

The Path To Follow

Bereshit

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Man is the Crown of Creation...But Only if He Fulfills the Torah

It is written, “And G-d said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the entire earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So G-d created man in His own image, in the image of G-d He created him” (Bereshith 1:26-27).

By his very nature, man was created to rule the world – “let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the entire earth” – this being the goal of Creation, as we read: “You placed everything under his feet” (Tehillim 8:7).

We know that the first man was created in a great state of perfection, befitting the work of the Creator’s hands. In fact Rabbi Hoshaya says in the Midrash, “When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, the ministering angels mistook him [for a divine being] and wished to exclaim ‘Kadosh’ before him” (Bereshith Rabba 8:10). He was so perfect that even the angels erred in his regard. Thus G-d was forced to place him in a deep sleep, says the Midrash, in order to show the angels that he was nothing but the work of His hands, kneaded from clay.

Our Sages ask if the expression “the work of His hands” is proper when speaking of G-d. Did He not create the heavens solely by His word, as we read: “He commanded and it stood firm” (Tehillim 33:9)? Since G-d is not corporal, and the concept of a body does not apply to Him, how can man be described as “the work of His hands”?

The answer is quite simple: This expression is just figurative, as the Rambam states: “What is the meaning of expressions in the Torah such as ‘beneath His feet,’ ‘the finger of G-d,’ ‘the eyes of G-d,’ ‘the ears of G-d,’ and so on? All this expresses the perception of man, who is only familiar with the body, which is why the Torah uses the language of man. Yet these are only descriptive terms. For example, it is said: ‘If I sharpen My glittering sword’ [Devarim 32:41], but does G-d have a sword? Will He kill with this sword? No, clearly this is but a metaphor.” Nevertheless, we still need to explain why our Sages used the figurative expression “the work of His hands,” since we do not find this expression used for any other being created during the six days of Creation.

We may explain this by saying that everything created in the world was done by the word of G-d, as it is written: “The world was created by means of ten utterances” (Pirkei Avoth 5:1). With man’s creation, however, a distinction is made: Man is the work of His hands, far superior to any other created being. As we read in the Midrash, “He gathered and collected dust from the entire earth, from the four cardinal directions, to create the first man” (Tanchuma, Pekudei 3), just as Rashi explains on Bereshith 2:7. Hence man’s creation was the result of great forethought and preparation. Furthermore, in regards to this great wonder that we acknowledge each day by reciting the blessing, “Who formed man in wisdom,” this blessing also states “and created within him.” In other words, He not only created man, but formed him as well. The Zohar alludes to this created being by describing him as “the work of His hands” (Zohar

1:35b), the Creator’s hands.

Nevertheless, even this requires an explanation: Why did Hashem feel the need to create man in such a complex and amazing way? Could He not have just given a verbal command to create him, as He did for all the other creatures? It certainly was not without a specific goal that He formed a being of such importance, nor that He created the first man at such a high level that the ministering angels erred in his regard. On the other hand, why is it written what we cited at the beginning of our discussion: That man should rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the entire earth? Have we resolved this question yet? Why is such an extraordinary being needed in order to rule the world?

That said, one who delves into the words of Rashi will understand: “This expression [veyirdu] denotes rulership [ridui] and descent [yerida]. If he is worthy, he will rule over beasts and cattle. If he is not worthy, he will be subjugated to them and the beast will rule over him” (Rashi on Bereshith 1:26). Thus the expression “let them rule over the fish of the sea...” is not the goal, but rather the consequence of man’s creation. The goal is to accept the yoke of the Torah and the fulfillment of mitzvot, the consequence being that man will “rule over the fish of the sea.”

It follows that the crown placed upon the head of the first man, which is the crown of Creation, still hangs in the balance. If he is worthy, meaning if he fulfills his duty, he will be a king (“he will rule over beasts and cattle”). However if he acts improperly towards his Creator and does not fulfill his mission, he will be a slave (“the beast will rule over him”).

The Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh provides us with an extraordinary explanation in his Sefer HaGilgulim: “By using the term yerida [which can also mean ‘descent’] in the sense of ‘rulership,’ the verse is hinting to us that by his actions, a person can descend from the level of a man to that of a fish, bird, cattle, or even a reptile. Depending on the severity of his sin, this descent can bring him very low, G-d forbid. That is what is being alluded to at the time of Creation: To the different degrees of descent that lead to punishment, or which can lead man back to his source.”

We therefore realize that the goal of Creation is for man to study the holy Torah and fulfill its mitzvot. The first phrase in the Torah alludes to this: Bereshith bara Elokim (“G-d created for reshith”)—created for the Torah, which is called reshith. It was for the Torah that the world was created.

As our Sages explain in the Gemara, “Resh Lakish said: Why is it written, ‘There was evening and there was morning, the sixth day’? What is the purpose of the additional ‘the’? This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, stipulated with the works of Creation and said to them: ‘If Israel accepts the Torah, you shall exist. If not, I will turn you back into emptiness and formlessness’” (Shabbat 88a). From here we learn that as soon as the first man was created, the survival of the heavens and earth depended upon the Children of Israel’s fulfillment of Torah, for that was the goal of Creation.

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In addition, our Sages explain in the Zohar (Toldot 134:1-2) something which people know perfectly well, but unfortunately do not feel to a sufficient degree: “When G-d wanted to create the world, He consulted the Torah and was inspired.” We normally interpret this to mean that the Torah contains, as it were, a blueprint of the world, one in which it is possible to see the oceans, dry land, lakes and rivers. This may be the simple meaning, but much more may also be implied: When G-d created the world, He looked into the Torah to see what was required. A man was required, and so He created a man; a woman was required, and so He created a woman; oceans and rivers were required, etc. Everything that was created was done with a specific goal, and that goal was the fulfillment of Torah.

We may conclude that the Torah did not come after the creation of man, but rather that man was created in order to fulfill the Torah!

That is why man is considered the crowning achievement of creation,

for his entire essence and nature consist of fulfilling the Torah. The Torah is not just a useful tool for him, as are the mineral, vegetable, and animal realms of Creation. Rather, the Torah constitutes his entire being in terms of his actions, attitude, and behavior. Let him fulfill the Torah, and thus fulfill the will of his Creator and enable the entire world to survive.

This is the reason behind man’s tremendous importance. In fact he is so important that he was formed, if we may say, by G-d Himself, the very work of His hands. Furthermore, G-d explicitly said in regards to man: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” That is, from the very outset G-d bestowed this being with a divine dimension, and therein lay his greatness. However it all depends on us: Will we merit to fulfill our mission as created beings who are worthy of being formed by G-d’s hands, or will we want to resemble all other animals, setting ourselves apart so little from them that they dominate us and nobody can protect us from them? The choice is in our hands, for the call is addressed to us: Come, let us make man. Let us use the powers that we possess insofar as being “the work of G-d’s hands”!

At the Source

To Warn and Remind

It is written, “From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it” (Bereshith 2:17).

In the very next verse we read: “Hashem G-d said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone. I will make for him a help as his counterpart.’”

The meaning behind the juxtaposition of these verses is explained in the name of the Mahari Bei Rav, according to what is written in Shabbat (11a). There we find the prohibition against reading on Shabbat by the light of a lamp, lest one comes to tilt it. The Gemara notes that if two people are reading together on Shabbat, then they may do so by the light of a lamp, for if one of them wants to tilt it, the other will remind him not to. Therefore once Hashem placed the first man in Gan Eden to work and keep it, He said: “I will make for him a help as his counterpart.” This was in order for her to warn and remind him of the prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge.

Some Help!

It is written, “I will make for him a help as his counterpart” (Bereshith 2:18).

We find the following story in Marbitzei Torah U’Mussar:

A man was complaining to Rabbi Eizik Scherr that an argument would break out at his home every Friday. This happened because he would complete his preparations for Shabbat very early, whereas his wife would always work until the very last minute.

“How do you prepare for welcoming Shabbat?” asked Rabbi Eizik.

“Thank G-d,” said the man, “from the middle of the day I sit down enwrapped in my Shabbat gelima [cloak], reading the parsha of the week and sanctifying myself for the Sabbath Queen.”

“In that case,” said Rabbi Eizik, “let me give you some advice: Take off your gelima for a moment and go help your wife with some actual work. When the time for Shabbat comes, you can then calmly tell her to stop, and peace will reign in your home.”

Needs are a Blessing

It is written, “Dust shall you eat all the days of your life” (Bereshith 3:14).

If the earth nourished the serpent and provided it with everything it needed, how did this constitute a curse? On the contrary, the serpent was promised an unending supply of food!

The author of Yismach Israel notes that it is precisely this promise – that the serpent would never have to work for food, which it would never lack – that constitutes a curse. In fact pleasure and joy in life only come from obtaining what we desire. This is the reason for the blessing, “Who creates numerous living beings and their needs,” for needs are also part of the blessing.

The greatest satisfaction that a person can have occurs when he obtains what he needs, and cursed is the one who has no desires to be met, one who lacks nothing and who needs nothing.

Arguments

It is written, “Cain spoke to Abel his brother. So it was, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him” (Bereshith 4:8).

What did Cain say to Abel? Our Sages speak about this in the Midrash: “What did they argue about? ‘Come,’ they said, ‘let us divide the world.’ One took the land and the other the movables. The former said, ‘The land you are standing on is mine,’ while the latter retorted, ‘What you are wearing is mine.’ ... Out of this argument, ‘Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.’ Rabbi Yehoshua of Siknin said in the name of Rabbi Levi, ‘Both took land and both took movables, so what did they argue about? One said, ‘The Temple must be built in my area,’ while the other claimed, ‘It must be built in mine,’ for it is written: ‘So it was, when they were in the field.’ Now ‘field’ refers to nothing other than the Temple, as we read: ‘Zion [i.e., the Temple] shall be plowed as a field’ [Micah 3:12]. Out of this argument, ‘Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him’” (Bereshith Rabba 22:7).

Being Afraid of Animals is Unnatural

It was a year of scarcity. There were no clouds in the sky, and the earth, dry and cracked, had produced nothing. There was almost nothing to eat, for a severe famine had struck the Jews of Jerusalem, and the little food that was available was too expensive for them to buy.

At the same time, there existed a yeshiva in Jerusalem where numerous talmidei chachamim studied. If the Jews of Jerusalem faced such a difficult situation, then that of the yeshiva students and their families was far worse!

During that stressful time, the rabbis of Jerusalem and the leaders of the community gathered together, and they decided to send a special envoy to the Diaspora. This envoy would speak to his Jewish brothers and ask them to help the residents of the holy city, who were dying of hunger.

Who would be sent on such an urgent mission? Lots were cast, and the name of Rabbi Avraham Galanti Zatzal was selected. Rabbi Avraham's piety and wisdom were renowned, and throughout his life he never stopped devoting himself to Torah with love. Yet now he found himself obligated to travel great distances to collect money, something that was difficult for him. However such a man could not refuse a mission designed to save lives. He willingly accepted the verdict, and so he took his tallit, tefillin, and some provisions for the journey, then set off for the city of Jaffa, from where he would travel to Constantinople.

After numerous days at sea, his ship finally approached the Turkish coast. Still far from land, the captain noticed some commotion along the coastline: People were running around in every direction, as if they had gone mad, seemingly asking for help. Men even appeared on the rooftops, waving their arms as if seized by great fear. The captain was afraid, and those aboard the ship, who witnessed the same scene, were also overcome with fear. The captain therefore decided to continue sailing, without dropping anchor at the port of Constantinople. When he heard this, Rabbi Avraham was puzzled, for he was supposed to travel to the Constantinople community in order to carry out his rescue mission. Yet now, how could he return to Jerusalem without having fulfilled his mission?

He turned towards the captain and asked him for a small boat and a sailor to lead him to shore. Once they landed, the sailor could return to the ship, while Rabbi Avraham would continue on his way.

The captain did not easily concede to this request. He tried to persuade Rabbi Avraham to stay aboard instead of trying to make it to shore. Yet faced with the determination and persistence of this Jewish traveler, the captain ended up being convinced.

A small boat was lowered from the ship into the water, and a sailor and Rabbi Avraham set out for shore. He hurried to get out upon reaching land, and the small boat returned to the ship, which now hastened to sail away.

Two armed soldiers greeted Rabbi Avraham as he walked up on shore. "If you want to live," they warned him, "leave quickly!"

"What's all the commotion?" he calmly asked.

"Two large, ferocious lions have escaped from the Sultan's zoo," the soldiers explained. "Now they're roaming free through the city. You can understand why the residents are running away and climbing upon the rooftops. You would do well to quickly climb on the nearest roof too!"

The soldiers had barely finished speaking when one of the lions appeared at the street corner. The soldiers disappeared in the blink of an eye, as if the earth had swallowed them up, but Rabbi Avraham didn't move.

With firm steps, the lion approached the man who was now standing in its path. But then, instead of pouncing on him and tearing him to pieces, this ferocious lion lay down before him like an obedient dog at the feet of its master. Rabbi Avraham quickly took the lion by its ear, and in this way he led it towards the zoo, which was located in the courtyard of the Sultan's palace. Rabbi Avraham was still leading this lion when he saw the second lion, which was trying with all its might to break down the door of a house. Standing on the roof of that house were its inhabitants, trembling with fear and petrified over what was happening. Rabbi Avraham approached the lion, took it

by the ear as well, and continued on his way quietly and calmly, holding the ear of a lion in each hand.

From their rooftops, the residents of the city saw this scene and were dumbfounded. At the same time, the Sultan and some of his relatives were standing on the roof of the palace, for they too were overcome by fear on account of the lions. Yet now, appearing before their very eyes, was a Jewish scholar who was making his way to the palace along with two giant lions, which he was holding by the ear as if they were gentle lambs!

Rabbi Avraham and his "escort" quickly arrived at the zoo, at which point the lions obediently entered their cages. The Rav then shut them behind iron gates.

Only at that point did the Sultan and his guards attempt to come down from the palace roof. The Rav was invited inside, where he was welcomed with great honor.

"Who are you?" asked the Sultan, "and how were you able to control these lions?"

Rabbi Avraham told him that he arrived from Jerusalem to collect funds to save Jews who were suffering from a grave famine.

"You're a sorcerer," the Sultan said to him. "Otherwise, how could you possess the courage and strength to control those terrifying beasts that made everyone in this city tremble?"

"Your Majesty," replied Rabbi Avraham, "you can see that I'm a weak, old man. I've never been strong, nor have I ever been a sorcerer, G-d forbid. Our holy Torah completely forbids sorcery, regardless of the kind.

"How was I still able to control these lions? Our Sages teach: 'Who is strong? He who controls his desires.' Throughout my life, I have put a great effort into controlling my desires. Please know, Your Majesty, that I fear nothing but my G-d."

The Rav continued, "Allow me to add one more thing: When G-d created animals, He introduced in them a natural fear of man, as the verse states: 'Let them [men] rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the entire earth.' Nevertheless, this fear only exists when men conduct themselves in the proper way. When they act like animals, however, they lose this divine dimension and should not be surprised to fear animals, rather than animals fearing them."

These words from the Rav, profound and filled with wisdom, impressed the Sultan and his ministers. The Sultan realized that before him was a holy man who was blessed by G-d. "I am obligated to reward this holy and righteous man," he decided deep within his heart. He therefore ordered his treasurer to give Rabbi Avraham a large sum of silver and gold for the needy in his city.

Happy and relieved in his heart, Rabbi Avraham left Constantinople and headed back to Jerusalem, taking with him a tangible reminder of the Sultan's gratitude.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Renewal of Creation Implies a Daily Renewal in Torah

It is written, "In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth" (Bereshith 1:1).

The Sages say (Chagigah 12b) that G-d renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation.

The Sages also say (Bereshith Rabba 1:1) that the beginning mentioned here refers to Torah, as it is written: "Hashem created me as the beginning of His way" (Mishlei 8:22), and the world was only created for the sake of Torah.

A person must always consider the Torah's words as new each day, which is why the Torah is called *reshith* ("beginning"). This teaches us that it is a beginning, and that each day its teachings must seem new to a person, as if he never studied them before in his life. Thus the Sages say, "Words of Torah should not seem to you like an old teaching that interests no one, but like something new that everyone seeks" (Sifrei, Va'etchanan 6:8).

Just as G-d renews the world each day, as He did at Creation, likewise the Torah – which is called *bereshith*, and for whose sake the world was created – must be renewed by man each day as well.

You Made a Golem of Clay (Part I)

It is written, "Hashem G-d formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Bereshith 2:7).

Man, the greatest of all created beings, the work of the Creator's hands and ruler of the entire earth, was created and formed like a Golem made of clay. When the breath of life was infused in him, he became "a living soul," a "soul endowed with speech." And so he stands above Creation – above the mineral, vegetable, and animal realms – he who is endowed with speech. From here comes the beloved character of man, as we read: "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]" (Pirkei Avot 3:14).

The Midrash states, "If all the nations assembled to create one insect, they would not be able to give it life" (Bereshith Rabba 39:14).

The gift of speech, and the bestowal of this gift upon a created being, was demonstrated on the sixth day of Creation through the first man. Nothing more.

Hence among our rabbinic sources, we discover a certain number of episodes in which the great men of Israel created sub-human beings. They did this with the help of the sacred Names that are found in Sefer Yetzirah, the first among all books of Kabbalah, which is attributed to our father Abraham. The most celebrated of these beings is "Yossel the Golem" of Prague. However there have been others, those whose existence is shrouded in mystery. In this article, as well as next week's article, we shall look into the most famous Golems, as well as the halachic consequences of their existence.

They Could Create an Entire World

When the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to create the world, the Midrash states that He created Sefer Yetzirah and consulted it for creating the world. When He finished, He placed it in the Torah and showed this Sefer Yetzirah to Abraham, but he could not understand any of it. A Celestial voice said, "Do you want to compare your wisdom with Mine? If you cannot understand on your own, go see Shem and Eber." Abraham then went to Shem and Eber, and they studied it for three years, until they knew how to create an entire world (Otzar HaMidrashim Pesikta).

The book Chelkat Mechokek cites the work Avodat HaKodesh by the holy kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero: "Sefer Yetzirah dates from the time of our father Abraham. It existed among our people during the time of the First Temple. Jeremiah studied it, as we learn from Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira's Sefer HaBitachon. Rav Chamai Gaon speaks of it in Sefer HaYichud, as well as the holy Kana Zatzal in Sefer HaPelia. He states that the prophet Jeremiah was learning Sefer Yetzirah by himself when a Celestial voice said, 'Acquire a study partner.' He therefore went to see Ben Sirah, and together they studied Sefer Yetzirah for three years, thus fulfilling the verse: 'Those who feared Hashem spoke to one another' [Malachi 3:16]."

The Calf Which They Made

The Gemara states that the Amora Rabba created a "man" by assembling the letters of Sefer Yetzirah. He then sent it to his friend Rabbi Zeira, who wanted to test it. When Rabbi Zeira spoke to it, but received no answer, he said: "Return to your dust" (Sanhedrin 65b).

Another use of Sefer Yetzirah is mentioned in regards to Rav Chanina and Rav Oshaya, who spent every Shabbat eve studying it. They were thus able to create a "third-grown calf" (good and full of flavor, like a young and tender calf) and ate it (Sanhedrin ibid.).

The Rashba cites this in one of his responses, asserting that the two Sages mentioned as having created this calf did so on the eve of Shabbat, "for that was the day of the creation of animals."

The book Shnei Luchot HaBrit deals with this miraculous creation and its origins: "Abraham wrote Sefer Yetzirah and transmitted it to Isaac, Isaac transmitted it to Jacob, and Jacob transmitted it to his sons, for we only transmit Torah secrets to those of noble lineage. Hence they transmitted it to the sons of their wives, not to the sons of their servant girls. In Sanhedrin, we find that Chanina and Rav Oshaya created a third-grown calf every Shabbat eve by means of Sefer Yetzirah."

On the question of whether the miraculous creation of such an animal still necessitates shechita [ritual slaughter] before being eaten, as do other animals, he confidently responds: "Shechita is certainly not required. It is permissible to eat it alive, which is what Jacob's sons did. Joseph believed that it was born from parents, and he told his father that they had eaten a limb from a living animal."

In his amazing book Parashat Derachim, the gaon Rabbi Yehuda Rozanis Zatzal addresses the astonishment of the commentators regarding how Abraham could have fed the angels, to whom he showed hospitality, meat and milk, as it is written: "He took butter and milk, and the calf that he had made" (Bereshith 18:8). Rabbi Yehuda Rozanis explains that Abraham gave the angels a calf which he had created by means of Sefer Yetzirah, meaning that the meal he served did not consist of meat and milk. This is also what the Malbim states in his commentary on the Torah.

Another interesting halachic question appears in Responsa Vayiken Yosef (10): "Can we redeem a firstborn animal with a calf created by means of Sefer Yetzirah?" His answer relies on what is stated in the Yerushalmi (Peah 1:1), where it is said that when only a single red heifer was found, it was purchased at the cost of its entire weight in gold. Why was one not created by means of Sefer Yetzirah? We must say that it is because shechita does not apply to an animal created by means of Sefer Yetzirah, and yet shechita is required for the mitzvah of the red heifer.

The book Sdei HaAretz (Yoreh Deah 3a) also discusses shechita in regards to an animal created by means of Sefer Yetzirah. It also mentions the prohibition against eating forbidden fat and blood, as well as the mitzvah of covering blood and other mitzvot that apply to a wild animal. The conclusion is the same: The law of shechita does not apply to such an animal, nor does the prohibition against eating its forbidden fat and blood, nor must its blood be covered up.

Who Will Give us Meat to Eat?

In regards to the possibility of offering such an animal on the Altar as a sacrifice, the Acharonim have tried to deduce this from what is written in the Mishnah (Pirkei Avot 5:6) and in other places, meaning that Abraham's ram was created at twilight on the eve of Shabbat. In that case, it is clear that even if an animal was not born from parents, it can still be offered as a sacrifice (Pardes Yosef, Vayeishev).

In regards to the complaint raised by the Children of Israel when they said, "Who will give us meat to eat?" (Bamidbar 11:4), the book Petach HaDa'at states: "Could Moshe not have created animals and birds by means of Sefer Yetzirah? In Sanhedrin, a calf was created on the eve of every Shabbat. Even if that was done for the sake of Shabbat, as mentioned in Torat Chaim on this passage, here too this responded to a great need."

The author of Kedushat HaLevi, however, writes that when the Children of Israel complained, "Who will give us meat to eat?" what they meant was that in the manna they could not perceive the taste of meat that was kashered with salt, for this commandment had not yet been given. Such was not the case for fish, for no taste was added via a mitzvah that could not be perceived in the manna. We can fully understand why Moshe did not create animals and birds by means of Sefer Yetzirah, for in that case the Children of Israel would have eaten them without shechita or salting, as the Shlah explains. Yet what they desired was precisely the taste of meat that had been kashered with salt!

Guard Your Tongue!

Many Err in this Area

If Levi is speaking to Reuven and telling him negative things about Shimon, and Reuven relates this to Shimon (thus transgressing the laws concerning gossip), then it is forbidden for Shimon to tell Levi: "Why did you say this about me?" As such, Shimon would be spreading gossip about Reuven.

Even if Shimon does not say that he heard it from Reuven, it will be easy for Levi to understand on his own that it was Reuven who told Shimon about it. This is forbidden, and many people err in this area.

– Chafetz Chaim