



Parshas Bereishis

For the week ending 24 Tishrei 5758
24 & 25 October 1997

Overview

In the beginning, Hashem creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, Hashem rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbos, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava — the Human pair — are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing “sin” into themselves, Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain in childbirth. Now begins the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the subject of the history of the world. Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to Hashem. Hevel gives the finest of his flock, and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel, and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain until the birth of Noach. After the death of Sheis, Mankind descends into evil, and Hashem decides that He will blot out Man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noach, finds favor with Hashem.

Insights

WHOSE LAND IS IT, ANYWAY?

“In the beginning of G-d’s creating the heavens and the earth” (1:1)

The Torah is not a history book. It is the instruction manual of the world, written by the Maker of the world.

If this is so, why doesn’t the Torah begin with the first of the Maker’s instructions? (The sanctification of the new moon in the Book of *Shemos*.) Instead, the Torah spends the whole Book of *Bereishis* identifying the Creator, and the connection of the Jewish People to Him.

Rashi, commenting on these first words of Torah, asks this question. He answers that if the nations of the world should claim: “*You are thieves! You stole the land of the seven nations of Canaan!*” then the Jewish People will be able to hold up the Book of *Bereishis* and say “*The whole world is Hashem’s. He created it and He gave it to whom He deemed fit. He decided to give Eretz Yisrael to them, and He decided to take it away from them and to give it to us.*”

Of course, that’s all well and good provided you accept that the Torah is the word of G-d. However, the nations of the world don’t seem to be in a great rush to accept the Torah.

Surely they can say that they are not obliged to honor a deed of ownership that relies on such a self-serving argument!

The answer is that we do not expect the nations of the world to accept the Torah as authentic, for they never stood at Sinai, nor do they have the benefit of an unbroken chain of Torah transmission. ***We, however, must know that our right to Eretz Yisrael comes from the Owner of the World, and our title-deed to Eretz Yisrael is His Torah.***

IMAGINE

“Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness...(1:26)”

How can man be “in Our image?” What possible comparison can there be between G-d and Man? G-d is the “Painter” and man is the “painting.” How can the painting resemble the artist in any way?

All the animals of creation view the world through their senses. They know only what they see, smell, hear, touch and taste. Their world is bounded by immediate perception. Man is different. The word for Man in Hebrew is *Adam*, which comes from “*dimion*,” meaning “imagination.”

The very essence of man, for that is his *name*, his defining quality, is his *imagination*. Man can fly above mere physical perception and travel to the ends of space and time — in his mind. Only Man can take what he perceives and compare, analyze and extrapolate.

This is the comparison between man and his Creator. Hashem said “*Let Us make Man...*” so that Man will have the power of imagination to extend himself by thought into places where nothing previously existed.

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GOOD VS. VERY GOOD

“...G-d saw all that he had made, and behold it was very good.” (1:31)

With each new creation, the Torah says, “and G-d saw it was good.”

With one exception.

The creation of Man. After Man’s creation, it doesn’t say that “God saw it was good”.

Why not?

The idea of Hashem *seeing* something implies that the nature of that entity is transfixed and immutable for eternity. However Man is not fixed. He has free will to choose either good or evil. Thus, concerning Man the Torah does not write “and G-d saw it was good.”

However, after the creation of Man, Hashem took a *second look* at the Creation and deemed it *very good*. Because with Man’s creation there came into existence a being who had the ability to *choose* to do Hashem’s Will, rather than to do it involuntarily like a flower or an animal or a star.

Thus, when Man fulfills Hashem’s Will he elevates the entire Creation from *good* to *very good*.

PARTNERS

“Let Us make Man...” (1:26)

One of the reasons that the Torah speaks here in the plural “Let *Us* make Man...” is to teach us that every human being is obliged to be a partner in the ongoing work of creation — that he should make himself worthy to be the goal and purpose of Creation.

It is for this reason the Creation concludes specifically with Man — to indicate to him that he is the “end” of creation — its purpose.

Thus, it is only fitting that Man should not only perfect his actions, but also his body. The mitzvah of *Bris Milah* (circumcision) indicates that Man, by making himself a partner in his own physical and spiritual self-perfection, shares in the concomitant perfection of the world.

DRESSED TO KILL

“After a period of time, Cain brought an offering to Hashem of the fruit of the ground; and as for Hevel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock” (4:3)

Why does the Torah prohibit the wearing of *Shatnez* — a mixture of linen and wool?

“*The fruit of the ground*” that Cain brought as an offering to Hashem was flax-seed. Linen is made from flax. Hevel’s offering was wool from the fleece of a sheep. When Cain saw that Hashem rejected his offering, whereas that of Hevel was accepted, he became jealous and angry and killed his brother.

Thus a combination of flax and wool would “remind” Hashem, as it were, that the first murder in history occurred as a result of these offerings.

We, as Hashem’s people, must not recall violence and murder between Man even by the clothes we wear.

Haftorah Isaiah 42:5-43:10

The Haftorah takes up the Parsha’s theme of Creation. It stresses that the Creation was not just a primordial event, but that Hashem creates the world anew at every second. Without this constant re-creation, the world would cease to exist.

Similarly, Hashem did not just create the world and then leave it to its own devices, like winding up a clock. Rather, He involves Himself with the smallest event in creation. The Haftorah also mirrors the creation of Mankind (the “key players” in Hashem’s purpose for creating the world) with the role of the Jewish People who are to be the key role-model for the world, *a light unto the nations*.

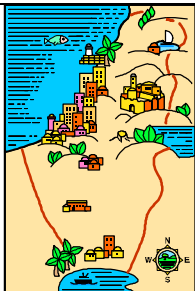
Just as in the Parsha, Adam sins but is given the opportunity to redeem himself, so too the Haftorah describes how the Jewish People falter and fall into sin, and yet, through Hashem’s mercy Israel is never abandoned for they are the agents of Hashem’s original intention.

Sources:

Who’s Land Is It, Anyway? - Heard from Rabbi Nachman Bulman
Good Vs. Very Good - Meshech Chochma
Partners - Rabbi Moshe Feinstein
Dressed To Kill - Midrash Tanchuma

LOVE OF THE LAND

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