

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE GREATNESS OF MAN AND HIS PURPOSE (FROM RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

The author of Chesed l'Avraham writes: "Life spreads to all the worlds by emanations from on high, and the spreading of this abundance is possible only by means of the connections that exist between them. The connections between the worlds are accomplished solely by man, for it is to achieve the union of all these worlds that he was created, and it is through him that an abundance of blessing and success spread to all the worlds." He continues and states, "The vitality of man comes from the world of Asiyah, his mind from the world of Yetzirah, and his soul from the world of Beriah. He carries the name Adam, which pertains to all the worlds, and it is through him that an abundance of good fills all the worlds." Such are his holy words.

Due to the fact that a man has a portion of all these worlds within him, only he can establish connections between them, connections through which abundance spreads to all the worlds. We see that, essentially, it is man's responsibility and mission to connect these worlds to one another, for he stems from each of them. If he were to sever one of the links that connects these different worlds, be it only for a moment, all of Creation would suffer as a result!

Let us try to understand this. It is written, "And G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which G-d created to make" (Genesis 2:3). G-d finished the work of Creation on the sixth day, just before the arrival of Shabbat, and man (G-d's preferred creation) was made last so that he could be responsible for all of Creation. This is like a king who builds a magnificent palace, splendid in all its details, and who calls for a servant and commands that he guard the property, telling him, "This house is mine, and it must always be kept in a state of perfection, always as splendid as now."

And yet, at the end of the verse, it is written, "to make," which indicates that there is still something to complete, that the world still lacks something. According to what we have seen above, it is clear that in this world man has the task of watching over Creation as he received it, and to add to the beauty of the world. The Sages have said, "Man was created on the eve of Shabbat ... so that he could immediately enter the banquet. It is like a king that builds a palace that is splendid in its least detail, prepares a great banquet, and when everything is ready he brings his guest into it, as it is said, 'Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out her seven pillars. She has prepared her meat; she has mingled her wine; she has also furnished her table. She has sent forth her maidens; she calls upon the highest places of the city' [Proverbs 9:1-3]" (Sanhedrin 38a). For man to accomplish his task, he should be concerned that, above all, he never severs the connections between the worlds, this in order that an abundance of light emanating from G-d can spread to all places.

We know that the first man was created in such a way that he contained within himself a part of all the worlds, hence it is man who commands and connects them. It is in this way that G-d's light and abundance can flow to all corners of Creation, for these worlds are connected one to the next.

How can man connect the worlds, as well as the Ten Sephiroth, to their source, to G-d? Only by means of the Torah, as it is said, "The uppermost knot of the Tefillin is a commandment of the Torah" (Menachot 39a). The Torah is a light (Proverbs 6:23) that illuminates all the worlds. G-d's intention is for man to fulfill

his holy task – that he live from the sweat of his brow without becoming indebted to others. When he lives a holy and pure life, he receives a reward from G-d that is in proportion to his good deeds, according to G-d's promise.

That being said, let us now return to the subject of the first man. On the day G-d created man, he placed him in the Garden of Eden "to till it and to guard it" (Genesis 2:15). Yet this work and safeguarding were only for a few hours a day (see Sanhedrin 38b). If, during those hours, man had maintained his state of purity and holiness, all the connections between the worlds could have been interlinked, and the infinite light would then have continued to flow for all the generations. Such is what the Sages have said: "G-d showed the first man all the generations and its leaders" (ibid.). That is to say, all the generations were dependant on the first man. If he had carried out his task to perfection, he would not have been chased from the Garden, and death would not have entered into the world.

That is why it is written, "to make" (Genesis 2:3). G-d left man a certain task to perform in order to provide him – him and all the generations to come – with the merit of living and rejoicing in the infinite light. Yet to our great misfortune, the first man failed in his task on the very first day he was created, and he was chased from the Garden. G-d laments over him (Bereshith Rabba 19:18) because of this sin, a sin that up to our day we have not succeeded in rectifying so as to make G-d reign in this world through the connections that link the worlds.

And yet, even in our day, man has the ability to carry out this reparation. He possesses the means and the power to do it by his Torah study, as the Sages say, "Great is Torah, for if not by its merit, heaven and earth would not exist" (Nedarim 32a). It is by the study of Torah that man spreads abundance in all the worlds by means of holy connections, and all of Creation perpetuates itself by the merit of the uppermost knot of the Tefillin, which attaches man to the Torah.

At present, we understand the need to immerse ourselves in a mikveh on the eve of Shabbat, which as we know is helpful for effecting the repair of the brit, the sign of the covenant that sanctifies the Jewish people.

The word mila alludes to the 40 days of the formation of the embryo (see Sotah 2a). During these 40 days, it is determined if the fetus will be a male, a man being the one who has the mission of connecting all the worlds in order to make the waters of life – the abundance that spreads in a holy way to all the worlds – spring forth. A man should understand and never forget that G-d desires and wants that the embryo should be a male at the end of its 40 days of formation, this in order for him to connect all the worlds by the abundance that spreads through the sanctified connections that link them. This also allows us to understand the statement of the Sages: "Up to 40 days, it is permitted to pray and ask that the infant not be deformed and that it be a boy or a girl. However after 40 days, it is forbidden to pray that it be a boy or a girl, for it is useless to pray and ineffective to ask for something that has already occurred" (Berachot 60a). This is because, as we have said, after 40 days G-d Alm-ghty has already decided what the fetus will be.

The letter mem in the word mila has a numerical value of 40 (referring to the 40 days of the formation of the child), and the word yeled ("child") has a numerical value of 45, which is also the numerical value of one of G-d's Names. We see,

therefore, that the task which man is responsible for, as well as his purpose in life, is to make sure that he does not damage the holiness of this connection (which the sign of the covenant represents). It is through it that all the worlds are linked, and it is the mark of the covenant between him and G-d. Whoever harms this sign harms the Name of G-d as much as he harms man himself, who was created to be the permanent connection between all the worlds. If he harms this sign, it is as if he denied the Name of G-d that he carries within him (G-d forbid).

Let us now explain the sin of the first man, who was created on the sixth day. G-d left him the task of continuing the work of Creation and perfecting it, this during the few hours that preceded the beginning of Shabbat. If he had obeyed G-d's will, death would never have entered the world, yet because of our great sins he damaged the sign of the covenant (see Sanhedrin 38b). The Arizal explains that the first man did not wait until Shabbat to join with his wife Chava, which provoked the jealousy of the serpent. The deterioration of man began as a consequence of his premature union with Chava. If he had waited until the night of Shabbat instead of uniting with her during the day, the Divine light would have protected him. Yet for not having waited, he ended up eating from the Tree of Knowledge. All this happened on the day before Shabbat (see Arizal, Ta'amei HaTorah).

The mikveh on the eve of Shabbat comes to correct the sin of the first man. Whoever purifies himself in the mikveh on the eve of Shabbat receives the holiness of Shabbat and its enveloping light, which prolongs the creation and the formation of man, and which connects the worlds to each other in order to fill them with abundance. We therefore see how awesome the secret of the purifying waters is. When a man descends into a mikveh, he prolongs the beam of the primordial, infinite light upon himself, the light from which all the worlds were created. Which beam of light is this?

We know that when G-d wanted to make His creations know His goodness and mercy, and to lavish them with the abundance of His goodness, He, so to speak, "withdrew" Himself to create a void in reality. He then made a beam of the infinite light descend from Him, and it reached that nothingness, that void. From that void and beam of light the Ten Sephiroth were created, and from them came the worlds. This "withdrawal" of G-d was only meant for man, only for beings capable of rejoicing in G-d, and from the moment that He created them, He put all the worlds into their power, with the obligation to connect and unite them. This is a sign of G-d's great generosity.

Such is the secret of the mikveh. In descending into the mikveh, which holds 40 seahs of water, a man accepts the sovereignty of G-d, his Creator. At the same time, he accepts the fact that at the end of his 40 days of formation in the womb of his mother, he became a man, attached to the Name of G-d. From that moment on, all the worlds are connected to one another and receive an abundance of Divine goodness.

When a man finds himself in the water of a mikveh, he prolongs this beam of infinite light upon himself, a beam with which G-d created the Ten Sephiroth, and this beam continues and gives birth to all that exists and fills all the worlds with an outpouring of abundance.

Everything that we have asserted thus far is indicated by the word mikveh itself.

The letter mem (whose numerical value is 40) represents the 40 seahs of water in the mikveh, as well as the 40 days of the embryo's formation in the womb, so that it can carry the name "man". The letter kuf represents the beam (or line, kav in Hebrew) of infinite light that descended into the void, a void created as soon as G-d "withdrew" Himself, and into which the light spread. From there the Ten Sephiroth, as well as the worlds of Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah were created. Without this light, the void would not exist. The letter he (whose numerical value is 5) represents the five forms of purity that a man takes upon himself on the eve of Shabbat when he is immersed in the mikveh.

All of the above illustrates just how the meaning and goal of the mikveh are profound and awesome. A man immerses himself in the mikveh on the eve of Shabbat to repair the foundation that was damaged by the first man, and he receives the infinite light in order to connect and unite the worlds to one another, for it is to continue the work of Creation that man was created, as it is written: "which G-d created to make." A man must be extremely careful not to damage the sign of the holy covenant, for that would be damaging the foundation of the

creation of man and denying the Name of G-d that he carries within himself. If he guards and purifies himself, he becomes like the first man before his sin, and thanks to the purification that occurs in the mikveh, he unites all the worlds together in holiness and purity. He also prolongs upon himself an abundance of goodness, which surges forth by means of the worlds, starting from that very same beam of light that connects them. It is for this purpose that man was created.

By virtue of being purified and sanctified, we will merit what the Sages have mentioned: "The one who sanctifies himself a little is sanctified a great deal; the one who sanctifies himself below is sanctified from above; the one who sanctifies himself in this world is sanctified in the World to Come" (Yoma 39a). Amen.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY (FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO)

It is written, "And G-d said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26).

The Midrash states: From whom did Hashem take counsel? For Rabbi Hanina, it was from the ministering angels: Hashem told them, "Let us make man in our image." Rabbi Shimon adds that at the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to create man, the ministering angels divided themselves into several factions. Some of them wanted that man be created, while others that he not be created. Rabbi Huna recounts, however, that Hashem created man while they were discussing this among themselves, after which He said to them, "Why are you arguing? Man is already made!"

This passage teaches us that instead of reading na'aseh ("let us make"), the Sages read na'asah ("is made"), which is contrary to the plain meaning of the verse that the Midrash itself gives us. Still more surprising is the idea that G-d was in need of their advice. Is it not written, "Who can say to Him, 'What are You doing'" (Job 9:12)?

Now the Gemara recounts as follows: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to create man, He first created several groups of angels and asked one group, 'Do you want us to make man?' They responded, 'What is frail man that You should remember him?' [Psalms 8:5]. With that He pointed His finger towards them and consumed them. The same thing repeated itself with the second group of angels. The third group exclaimed, 'Our predecessors gave You their opinion, but what purpose did that serve? The entire world belongs to You. Everything that You desire to do, do it!' During the period of the generations of the flood and the dispersion, the angels said, 'Master of the world, weren't the first groups of angels correct?' He replied, 'Until old age I am unchanged, and until hoary years I will carry. I have made and I will bear; I will carry and I will rescue' [Isaiah 46:4]" (Sanhedrin 38).

This entire passage also seems strange. Why did Hashem feel the need to create several groups of angels and to ask them their advice if, in the end, He completely disregarded it? What purpose did their responses serve?

I have the impression that Hashem proceeded in this manner for the good of man – in order to guarantee his existence – and that this was part of His extraordinary goodness, without which the world could not have survived. It was essential for Him to consult with them, yet to refuse their advice.

A parable will help us to better understand the situation:

A prince ordered his servant to go to town and buy him a certain precious object, instructing him not to return empty-handed. The servant thus began searching for that particular object, yet he only found a single one that was being sold at an exorbitant price by some shopkeeper. He began to bargain with the shopkeeper, acting as if he were planning to leave, and then returning to discuss the price with him. He was about to conclude the deal, when all of a sudden another dealer passed by and took notice of the sale. Seeing what was happening, he tried to blackmail the shopkeeper into including him in the transaction. The dealer said to the shopkeeper, "I know as well as you do what the imperfections are in the object that you're trying to sell. If you don't agree to give me a cut of the sale, I'll make the buyer aware of the object's imperfections and he won't want to purchase it anymore!" The shopkeeper flew into a rage and shouted, "Get out of here you crook! You won't get a cent!" Greatly irritated, the dealer went to tell the servant about the problems with the object. The latter began to backpedal when he heard this, however he quickly remembered that he couldn't return to the palace empty-handed. He thus paid the price that the shopkeeper had asked. When the servant presented himself before the prince, he refused to accept what the servant had brought back, claiming that he had found some other, more beautiful object in the meantime. Furthermore, the prince no longer wanted something

Continuation page 4

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM RABBI SIMCHA BUNIM OF PSHISCHA

Someone once asked Rabbi Simcha Bunim the following question: “Why do Chassidic avrechim normally leave their families to stay for weeks and months with their ‘Rebbe’ to learn the fear of Heaven from him? Is it impossible, therefore, to learn the fear of Heaven at home with books of Mussar?”

He responded with a story:

“For several nights Rabbi Eizik had dreamed that he should go to Prague and begin digging under the royal bridge, for there he would find a great treasure. Eventually, Rabbi Eizik decided to go to Prague. In arriving there, he went directly to the royal bridge, but at that time he noticed that soldiers were guarding the bridge day and night. He went around it several times, yet he was still fearful of getting close and digging underneath.

“One of the soldiers saw him and asked what he was looking for near the bridge. When Rabbi Eizik told him the story of his dream, the soldier began to mock him and said, ‘I too, I also have an often-occurring dream. I dream that in the town of Krakow there’s a Jew named Rabbi Eizik, the son of Rabbi Yekalis, and that there’s a huge treasure buried under the stove in his home. But only an fool would have faith in the words of a dream.’

“Rabbi Eizik understood that Heaven had sent him to Prague so that the soldier could inform him that he had a great treasure in his house, buried beneath his stove. He went back home, dug underneath it, and there he found a great fortune of gold coins. Rabbi Eizik thus became very wealthy and gave a large amount of tzedakah to the poor. He also built a synagogue that is known as ‘The Synagogue of Rabbi Eizik the son of Rabbi Yekalis.’”

Rabbi Simcha Bunim concluded: “When an avrech goes to the Tzaddik, he realizes that in his home – in his soul – there is a great treasure. If he puts a great deal of effort into digging and searching for this treasure, he will find it, as it is written in the Torah: ‘For the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and your heart – to perform it’ [Deuteronomy 30:14]. It is literally with you.” He also taught his students the following: “The World Above, the World to Come, is also found here in this world, with the Rabbi and the Tzaddik.”

Rabbi Simcha Bunim was born in 5525 (1765) in Vadislov, the son of Rabbi Tzvi the Maggid, who was a great speaker. When he was older, his father sent him to study Torah with Rabbi Yirmiyah, the Rosh Yeshiva of Mattersdorf, and in other yeshivas in Hungary and Moravia. He was greatly influenced by Rabbi Mordechai Benet, who was then the head of the Nickelsburg yeshiva.

When he returned to his father in Hungary, Rabbi Simcha Bunim married the daughter of Rabbi Moshe of Bedzin. As was the norm during that time, Rabbi Simcha Bunim was supported by his father-in-law in Bedzin for several years. There he studied Torah and was encouraged by his wife, a woman of valor who was known for her piety and good qualities.

In Bedzin, he began to get closer to Chassidut, and little by little he started to adopt its customs. He prayed with burning zeal, in the manner of the Chassidim, and went to see to Tzaddikim, Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov and Rabbi Israel the Maggid of Kozhnitz.

Through the influence of the Maggid of Kozhnitz, he was hired by the wealthy Dov Bergson, who put him in charge of dealing in wood and forest products. He devoted himself entirely to this business, frequently traveling to various towns, especially to Danzig and Leipzig in Germany. After a certain

time, he began studying pharmacology and even received a diploma after passing an exam before a board of doctors in Lvov. From there, he went to Pshischa and opened up a pharmacy. During all that time he remained closely attached to Chassidut. He often visited the Tzaddik Rabbi Israel of Kozhnitz, and he was also very close to Rabbi David of Lvov, until finally he found the one in search of his soul – Yaakov Yitzchak, “the holy Jew” of Pshischa. There “the holy Jew” was building a new Chassidut, one of great spirituality, with a number of particularly wise individuals. It is not surprising that Rabbi Simcha Bunim, who himself had a very sharp mind, became attached to him.

In Pshischa, people learned that being a worker of miracles was not as difficult it seems, for all men of a certain level could overturn heaven and earth. What is difficult, however, is truly being a Jew.

The “holy Jew” of Pshischa didn’t live very long. He was 45 years old when he left this world. His disciples assembled to ask Rabbi Simcha Bunim for advice on his succession. He responded with a parable:

“A shepherd fell asleep in a field. At midnight he awoke and remembered his flock, and he was seized with fear lest he find it scattered. He then looked around and was relieved to see the flock grazing peacefully by the edge of a brook. He then got up and cried, ‘Master of the world, how can I thank you for having safeguarded my flock? Put Your flock in my hands, and I will guard it as the pupil of my eye. I will never again fall asleep.’”

Rabbi Simcha finished by saying, “If you can find a shepherd as faithful as that, take him as your Rebbe.”

Everyone got up and said, “It is you, Rabbi Simcha Bunim, who is our shepherd – you who are our Rav.”

Rabbi Simcha Bunim was a great Torah Gaon. However, it is not for this that he is best known. He was wise among the righteous and the pious, and he developed an entire world of wisdom for his Chassidim. He taught them how to be true Jews.

One day a man who mortified himself by a daily fast came to see him. He asked Rabbi Simcha if he had already arrived at the level of a Tzaddik and if he would soon see the prophet Eliyahu.

Rabbi Simcha replied, “The main thing is the way in which a man conducts himself after his fast. Does he eat like a man, or does he devour his food like an animal?”

Tens of thousands of people from all walks of life lined up to listen to him. He was esteemed and respected, wise and intelligent. He had among his students the greatest Chassidim of his generation. At the end of his life, he lost his sight and suffered greatly as a result. He then said, “I, Bunim, prayed to the Holy One, blessed be He, that He take the light of my eyes so that they could open and look upon the glory of eternity, and that my mind be sharpened so as to deeply reflect upon eternity.”

He led his Chassidim for only 13 years, from 5574 (1814) to his death in mid-Elul 5587 (1827). However he succeeded in training a generation of great Chassidim during those 13 years.

With the approach of his death on Elul 12, 5587, he heard his wife crying. He told her, “Why are you crying? All the days of my life have only served in teaching me how to die.”

STORY OF THE WEEK - SAVED AT THE LAST MINUTE!

Rabbi Shimshon Wiener, the Rav of Vienna during the era of Emperor Franz Joseph I, was known for the clarity of his Halachic decisions and his piercing gaze. Many came to him for advice and to receive his blessing.

One day a rich man from a small neighboring town came to him and asked for his blessing for the upcoming wedding of his daughter. The Rav asked for the name of the fiancé and blessed the couple. Not long after the wedding, the man brought his son-in-law to the Rav to meet him.

The Rav saw a modest avrech before him, one who radiated with holiness and whose face lit up with wisdom. The two enjoyed exchanging words of Torah, and at the end of the visit the rich man went back home filled his joy that he had taken such a son-in-law.

The couple could have lived in peace and joy. The rich man assured them of support, and he encouraged his son-in-law to consecrate himself to the study of Torah. They lacked nothing.

However the friends of the young woman were jealous of her husband, for he was as handsome as he was knowledgeable. Little by little, they began to drive the young woman against her husband: "He only knows how to study Torah," they told her. "He sits there studying while you stay at home completely bored. Don't you see that your husband is neglecting you?"

The words of the young woman's "friends" penetrated to her heart. With time, she began to scorn her husband, embittering his life with squabbling and driving her father against him as well. The life of the young avrech became a living hell, and when he no longer had the strength to tolerate it anymore, he took his things and went to see Rav Shimshon Wiener in Vienna. He told the Rav everything that had happened, including his intention to disappear for several years, with the hope that during this time his wife would regret her behavior.

The young woman suddenly found herself abandoned. It was then that she understood that she had gone too far. She waited a week, two weeks, a month, two months ... yet still her husband had not returned. Sadness and sullenness descended upon the rich man's home.

Rumor of what had happened also reached the ears of a young man in a neighboring town, a man who had earlier asked for the girl's hand in marriage. Now, he told himself, was the time to obtain it. A plan of deception developed in his heart: He was going to, as it were, "liberate" the young woman, after which he could marry her.

He proposed to the rich man (the girl's father) that he would travel throughout the cities of Europe in search of his daughter's lost husband. "Provide me with a letter of recommendation from the Rav of the city," the young man told him, "and if I meet your son-in-law, I will show that letter to the local Rav and he will oblige your son-in-law to return, or if he refuses, to grant your daughter a divorce."

The young man spoke well, and he convinced the rich man of his good intentions. He set off with his friends, men who were as admirable as himself, and when they arrived at a town that was sufficiently far away, he decided that the moment was ripe to carry out his plans. They found a poor wretch and offered him a good sum of money to collaborate with them. "We'll claim that you're the lost son-in-law," he told him, "and when we bring you before the Rav for more explanations, begin by going into denial. After that, pretend to think it over, and finally allow yourself to be convinced by the Rav's appeals. Then you'll grant the girl a divorce."

In fact, that is precisely what happened. The local Rav, a simple and honest Jew, thought that the poor wretch being presented to him was really the lost husband. He arranged the divorce and put the band of swindlers in charge of bringing the divorce document to the girl.

They therefore returned with the document and gave it to the girl, who now thought that she was free to remarry. A month passed, and the young man got ready to execute the second phase of his plan. After the "kindness" that he had shown to the girl, it wasn't difficult for him to obtain the hand of the young "divorcee". The rich man and his daughter rejoiced in his proposition, and the two got engaged.

Once again the rich man went to Rav Shimshon Wiener and asked him to preside over the wedding of the couple. The Rav listened to all the details of the story and immersed himself in deep thought. It was obvious that this whole story

didn't please him a bit. Yet he said nothing.

Since Rav Shimshon knew where the son-in-law had gone, he sent him an urgent letter in which he told him to come immediately to Vienna. One week before the marriage, he presented himself before the Rav, and it was clear that he was suffering greatly in his state of poverty. He was very thin, and it was difficult to see in him the son-in-law of a rich man. He was stunned to learn from Rav Shimshon that he had supposedly granted his wife a divorce. He immediately wanted to return to his father-in-law to reveal the imposter, but the Rav restrained him: "People will just think that you changed your mind," he said. "Let me reveal the truth."

On the set day, the Rav was driven to the rich man's home to organize the wedding. Next to him, dressed as a servant, was the real husband. The Rav instructed him on what he was to do.

The "fiancé" was standing under the chuppah and the best man went to get the girl. All of a sudden, the Rav's "servant" cried out that he wouldn't allow the "fiancé" to marry this girl before he had paid him back the money he owed him. The "fiancé" was shocked. "Who's this? I've never seen him before in my life!"

The Rav asked, "Perhaps you did in fact borrow money from him once?" The "fiancé" swore that he had never seen him before, and he repeated his oath two or three times. The Rav then raised his voice and said, "If you have really never seen this man before in your life, how is it that you received a divorce paper from him that you brought to his wife?"

A dead silence fell upon the hall. Dejected, the scoundrel fled. The rich man and his daughter looked at the Rav's "servant" and recognized him as the lost husband. They now understood that the Rav's wisdom had saved them at the last minute from a very serious transgression.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY (CONTINUATION FROM PAGE 2)

as expensive as what his servant had brought back. The servant took this news badly, and he returned to the shopkeeper. "Take back your merchandise," he told him, "and give me back my money. You can clearly see for yourself that it's full of imperfections!" The shopkeeper replied, "Don't come here and give me a hard time. You clearly saw all its imperfections before giving me your money, and you purchased it knowing full well what you were doing."

We know that man was created only to express the glory of G-d, to show reverence for Him, and to observe His commandments. In principle, for the world to continue to exist, a man should remain upright and clear of all sin. If he sins by transgressing Hashem's will, the normal result would be that everything returns to its initial state of chaos, for Hashem didn't create the work of His hands so that it could oppose His will. By the measure of strict justice, even repentance should be ineffective. This is why Hashem in His goodness mentioned all the generations in advance to the first man. He knew that since his beginning, man would be wicked and totally incapable of controlling himself, to the point of doing nothing but evil. This is why, even before creating him, Hashem prepared a way for man to survive, a way that didn't allow his detractors to harm him. It consisted of asking the angels for their advice, and it was done in order for them to respond, "He will sin!" Hashem could then do what was good in His eyes and create man, to the extent that, from then on, even if man became guilty of sin, the accuser would have his hands tied. This is because he had previously said that this created being would be full of imperfections, and Hashem had nevertheless chosen to create him.

This is what the Gemara wants us to understand when it mentions the generations of the flood and the dispersion. The meaning of "I have made and I will bear; I will carry and I will rescue" (Isaiah 46:4) is as follows: "I knew about man's weaknesses, yet I created him all the same." The Midrash drives home the same idea: "At the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to create man, the ministering angels divided themselves into several factions. Some of them wanted that man be created, while others that he not be created." The Creator desired that they mention man's weakness and faults so that he would only be created after this realization. The meaning of "Why are you arguing? Man is already made!" is as follows: "I did not ask you for your advice so that I could follow it, but so that you could clearly recognize the wicked aspects of man. As for Myself, I did what seemed good in My eyes."