acutely aware that he owed an enormous debt of gratitude to Adam *HaRishon* for his gift of life. Thus, David's songs were the product of his abiding love for – and faith in – Hashem, and his overwhelming sense of gratitude to Adam. Is it any wonder that *Sefer Tehillim* has become for us the staple of prayer and enduring faith to the Almighty?

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Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Bereshit (Genesis 1:1-6:8)
By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

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

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

verse and given it a nationalistic spin. He has placed our right to the land of Israel as an implication of the very first verse of the Torah!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

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ל"ה בתשרי תשע"ט

East of Eden

In this week's D'var Torah for Bereishit, the Chief Rabbi explains why real paradise is to be found just east of the Garden of Eden.

When were the good old days?

Every time we return the Sefer Torah to the ark we recite the verse from Eicha, "Hashiveinu Hashem Eilecha Venashuva – Return us to you Hashem and we will return, Chadesh Yameinu K'Kedem – Restore our days as of old." Which period of history are we referring to? Which glorious moment is it which we hanker after at this time?

The Midrash, in Eicha Rabbati, transports us back to a passage in Parashat Bereishit. It is the exact moment when Adam and Eve had just left paradise. The Torah tells us that Hashem established 'Kruvim' – angels with fiery, swivelling swords to guard the entrance into the Garden. Where were they situated? "Mikedem L'Gan Eden – East of Eden." Outside of paradise.

It is that same word 'Mikedem' – "Chadesh Yameinu K'Kedem." 'Kedem' means 'east' and it also means 'times gone by'. That is because at the earliest part of the day the sun rises in the east. Isn't that remarkable? We are going all that way back in time but stopping short of actually going back into paradise itself. Surely that is the ultimate utopia that we should long for?

Instead we prefer a period when we are outside of paradise with all the challenges of this world. That, I believe, is the whole point.

Our Sages refer to the time when Adam and Eve were in paradise as a period of "Nahama Dekisufa – They were eating the bread of shame." This is because they didn't need to do anything to earn or deserve that which was delivered to them – it was provided on a silver platter. As a result, miracles seemed normal. Everything was ordinary and nothing was special. There was no sense of fulfilment and no genuine feeling of happiness. It was only once they were outside of the garden, in the real world, facing the challenges of life, that they could actually achieve success and gratification.

This is a sentiment which we convey to a bride and groom under the 'chuppah'. "Sameach T'Samacah Rei'im Ahuvim – Please Hashem give this loving couple lots of joy." "K'Samechacha Yetzircha" – In the same way as you gave joy to Adam and Eve, "B'Gan Eden Mikedem." And many mistranslate this to mean 'when they were in the Garden of Eden in days gone by.' But actually, it means Mikedem L'Gan Eden – 'East of Eden' – when they were outside of paradise.

That is the reality of the life that the bride and groom will have. They will have to work at their relationship. They will have to exist in a world with numerous challenges. Once they are able to appreciate that and to succeed, the fulfilment they achieve will be second to none. That is the 'bracha' we give to them under the 'chuppah'.

So now we understand the meaning of "Chadesh Yameinu K'Kedem." The 'good old days' – are actually, achievable right now. We embrace this world, we grapple with its issues and we strive to overcome the challenges. And once, please God, we will do that, our joy will be second to none.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.