

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Bereishis

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

IT'S UP TO US

Reb Leibele Eiger

"In the beginning G-d created..." (1:1)

I learned three things in Kotzk: that humans are humans, and angels are angels; that if one wants, one can be even greater than an angel; and "In the beginning, G-d created..." means that G-d created just the beginning - and He left the rest for us to complete.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov

"In the beginning G-d created..." (1:1)

"In the beginning" - the first thing a Jew must know is that "G-d created the heavens and the earth."

The basis of all knowledge is that G-d is the sole creator of everything.

CONSTANT RENEWAL

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"In the beginning G-d created..." (1:1)

Hashem created the world in a state of beginning so as to always be in a creative state. It is not like an object formed and completed by a craftsman. The universe needs continual labor and renewal. If this process were to stop then the universe would revert to its original chaos.

[Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev adds that we say "He creates light and creates darkness" (Daily Liturgy) in the present rather than the past tense because the process of creation is a continuous one. Thus, it says, "He is constantly renewing, with His goodness, creation every day." Similarly, Rebbe Nachman, Reb Aharon Karliner and many others have noted that just as the Almighty renews creation every day, so too, must each individual renew his faith and be an innovator every day.]

PARTNERS IN CREATION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"In the beginning G-d created..." (1:1)

It is a known fact that G-d, the Torah, and the Jewish People are one. Therefore, observance of the *mitzvot* expresses the purpose of creation.

The words "In the beginning" indicate that creation is only the first phase in an ongoing process, for man is intended to be G-d's "partner in creation" (Shabbat 10a), helping G-d realize His desire for a dwelling. G-d created the material world but left to man the task of revealing the spiritual within it.

The Zohar states that "G-d looked into the Torah and created the world. Man looks into the Torah and maintains the world."

DIVINE DUTY

Chiddushei HaRim

"In the beginning G-d created..." (1:1)

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 1:6) comments that Israel is called "first" in the Torah. The word "first" (ראשית) is used rather than "beginning" to show that the Creation came for the sake of Israel.

It is imperative to bear in mind that it becomes our duty, as Jews, to perform any act that may make the world a better place in which to live.

CHARACTER IMPLICATIONS

Strikover Rebbe

"In the beginning G-d created..." (1:1)

We find character implications in the letters of the word *Bereshit*, namely: *bitachon* - trust; *ratzon* - will; *ahavah* - love; *shetikah* - silence; *yirah* - fear; and *Torah* - learning.

THE BEGINNING

Rebbe Nachman

"In the beginning G-d created..." (1:1)

Moshe did us a great favor by beginning the Torah with the simple words "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and earth." In this way, he provided us with a model of faith that involves no sophistication or philosophy. (See Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #219)

The world was created principally for the sake of testing people's faith. Once, a follower of Rebbe Nachman was experiencing doubts. The Rebbe told him that all of creation came into being because G-d saw that there would be people who would cling to faith despite being plagued by confusion. G-d saw that these people would overcome their questions and remain strong in their beliefs, and for them, He created the world.

The word *Bereishit* (בראשית) may be written as *Beit Reishit* (ב' ראשית). The word *Beit* (בית) may itself be read as the word *Bayit* (בית, home), and the word *reishit* (beginning) can be understood as referring to the Torah (Vayikra Rabbah 36:4). Thus, the word *Bereishit* - *bayit reishit* - teaches us that a person who builds his life on Torah principles brings benefit to his home. This is reflected in the fact that when we return to our homes following the holiday of Sukkot, we begin reading the Torah again from *Bereishit*. (See Likutey Moharan I, 266)

I was with Him as a nursling. (Mishlei 8:30)

Do not read *Amon* (אָמון, nursling), but *Uman* (אומן, blueprint). (Bereishit Rabbah 1:1)

The Torah is the blueprint of the world. Everything is sustained by combinations of letters in the Torah (see Likutey Moharan I, 33:3). Therefore, one can always find the Torah, which provides a pathway to G-d, in whatever exists in creation.

The word *Bereishit* can also be translated as "for the sake of the head." The world was created for the sake of Israel, which is its head. (Vayikra Rabbah 36:4)

When G-d created the world, He anticipated the pride and joy that He would derive from the good deeds of His nation, Israel. Therefore, He created everything in the world in accordance with how it would reflect that pride and joy. (See Likutey Moharan I, 17:1)

[Rabbi Chaim Kramer adds: Some people might reflect the beauty of the Swiss Alps; others, the beauty of the Amazon rainforest or even the Sahara Desert. Every Jew must be aware of how important he is in G-d's eyes, and know that in one way or another, he reflects the beauty of Creation.]

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d. (Tehillim 111:10)

The letters of the word *Bereishit* (בראשית) can be transposed to form the phrases *Yarei Boshet* (ירא-בשת, awe-humility) and *Yarei Shabbat* (ירא-שבת, awe-Shabbat). Shabbat (שבת) is associated with repentance, for it contains the same letters as *Tashuv* (תשוב, you will repent). Thus, with the word *Bereishit*, the Torah indicates the importance of striving for awe of G-d. With this awe, a person can attain great levels of humility before G-d, so that even if he falls, he can always return to Him (Likutey Moharan II, 72; *ibid.*, I, 38).

Furthermore, *Yarei Boshet* (awe-humility) indicates that a person's humility - which is due to his understanding of the awesomeness of G-d - inspires him to fear G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 22:10)

The letters of the word *Bereishit* (בראשית) can be rearranged to form the phrase *Rosh Bayit* (ראש בית, head of the house). The "head" refers to the *tzaddik* and the "house" to the world. A person's first step in drawing close to G-d should be to seek out the *tzaddik*. (See Likutey Moharan II, 67)

Inherent within each new situation is the Divine attribute of judgment. Just as all of Creation came into being only after the *tzimtzum*, so too, we can attain our own goals only after we face the constraints of each new instance of *tzimtzum* - with its "chaos, emptiness and darkness" - until we come to the light. (See Likutey Moharan I, 84)

CHARITY AND HOPE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"In the beginning G-d created..." (1:1)

Challah (the kneaded dough given to the *Kohen*), *Bikkurim* (first fruits) and *Terumah* (tithes) are called "first." In the merit of performing these *mitzvot*, the world was created. (Bereishit Rabbah 1:4)

This Midrash teaches that charity is the first and foremost pillar of Creation. Before a person performs any creative act, he would be wise to give charity. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 216a)

The world was created with Ten Sayings ("G-d said..."). Yet only nine times does the Torah record the words "G-d said." This teaches that Bereishit is a Concealed Saying. (Rosh HaShanah 32a)

Just as Bereishit is a Concealed Saying, G-d's presence is concealed in Creation. When the Torah states, "The earth was formless and empty, with darkness upon the face of the depths, and the spirit of G-d hovered above the surface of the waters" (1:2), it gives us hope for our own lives.

Despite everything that can overwhelm a person and upset his life, G-d is with him and can take him out of his confusion and chaos. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 213a)

This point is made even clearer by the fact that the Torah never mentions the creation of the waters, only that the spirit of G-d “hovered above the surface of the waters.” Though certain things in Creation conceal G-dliness, we should always know that G-d is present. (ibid., p. 430)

FILLING THE VOID

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth...” (1:1)

We are taught in the Midrash that G-d created the world as a “lower realm” - i.e., a realm initially devoid of Divine consciousness, and even opposed to it - intending that humanity fill the world with Divine consciousness. The tool that G-d gave humanity in order to enable it to perform this feat is the Torah. The drama of creation thus required three elements: the world, the human race, and the Torah, serving respectively as the setting, the actors, and the script.

G-d gave humanity the free choice to ignore Him and His intentions for the world, and this is exactly what the early generations did. In keeping with His decision to grant free choice, G-d obliged, so to speak, by removing His revelation from the world, hiding progressively further behind the facade of nature.

In response to most of humanity’s choice to ignore Him, G-d implemented His “contingency plan”: He took the one family that continued to nurture the original ideal of Divine consciousness and forged them into a nation - the Jewish people - with whom He then entrusted the mission of fulfilling His original purpose for creation. The Jewish people would both serve as an inspiration and example for the rest of humanity and encourage them to play their role in His scheme for transforming the world into His home. The Book of Bereishis is the chronicle of how the creation of the Jewish people became necessary and how it came to be. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, pp. 1-15; vol. 10, pp. 3-6) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

TAKING THE FIRST STEP

Lechivitzer Rebbe

“In the beginning G-d created...” (1:1)

Bereishis can be translated as “For the sake of the first.” Hashem demands that man make a beginning in the right direction and after, He will assist him to continue on the right path.

Therefore, He ordained that we should dedicate the first fruits, the first stalks of grain, the first cattle to Him, and the Law of Tradition commands us to devote the first part of the day to prayer.

PROPER PREREQUISITE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth...” (1:1)

Rashi asks why the Torah begins with the description of creation when it should begin with the first *mitzvah* of *Rosh Chodesh* in *Parshas Bo*. After all, the Torah is a book of *mitzvos*. Why does the Torah begin with creation?

Rashi answers that if a nation who had been living in Eretz Yisrael would be evicted by *Klal Yisrael* and claim that the Jewish people stole Eretz Yisrael from them, we would be able to respond that Hashem created the world and can decide who inhabits an area at any given point in time.

The Slonimer Rebbe (Nesivos Shalom) points out that Rashi does not fully answer the question. Rashi’s suggestion only provides a reason for why *Parshas Bereishis* precedes the *mitzvah* of *Rosh Chodesh*. It doesn’t resolve why the rest of the *parshiyos* in *Sefer Bereishis* and the first two *parshiyos* in *Sefer Shemos* exist.

The Slonimer Rebbe explains based on a comment of Rav Chaim Vital. Rav Chaim Vital asks why there is no formal *mitzvah* to develop positive *middos*. If there is so much emphasis on the value of working to refine one’s character traits, shouldn’t that be included in one of the 613 *mitzvos*? Rav Chaim Vital answers that ensuring that one has refined *middos* is the basis for all *mitzvos*. It isn’t necessary to have it as a separate *mitzvah* because it is embedded in the very fabric of every *mitzvah* that we do.

Based on the insight of Rav Chaim Vital, the Slonimer Rebbe explains that *Sefer Bereishis* and the first two *parshiyos* of *Sefer Shemos* are included in order for us to learn from our *Avos*, *Imahos*, *shevatim* and Moshe Rabbeinu about how to develop positive character and personality traits.

As the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 25a) tells us, *Sefer Bereishis* is referred to as *Sefer HaYashar*, the book of the straight. Hashem wants us to work on ourselves before receiving commandments, and ultimately the Torah itself. It is for this reason that the stories of our ancestry are included prior to introducing the *mitzvos*.

The Slonimer Rebbe is highlighting a critical and important lesson in *avodas Hashem*: *Derech eretz kadma l’Torah* - “Respect precedes Torah.” While we certainly must go to great lengths to ensure that we perform each and every *mitzvah* in the best way possible, we must also approach developing positive character traits and *middos* as a prerequisite for observing *mitzvos* within the appropriate framework.

THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth...” (1:1)

Mashal: In Europe, at the turn of the twentieth century, life was simple. People didn't need much and, for that matter, people didn't have much. So when a package arrived from America to the home of the famed mashgiach, R' Yechezkel Levenstein zt'l, containing some sort of electrical appliance, the family really had no idea how it worked. They took the funny looking apparatus out of the box and sat it on the table. Then they looked at it, up and down, and still they could not figure it out. Finally, R' Yechezkel said, "Where's the box it came in? It must have come with some sort of instructions to teach people how to use it."

Sure enough, they turned the box upside down and found the instructions. After that, it wasn't too hard to figure out how to use the appliance.

Nimshal: The Midrash tells us: "Hashem looked into the Torah before creating the world." The Torah was, in fact, the "blueprint" that Hashem used in order to produce this glorious and magnificent edifice. That day, holding the instructions in his hand, R' Yechezkel shook his head and said, "If a minor appliance such as this must come with instructions in order to use it, how much more so does an entire world need a blueprint of instructions - the Torah - in order to make it work!"

REVEALING THE CONCEALED

Baal Shem Tov

"In the beginning G-d created..." (1:1)

The word *bereishit* (בראשית) can be read as *bet reishit* (ב' ראשית), "two beginnings." For there is a material *bereishit*, namely, the beginning of the universe, and there is a *Torah bereishit*, the start of the Torah.

The purpose of these two beginnings - the world and the Torah - is *bara Elokim*: The word *bara*, "He created," is related to the word for clarity, and *Elokim* refers to the G-dliness that is concealed within creation. *Bara Elokim* means to clarify and reveal the ultimate purpose of this concealment.

The supernal *sefirot* (Divine attributes) similarly contain two heads: The *sefirah* of *keter* and the *sefirah* of *chochmah*, each of which is referred to as *reishit*, a beginning. However, whereas the *keter*-beginning is concealment, the *chochmah*-beginning is revelation, as in the verse (Tehillim 111:10), "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d."

On Shabbat Bereishit, the light and vitality of *chochmah* shines forth and flows across the entire subsequent year. Each day of the year, be it an ordinary weekday, a Shabbat, a festival, or a private festival celebrated by an individual - such as the day a child is first introduced to *cheder*, the day of his *bar mitzvah*, and other auspicious occasions or events in his life - receives its light and vitality from Shabbat Bereishit. Your spiritual conduct on this first Shabbat of the year will directly influence your spiritual performance during the rest of the year.

RIGHT BEFORE OUR EYES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"The earth was formless and empty, with darkness upon the face of the depths, and the spirit of G-d was hovering upon the surface of the waters..." (1:2)

Mashal: In the dead of winter, a group of hikers became lost in the forest. Night fell, and the group was unable to find their way back to the regular path. No matter how hard they searched, they could not locate the correct trail.

At first light, however, one of the hikers called out, "I found it!" and immediately pointed out a large straight path that led them directly back to civilization.

As the group happily walked back to the encampment, each member wondered aloud, "How could we have missed it? The path was right there before our very eyes!" It was clear, though, that the thickness of the forest, together with the blackness of the night, prevented them from locating the path.

Nimshal: The Chafetz Chaim zt'l explains that the original darkness that covered the earth at the time of Creation is compared to *Olam Ha'zeh* (This World), which is steeped in the darkness of sin, foreign religions, and an underappreciation of Hashem, Who controls this earth.

But Hashem also created light, which correlates to *Olam Haba* (The World to Come). It is so close; it is right there before our very eyes! All we need to do is banish the darkness in order to attain this wondrous light of the Torah.

FIRST DARKNESS, THEN LIGHT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"The earth was formless and empty, with darkness upon the face of the depths, and the spirit of G-d was hovering upon the surface of the waters..." (1:2)

"Formless," "empty," "darkness" and "depths" refer to the four exiles (Bereishis Rabbah 2:4).

The "spirit of G-d" is the spirit of Mashiach. (Zohar I, 192b)

G-d sees the end from the very beginning. In the beginning, He foresaw that there would be exiles and suffering. But also in the beginning, He created the source of consolation from that suffering: Mashiach and Redemption.

Moreover, the spirit of G-d "hovers" above the depths. Even in the midst of suffering, the "spirit of G-d" hovers right above a person.

When there is *tohu vavohu* - too much confusion - one cannot see or experience G-d. Yet he should be aware that G-d is always "hovering" nearby. At any time, a person can attach himself to G-d and bring about a revelation of G-dliness. (Likutey Halachot III, p. 306)

Why is it that goats precede the sheep in a flock? Just like the Creation: First came darkness, then came light (goats are generally a darker shade than sheep). (Shabbat 77b)

The seed of a medicinal plant must be nurtured to sprout properly so its healing qualities can take effect. So too, faith must be nurtured for its qualities to be effective. Even more, faith must precede healing.

Why? "Just like the Creation: First came darkness, then came light." Darkness signifies a lack of advice; light represents clear counsel. A person who is surrounded by the "darkness" of indecision must seek counsel from one who can reveal it to him. That one is the *tzaddik*, whose "deep waters are counsel in the heart of man, and a wise man will draw them forth" (Mishlei 20:5).

"Waters" - i.e., counsel - nurture the "seed" - faith - which sprouts into vegetation and herbs that can heal. Thus, first comes darkness, which causes a person to be ill. Then comes "light" - counsel, faith and healing.

DIVING INTO TORAH

Baal Shem Tov

"The spirit of G-d was hovering upon the surface of the waters. And G-d said, 'Let there be light...'" (1:2-3)

You have the spirit of G-d within you. It is your soul. When you invest your very soul into studying the Torah - the Divine waters - hovering with patience and diligence over its sacred words, attempting to reach greater depths of insight, then G-d commands, "Let there be light!" - you will suddenly find your eyes illuminated with the light of the Torah.

Dovid HaMelech prayed (Tehillim 71:9), "Do not cast me aside in old age!" This is the cry of the Torah to each Jew: Do not treat my teachings as old material! View me as new each day!

REVEALING THE LIGHT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"G-d said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light..." (1:3)

On the First Day, everything was created in potential, to be actualized on its own, individual day. (Rashi)

The original light created on the First Day was deemed too great for this world and was hidden away for the *tzaddikim* in the Future (see Bereishis Rabbah 12:6).

Creation demonstrates the process of bringing potentiality into actuality. Right from the beginning, obstacles exist - the chaos, the void, the darkness - representing the impediments that each person faces when he tries to create a spiritual life for himself.

One must persevere. Then, "G-d said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" - meaning, the light that is there in potential will come into existence. It is up to each person to seek out and reveal this light.

REPLACING DARKNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light..." (1:3)

G-d seeks "partners" in His ongoing re-creation of the world. Thus, whenever we take upon ourselves to begin some project intended to promote holiness, goodness, and Divine consciousness in the world, we should remember that we are G-d's emissaries in this endeavor, acting on His behalf.

This being the case, our own "act of creation" must take its cue from G-d's creation of the world. Just as the initial state of reality seemed antithetical to Divine consciousness - void, chaotic, and dark - so will there be challenges and obstacles to our own creative projects. Nonetheless, just as light broke through and illuminated the world on the first day of creation, paving the way for the rest of the creative process to unfold, so too, when we resolve to see our endeavors through to fruition, G-d will turn the tables, and light and order will displace chaos and darkness. (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 7, pp. 9-10; Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, p. 657) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

LIGHT OF THE FUTURE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"G-d saw that the light was good..." (1:4)

The original light illuminated so brightly that a person could see the entire globe. G-d foresaw that the wicked would misuse this light, and hid it for the *tzaddikim* for the Future. (Bereishis Rabbah 12:6)

From the very beginning of Creation, G-d envisioned everything that would take place until the end of time. Similarly, our goal should be to look towards the end of time, to the place beyond our temporal lives, and focus on the World to Come.

Thus, "G-d saw that the light was good" - He saw that it was not for this world, and He hid it for the *tzaddikim* (ibid., 12:6). A person who desires to see this light must therefore attach himself to the *tzaddikim*, follow in their paths, and always focus on the ultimate goal.

TRANSFORMING DARKNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d saw that the light was good..." (1:4)

"Light" signifies Divine consciousness and "darkness" signifies the lack thereof. G-d created the world inherently "dark" in order for us to transform it into His home by shining the light of Divine consciousness into it.

This pair of opposites - light and darkness - manifests itself in many ways: as knowledge vs. ignorance, positivity vs. negativity, love vs. hatred, order vs. chaos, and so on. In each of these cases, there is an inherent power in the "darkness" that is lacking in the "light."

This inherent power of darkness can be harnessed, like the rest of creation, toward the fulfillment of G-d's purpose. Thus, rather than use light to eliminate darkness, G-d wants us to use light to transform darkness itself into light - to make the darkness itself shine with Divine consciousness.

This is why, when "G-d saw that the light was good," He did not do away with the darkness, which would have left daylight to shine throughout the entire 24-hour day. In fact, darkness purpose is so important that for half the year there is more darkness than light.

Rather, when "G-d saw that the light was good," it was because we can use light to subordinate and guide darkness, to direct darkness' power toward holy purposes. (Bereishis Rabbah 2:5; Likutei Torah 2:7d) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

LIGHT IS COMING

Imrei Shefer

"And there was evening and there was morning, one day..." (1:5)

The Jewish day begins with night. The night is laden with trepidation and fear. However, when daytime comes, there is light and salvation.

As is known, "the righteous begin with affliction and end with salvation. The wicked begin with salvation and end with affliction."

DON'T PROCRASTINATE

Rabbi Yisrael of Modzhitz

"And there was evening and there was morning, one day..." (1:5)

"ויהי ערב - and there was evening" - These are the deeds of the wicked. "ויהי בקר - and there was morning" - These are the deeds of the *tzaddikim*. (Midrash)

The *tzaddik* says he will do *teshuvah* this morning (בקר), and the wicked says he will do *teshuvah* tonight (ערב).

Thus, the *tzaddik* spends his whole life in repentance, while the wicked spends his whole life in sin since he never gets around to doing *teshuvah*.

PEACE THROUGH UNITY

Strikover Rebbe

"And there was evening and there was morning..." (1:5)

"And there was evening" signifies the persecutions of the Diaspora; "And it was morning" signifies the Redemption. "It was one day" lets us know that when the Jews will act as one, there will peace and harmony among them.

NIGHT AND DAY

Reb Noson of Breslov

"G-d called the light 'day,' and the darkness He called 'night.' And there was evening and there was morning, one day..." (1:5)

Each day of a person's life contains a night and a day - both ups and downs.

Our main mission in life is to combine the two, to understand that even in the darkness, there is light, and that notwithstanding the light and good moments, there could be difficult moments, too.

With this understanding, we attain true faith and come to recognize G-d. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 202)

Any architect of value will constantly seek to design new and different structures. The Architect of the world certainly creates new things each day. Each day must shine brightly, with added light.

We can emulate G-d by cultivating renewed energy and a fresh approach each day, to add light and goodness to our lives. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 123a)

One can attain "daylight" and intellect only when he acknowledges that there is a "night" and constrictions that precede it. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 208a)

INCREASING DESIRE

Rebbe Nachman

"G-d said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and it will separate between water and water...' (1:6)

At the onset of Creation, everything was a single unity. But on the Second Day, G-d created the firmament to separate the "lower waters" from the "upper waters." Each of these "waters" desired to be close to G-d, and they cried and pleaded with Him for that privilege. (Tikkuney Zohar #5, p. 19b)

We see, then, that the firmament keeps the lower waters at a distance from G-d. We generally find that the greater the value of our objective, the greater the obstacles that we face in order to attain it. And once we reach a goal, the greater our satisfaction in having done so and in having withstood the challenges along the way.

G-d created a "firmament" that separates us from our spiritual goal. If we truly desire G-dliness and spirituality, we will cry out to G-d and beg Him to draw us close. Thus, the obstacles we face in our spiritual search are not meant to keep us at a distance, but to increase our desire to attain the knowledge of G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 66:4)

ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

Reb Noson of Breslov

"G-d said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and it will separate between water and water...' (1:6)

When the waters were separated, the lower waters began to cry. Each said, "I want to be before the King!" [Therefore] G-d made a covenant with the waters that they would be placed upon the Altar [in the Temple, during Sukkot]. (Tikkuney Zohar #5, p. 19b)

The lower waters "cried" because they didn't know that it was possible to reveal G-dliness through them. The firmament represents the *tzaddik*, who shows those "below" that even they can reveal G-dliness. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 29a)

WHEN TO SEPARATE

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"And [G-d] divided the waters that were beneath the firmament from the waters that were above the firmament, and it was so..." (1:7)

According to the Midrash, the comment "and it was good" was omitted here because the waters were divided from one another and division is not good. But why, then, do we find the comment "and G-d saw that it was good" in connection with the fourth day of Creation, when G-d also made a division, this time between light and darkness (1:18-19)?

Because the division between light and darkness - unlike that of the waters - was a division between opposites, and it is desirable and even "good" to separate such opposites as light and darkness, since these two cannot exist together. But the waters belonged together, and it is not "good" to put asunder things that should be one.

This should teach us that people of like minds should unite and that any division among them is a bad sign. However, in the case of good and evil, a clear-cut separation is actually a good sign.

FINDING THE GOOD

Reb Noson of Breslov

"G-d made the two great lights - the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night - and the stars..." (1:16)

Because it was diminished, the moon was given the stars to accompany it. (Chullin 60b)

The stars represents the *tzaddikim* (cf. Daniel 12:3) who find goodness even in the darkest moments and merit even in the most unworthy people. Their actions rectify the diminished moon. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 304)

STRENGTHENING OUR FAITH

Rebbe Nachman

"G-d made the two great lights - the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night - and the stars..." (1:16)

The sun - the "greater light" represents wisdom, which illumines the path a person walks upon and directs him to his goal. The moon - the "lesser light" - represents faith, which guides a person when he cannot understand the circumstances of his life's journey. This is why the moon shines at night, in darkness - for in a person's darkest moments, faith illumines his path. (See Likutey Moharan I, 35:5-6)

Originally, these two lights were created as equals - thus, a person's faith would be as solid as his intellect. However, G-d then diminished the moon - and so a person must struggle to build his faith, especially when he faces challenges. He must always work on strengthening his faith until, in the words of the prophet, "the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun" (Yeshayahu 30:26). (See Likutey Moharan I, 1:2)

REFLECTIVE LIGHT

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"G-d made the two great lights - the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night - and the stars..." (1:16)

G-d creates the "two great luminaries in the sky, the great one to rule the day and the small one to rule the night" (1:16). Why does the *pasuk* (verse) announce two great luminaries, only to further single out the sun as the great luminary?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik suggests an insight into the concept of great and small. While the sun is itself a source of light, the moon only reflects light. When we are young, we receive guidance and wisdom from parents and teachers, with the hope that one day we will become that source of light and inspiration for others. Reflecting light when we are still growing does not diminish our greatness; rather, it enhances it as we humbly learn from those who have accomplished what we hope to one day reflect toward others.

MAKING MAN

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"And G-d said: 'Let us make man in Our image...' (1:26)

Before G-d created the first human being, the Torah relates, He pronounced, "נעשה אדם - Let us make man." Surprisingly, it seems that G-d was speaking to somebody, inviting him to come and make Adam together with Him. Whom was He addressing?

The Ramban explains that Hashem was not actually addressing anyone, but rather proclaiming that He would create Adam together with the earth. Adam was made עפר מן האדמה - from the earth (2:7), and thus Hashem announced, "We shall make man" - that He would make Adam with the earth which He had just brought into existence.

The Radak explains נעשה אדם to mean that all of existence was created for the purpose of serving man. After everything else was created, Hashem proclaimed that now all of creation would come together to sustain the human beings, for whom the entire universe was created.

Rashi offers a different interpretation, explaining that Hashem wanted to teach us a very important lesson about humility. Before creating the human being, G-d consulted, as it were, with the angels. Of course, Hashem's wisdom is perfect and lacking nothing, such that He has no reason to consult with anybody about anything. Nevertheless, He turned to the angels and asked their advice, so-to-speak, to teach us that it is proper to consult with even those who have fewer skills and less experience than we do. We always stand to gain from hearing a different opinion, and a different perspective, even from those who have yet to reach our level of expertise.

The Zohar presents an especially meaningful explanation for the נעשה אדם. According to the Zohar, Hashem was addressing Adam himself, the human being whom He was now creating. Before the creation of man, Hashem turned to him and said, "We are going to create you together. I will begin the process. I will bring you into the world, give you a body and a soul, a personality, strengths and talents. But you will have to do the rest."

We human beings are given the challenge - and opportunity - to complete our creation by working to perfect our beings. We are the only such creature in all of existence; all other creatures are meant to remain the same way they were created. Angels are pristinely spiritual, bereft of physical drives and temptations, whereas animals are entirely physical, driven exclusively by physical instincts. Human beings are the only creatures which are a composite of these two dimensions, the physical and spiritual, and who must therefore work to overcome our negative tendencies and improve ourselves.

Hashem turns to each and every one of us and announces, נעשה אדם - that we are to partner with Him in the creation of ourselves, by putting in the work to grow and achieve to our fullest potential. We are not just spectators in our lives; neither are we to passively allow life to take us to whichever direction it happens to go. We are active participants in building our lives and our beings, bidden to work as G-d's partners in our own creation.

The Zohar adds that Hashem refers to the creation of man with the verb נעשה ("let us make"), as opposed to נברא ("let us create"), as a veiled reference to *Bnei Yisrael's* pronouncement at Mount Sinai "נעשה ונשמע" - We shall do

and we shall hear" (Shemos 24:7). The way we do our part to create ourselves is by committing ourselves to the Torah. The Torah is our script that we follow in order to fill our role on this "stage" which is life. Hashem invites us to partner with Him in the process of our creation, and He told us how this is done - by adhering to the laws presented in the Torah.

GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

Rebbe Nachman

"And G-d said, 'Let us make man in Our image and likeness. They will rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals and the entire earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth...'" (1:26)

G-d created Adam alone so that each individual (a new "Adam") will say that the world was created for him. (Sanhedrin 37a)

Therefore, each individual has a responsibility to refrain from sinning, which would damage the world and harm others. Instead, he must seek to improve the world, particularly by praying for all of existence - even for the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms. (See Likutey Moharan I, 5:1)

MAJORITY RULES

Kotzker Rebbe

"And G-d said, 'Let us make man in Our image and likeness. They will rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals and the entire earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth...'" (1:26)

When the Holy One, blessed be He, proceeded to create man, Compassion said: "Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of loving-kindness." Truth argued: "Let him not be created, for he is made of falsehood." Justice said: "Let him be created for he will do justice." Peace said: "Let him not be created because he is full of strife." What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took Truth and cast it down to the ground. (Midrash)

When Truth was cast down to the ground, Peace remained the sole objector to man's creation, with Compassion and Justice both in favor of the decision to make man.

Why did G-d choose Truth, rather than Peace, the other objector, to be cast to the ground?

Because not even a majority vote can stand up against Truth. Even if both Justice and Compassion had favored man's creation, arguing that he would practice justice and compassion, Truth would have proceeded to prove that even his acts of justice and mercy would be sham and falsehood. Peace, on the other hand - which argued that man would be full of strife - could easily be made to give way to a majority combination of Justice and Compassion. Hence, Truth, rather than Peace, was "cast to the ground."

DESTINED FOR GREATNESS

Rab Noson of Breslov

"G-d created man in His image. In the image of G-d, He created him; male and female He created them..." (1:27)

The angels argued with G-d, "Do not create man, for he will sin against You." (Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 24:7)

But G-d did create man, for He is compassionate beyond description. G-d saw to it that there would be *tzaddikim* in every generation who would work to infuse people with the knowledge of G-d and who would eventually bring all people back to serve G-d. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 37a)

Shabbat, the day G-d finished His Creation, represents the World to Come, the level of "beyond time." Adam was created just before Shabbat, because man's mission is to elevate everything from the level of being ruled by time to the level beyond time. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 420)

OVERCOMING SETBACKS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good..." (1:31)

On the first day of creation, Hashem created light. But this light was so intense and spiritual that Hashem felt that some people were unworthy to experience it. Thus, He set it aside for *tzaddikim* to enjoy in the World to Come.

On the third day, Hashem created fruit trees. However, although He decreed that the bark should have the same taste as the fruit, the earth disobeyed this command - and was actually cursed for this intransigence.

Yet again on the fourth day, Hashem's Master Plan was not entirely fulfilled. The two great luminaries - the sun and the moon - were created equal in size. But then the moon complained that "two kings cannot share one crown" (Rashi), and Hashem minimized the size of the moon.

We learn an amazing lesson from the Almighty, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, says R' Avraham Pam zt'l.

When a person works on a major project, there are bound to be setbacks; not everything runs smoothly, nor does everything go exactly according to plan. A human being can become dejected, despondent, even depressed. But Hashem looks at things from a higher perspective: "Hashem saw all that He had done - and it was very good!" With all the "setbacks" and reversals on each day of Creation, Hashem only focused on the positive. "It was very good" - it wasn't just good, it was "very good!" It was so good that Hashem chose to focus only on the wonderful aspects of Creation.

One can curse the darkness, or one can light a candle! It's a matter of choice. We cannot control what happens to us in life - but we can control the way we see and deal with it. If one looks for the good, then they will surely find it!

NEED FOR FLEXIBILITY

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"And G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good..." (1:31)

Looking at the beginning of *Sefer Bereishis*, it seems to read like a catalog of mistakes or opportunities lost.

Hashem commanded the earth to grow trees that taste like fruit, and it instead grew trees that sprout fruit but not trees that themselves taste like fruit (Rashi).

Adam and Chava are instructed not to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas*, but they transgress their instruction and eat from it, and Hashem expels them from the Garden of Eden.

Kayin and Hevel are involved in a dispute that ends in murder.

Such a series of events hardly reflects the description of *טוב מאד* given to the creation (Bereishis 1:31). How do we understand this rapid deterioration?

Rabbi Shalom Rosner (Shalom Rav, p. 3) quotes Rav Pam, who says that we learn from here that life doesn't always go according to plan, and when it doesn't go the way that we thought it would, we need to be flexible enough to embark on Plan B! Even in a world described as *טוב מאד*, not everything develops in the way that we think it will. We will find success if we have sufficient resourcefulness to adapt and embark on a new plan.

The idea that things do not always work out the way we expect them to is also found at the birth of our people as a nation.

In the Pesach Haggadah, at the end of *עבדים היינו*, we proclaim: "And had *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* not taken us out of Egypt, then we and our children and grandchildren would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt!"

History would seem to disprove this proclamation. Over time, every nation that has become enslaved has eventually gone free. Slaves have gone free as a result of a new benevolent ruler, others as a result of revolution, and others as a result of a change in societal norms. Why do we assume that had Hashem not come to our rescue 3,000 years ago in Egypt we would still be slaves? Would history not have inevitably followed its usual pattern?

The Be'er Yosef answers with a simple message: Life does not always follow the script that we expect it to! If we analyze history with cold, scientific parameters and apply strict logic, then we can become disappointed when things do not turn out in the way that we expected. We will be unable to change our approach in light of unexpected disappointment.

The creation of individuals and the birth of our people as a nation teach us that we need to be aware that we may need to alter our path. Either individually or collectively, we may need to adopt a second plan because life is unpredictable. The better prepared we are and the more flexibility we show, the happier we will be.

APPRECIATING THE AMENITIES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good..." (1:31)

Mashal: The founder of the Mussar Movement, Rav Yisrael Salanter zt'l, once traveled to the city of Paris where he was scheduled to meet a wealthy Jew. The Jew insisted that they meet in the lobby of an exclusive hotel in Paris. R' Yisrael had no choice but to acquiesce.

When the man sat down with R' Yisrael, he ordered two cups of coffee. The coffee was served by an impeccably dressed waiter, and when the rich man received the bill, he commented on how expensive a mere cup of coffee was.

R' Yisrael had an altogether different perspective.

"Everyone knows that a cup of coffee is inexpensive," he said. "Yet the proprietors of this fine hotel are correct to charge a high price. Look at this magnificent building, at the luxurious gardens, fountains and paintings. When I drink this coffee, all these factors add to my enjoyment and pleasure. For this reason, they have a right to charge extra!"

Nimshal: We all reside in This World, the "hotel" of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who created everything in its most perfect state. Thus, even when we sip a cup of water, we should think of all the side benefits that we enjoy; the ground we stand on, the air we breathe, the blue sky over our heads, the scent of flowers and the sound of birds chirping. When we make a brachah on a cup of water, we should thank Hashem for all the goodness involved in giving us this great pleasure.

THE DAY OF REST

Reb Noson of Breslov

"With the Seventh Day, G-d completed His work that He had done. He rested on the Seventh Day from all His work that He had done..." (2:2)

"Made the world" represents an "arousal from below," signifying man's efforts to create during the six days of the week. "Rested on Shabbat" represents an "arousal from Above," in that everything is performed by G-d alone, for He bestows benevolence even if we do not make an arousal from below. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 2)

What was the world missing? Rest. Comes Shabbat, and with it comes rest. (Rashi)

The rest that was created on Shabbat completed the Act of Creation. For the rest that comes on Shabbat - the focal point of the six weekdays - sustains the world. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 109a)

THE FACE OF SHABBOS

Sefas Emes

"And G-d blessed the Seventh Day..." (2:3)

He blessed it with the light of a person's countenance; the light of someone's countenance during the week is not the same as it is on Shabbos. (Midrash)

According to Jewish law, the Sheva Berachos of a marriage service can be repeated on the seven days of festivity following the wedding only at those meals where "a new face" (a guest who had not attended the wedding or previous Sheva Berachos) is present. On Shabbos, however, the blessings may be recited even if there is no "new face" among the guests.

Shabbos is exempt from the ruling because on Shabbos the light of every Jew's countenance is transfigured. Thus, on Shabbos, each person represents a "new face" at the wedding festivities, because their face is not the same as it is during the week.

RETURNING ON SHABBOS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"For on it He ceased from all His work that G-d created to do..." (2:3)

This means to say, as explained in the holy books, that through his deeds, a Jew - although a terrestrial creature - can merit throughout his life to travel in the higher worlds. ("Traveling in the higher worlds" means clinging mentally [deveikus] to G-d. The Ramban describes this state as thinking about G-d constantly, even, for example, while carrying on conversations with other people.)

This is true especially on the holy Shabbos. Since the sanctity of Shabbos is so great, a Jew who observes it cleaves on that day automatically to an exalted holiness. As such, a Jew returns to his source on Shabbos. (The natural disposition and consciousness of every Jew is to be constantly aware of G-d; the exigencies of life in the physical world militate against sustaining this consciousness. The enveloping sanctity of Shabbos allows our consciousness to return to its natural state of deveikus.)

This is the allegorical import of the phrase "for on it He ceased," for the word for "ceased" [שבת] is related to the word for "return" [שוב], and thus this phrase can be read, "On it [i.e., Shabbos], he [i.e., the Jew] returns [to his source]."

The verse continues, "from all His work that G-d created to do," emphasizing the verb "to do" [לעשות], meaning that even His handiwork that He created in the world of *Asiyah* [עשייה], i.e., the human being, returns in his thoughts on Shabbos to the higher worlds, on account of the exceeding radiance and sanctity of Shabbos.

FAITHFUL BLESSINGS

Rebbe Nachman

"And G-d blessed the Seventh Day and made it holy, for on it He ceased from all His work that G-d created to do..." (2:3)

By observing Shabbat as a day of rest, we express our faith that G-d created the world and rested on the Seventh Day. Thus, Shabbat corresponds to faith, which is the source of all blessing, as indicated in the verse (Mishlei 28:20), "A man of faith has abundant blessings."

Therefore "G-d blessed the Seventh Day" - for, like faith, Shabbat is the source of all blessing for mankind. (See Likutey Moharan I, 31:2)

GRAFTING ONTO HASHEM

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"And G-d blessed the Seventh Day..." (2:3)

The Imrei Chayim of Vizhnitz suggested explaining the word ויברך (And He blessed) in this *pasuk* as referring to הברכה - grafting, the agricultural process of attaching a branch of one tree onto a different tree. G-d blessed Shabbos with the special power to enable us to "graft" ourselves onto Hashem.

Throughout the workweek, we are beset by worldly responsibilities and pressures. We try to bond with Hashem, but the grind and turmoil of the workday get in the way. On Shabbos, however, we are given the special opportunity to disconnect, to turn off our phones, to leave the noise of social media, to put behind us our mundane pressures and obligations, and connect with Hashem.

The Gemara in Maseches Beitza speaks of a נשמה יתירה - "extra soul" - which we receive on Shabbos. Numerous different explanations have been given for what exactly this means. According to the Imrei Chayim, this means that on Shabbos, our soul is not conflicted, it's not struggling, and instead has the ability to bond with Hashem.

On Shabbos our soul is given the extra special power to be "grafted" onto Hashem, to bond with him in an especially beautiful way. This is the precious gift which we are given each and every week - the opportunity to "graft" ourselves onto Hashem and bring our relationship with Him to the next level.

BEYOND NATURE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"...on the day that G-d made earth and heaven." (2:4)

The Torah uses two main Names for G-d. Throughout its account of the creation week, it refers to Him exclusively by the Name *Elokim* (אלקים), which signifies His concealment within creation.

This is because only by hiding His existence could G-d create creatures who are conscious of themselves as being separate from Him. This concealment of G-d is known as "nature," the facade that makes us think that the world runs by itself.

But when the Torah begins the story of humanity, it introduces a second Name of G-d, *Havayah* (Y-H-V-H), which signifies His revelation, His open intervention in the affairs of the world. This is because humanity's mission is to reveal G-d within the physical world.

In order to accomplish this, G-d grants us the unique capacity to connect with Him beyond the limitations of nature. (Hitva'aduyot 5748, vol. 3, p. 163) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

THE SALVATION IS READY

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"The trees of the field did not yet come to the earth, the grasses did not yet sprout, because Hashem had not sent rain to the world, and there was no man [yet in the world] to work the land..." (2:5)

Rashi explains: "Why didn't it rain? Because man wasn't in the world to work the land and no one was there to recognize the goodness of rain. When Adam came and he knew that the world needs it, he prayed, it rained, and trees and grass grew."

Rashi explains that Hashem created the trees and the grass, and they were waiting, ready, under the ground, but needed rain to sprout. When Adam was created on the sixth day, he recognized the need for rain, he prayed and then all flora grew to their full height.

We learn from this that the salvation is ready and waiting. All we need to do is daven to Hashem and ask Him to give us what we need.

STAYING CONNECTED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d formed the human out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils a soul of life..." (2:7)

By "blowing" the soul into the body, G-d indicated that our soul originates deeper "within" Him than does the rest of creation. This emphasizes the fact that we are the primary purpose of Creation, whereas everything else is secondary.

Our Divine soul is a spark of G-d. Therefore, the soul can never lose its intrinsic connection with G-d. Our challenge is to ensure that this connection remains manifested within our physical being.

Just as when one blows, the air can reach its destination only if there are no physical obstructions, so too, the more we free our lives of spiritual "sludge" - harmful or negative thoughts, words, or deeds - the more our G-dly souls can shine freely. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

SPIRITUAL AGRICULTURE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d planted a garden in the eastern part of Eden and placed there the human whom He had formed." (2:8)

The fact that G-d's first act after creating the world was to plant a garden stresses the centrality of agriculture in civilization. A healthy civilization must be based on a healthy and vibrant agricultural sector that works the earth responsibly, simultaneously maximizing the health-giving qualities of its produce and ensuring the sustainability of its resources. An unworked or overworked earth will cause civilization to be destroyed.

Allegorically as well, tending to our own "garden" - our full array of spiritual resources - is the basis for ensuring our spiritual health. Just as the farmer must avoid detrimental practices, we must avoid damaging behavior. And just as the farmer must cultivate trees and plants in order that they bear fruit, so must we pursue our spiritual goals in order to maximize their effect on the world. We must not allow ourselves to lie desolate: our lives must bear fruit. Our spiritual produce must sustain both ourselves and others in a lasting and meaningful way. (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 20, p. 378) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

IT'S ALL FOR US

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Hashem, G-d caused to sprout from the ground every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food..." (2:9)

The Midrash (Koheles Rabbah 7:19) says, "When Hashem created the first man, He took him and showed him all of the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him, 'See My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are? And everything that I created, I created it for you.'"

This message was not limited to the first man; each of us are equally urged to internalize this lesson, as the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 37a) states, "every individual is obligated to say, 'For my sake the world was created.'" If we take this obligation seriously, we will come to recognize that everything we experience has been specifically created "for me." Such an attitude leads to a close connection with Hashem by knowing that He is constantly awarding us opportunities to grow through the experiences and challenges we encounter, and He is willing us to succeed.

Someone who unfortunately did not appreciate this lesson was a taxi driver who once drove Rav Yechezkel Levenstein and related the following story: "Rabbi, I have a very religious best friend. He wasn't always religious though, we were army buddies, and he was as secular as me. After our service was up, we all went to India to have some fun and decided to camp in the jungle. In the middle of the night, I woke up to hear muffled screams. My friend had a huge boa constrictor around his neck squeezing tighter and tighter. I screamed and hit the snake with a

stick but it just wound itself tighter around his neck. My friend was quickly losing consciousness. With nothing else we could do, someone shouted, 'Say Shema Yisrael.' And with his last ounce of strength this is what my friend did. The moment he completed the last word, the snake loosened his grip and slithered away. It was a miracle! My friend became a changed man. He now wears a hat, lives with his religious wife, and has kids in yeshivas."

"I understand your friend's acceptance of Torah and *mitzvos*," the Rav exclaimed, "but why are you not more religious after witnessing it?"

"Me?" said the taxi driver in astonishment. "The miracle didn't happen to me!"

We may not be as blind to Hashem's providence as this man but how many times do we ignore the inexplicable successes we experience in life? And how much do we change our lives when we see miracles that happen to those around us? If we keep our eyes and hearts open, then each of us will see a world of kindness and realize that it is all for "me." This recognition will grant us a greater appreciation of Hashem and guarantee that our connection to Him will be deepened.

CLING TO YOUR WIFE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cling to his wife..." (2:24)

The Gemara (Yevamos 61b) states: "A man without a wife is living without goodness." R' Boruch Epstein zt'l (Torah Temimah) expounds on these words and says that the main purpose of marriage between a man and a woman is for them to live a life of fulfillment, mutual respect and devotion for one another. Otherwise, they are no different than animals who simply drift together out of natural habit.

R' Avigdor Miller zt'l's doctor gave him the news: The fainting spells he had been experiencing had finally been diagnosed, and surgery was needed. R' Miller did not agree to the surgery immediately, despite the doctor's warnings. But after spending some time thinking it over, he finally agreed to the operation. Baruch Hashem, the surgery went well, and before long R' Miller was back to his usual hectic schedule.

A few days after the surgery, a prominent *rav* paid R' Miller a visit and inquired how he felt after the operation. "You know," R' Avigdor remarked, "I had complete faith in Hashem that I would be fine, and I really didn't need the surgery. But I decided to go through the operation for my rebbetzin's sake."

He went on to explain that every morning, his wife would wake up early to escort him down the steps on his way to davening. She was afraid that her husband might faint and hurt himself. R' Miller shrugged, "I can't practice my *emunah* on my wife's account," he concluded. "So I agreed to have the operation."

"But Rebbi, does one have to extend himself so far for his wife - even to the point of undergoing major surgery?" the *rav* exclaimed.

"For a wife," said R' Miller emphatically, "one must do far more!"

APPRECIATING OUR SPOUSE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cling to his wife..." (2:24)

Parashas Bereishis recounts the creation of the world, including plants, animals, and humans. At first glance, it seems that G-d includes Adam's marriage to Chava in order to highlight the contrast between man and animal. However, the Biblical concept of marriage describes an "acquisition" of a wife (Kiddushin 2a), seemingly equating Adam's control over Chava with his ownership of the animals he named.

Rabbi David Forman of Aleph Beta addresses this question by comparing the concept of "acquiring" a partner to acquiring Torah. Rabbi Forman explains that acquiring Torah doesn't involve control or ownership; rather, it completes us only when we actively treasure it, appreciate it, and work on it. The same applies to marriage: men and women - unlike animals - complete each other when they appreciate each other and continually work on their relationship, establishing together a union worth treasuring.

SNEAKY SNAKE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And [the serpent] said to the woman: 'Did G-d really say not to eat from any of the trees of the garden?'" (3:1)

Both Chava and the serpent knew that G-d had not forbidden any fruit other than that of the Tree of Knowledge. G-d intended for Adam and Chava to expand their Divine consciousness by enjoying the fruits of the Garden.

Thus, the serpent was suggesting that by depriving them of the fruit of this tree, G-d was limiting their ability to accomplish His objective: "If He has denied you this fruit, He may as well have denied you all fruit!" Eating the forbidden fruit, the serpent argued, would be the best way to achieve G-d's purpose.

This is the classic technique of the evil inclination: It does not (initially, at least) attempt to convince us to disobey G-d's will, for we, as logical thinkers, would refuse. It instead convinces us that transgressing G-d's will is a shortcut to accomplishing G-d's purposes.

Thus, at the very dawn of human history, G-d's first lesson to us was to reject our evil inclination's schemes, in order to remain true to our Divine calling. (Torah Ohr 5c-6a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

AGE-OLD TACTIC

Chiddushei HaRim

"And [the serpent] said to the woman: 'Did G-d really say not to eat from any of the trees of the garden?'" (3:1)

It was one of the character traits of the first serpent on earth to seek to cool man's zeal for fulfilling G-d's commandments, and to persuade him to disregard them.

The serpent said to Chava: "And what if G-d said that you mustn't eat of any of the garden's trees? What harm can there be in disobeying just this once? Why be so particular about your fear of G-d all the time?"

This approach - first tried by Gan Eden's serpent - has been used throughout history by all those attempting to lead others astray from their faith.

BITE OF THE SERPENT

Peninim Yekarim

"The serpent said to the woman: 'You shall not surely die...' (3:4)

The serpent pushed Chava to the tree until she touched it, and then he said to her: "Just as you haven't died when you touched it, so, too, you won't die when you eat it." (Midrash)

What proof did the serpent cite that there was no death in merely touching the tree? The fact that he had made Chava touch the tree and she did not die immediately. But didn't G-d imply that death would come "on the day that you will eat from it"? The day was still young. How could Chava be sure that she wouldn't die that day?

The serpent said: "You may eat of the fruit to your heart's content. If there is no risk of death in touching it, you will probably not be at risk in eating it. But even if you were to die for having touched the tree, you may eat of its fruit because you can only die once, and you might as well enjoy yourself beforehand."

This is the way of the evil impulse. Once he has caused someone to start on the road to sin, he says: "You see, you are lost already. So you might as well enjoy yourself while you are still alive."

COMPLETE FAITH

Reb Noson of Breslov

"For G-d knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened. You will be like G-d, knowing good and evil..." (3:5)

The Serpent's enticement caused Chava to waver, thinking that she might be able to gain G-dly wisdom in order to understand the reasoning behind G-d's decrees and laws. Even today, one who insists upon knowing and understanding G-d's reasons before he performs a *mitzvah*, as did Chava, "eats" from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Instead, one must show absolute faith in G-d, even if he does not know or understand G-d's reasons. Having faith is a rectification for "eating from the Tree." (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 205a)

LIVE IN THE PRESENT

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

"She [Chava] also gave some to her husband, and he ate..." (3:6)

Adam's transgression was that his main concern was for the morrow. The serpent prodded him by telling him that he was a servant who was unable to tell the difference between good and evil. He was told to eat the fruit so he could choose good and receive a reward. And Adam, worried about the morrow, listened and did evil.

He would not have done so if he would have been grateful for the present. He would have listened to G-d's commandments and resisted. The morrow would have taken care of itself.

ANSWERING THE CALL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (3:9)

With this question, G-d was asking Adam, "Look, Adam, where have you fallen to! What has become of you?" By asking the question, He gave Adam the opportunity to confess his sin and atone for it. This would have softened the effect of the sin and avoided the need for G-d to administer restorative punishment. Had Adam repented, he would have thereby fulfilled the purpose for which G-d gave him the opportunity to sin, i.e., to anguish over the distance from G-d experienced in his self-centeredness and thereby achieve an infinitely greater yearning for Him than would be possible otherwise.

These words pose an eternal question to every person: "Where are you? Are you aware of the purpose of your existence on this earth? How much of your life's mission have you accomplished?"

Answering this call will enable us to maximize our potential and fulfill our Divine mission of transforming the world into G-d's home. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 73-75) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PERFECTLY IMPERFECT

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"G-d called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (3:9)

After Adam and Chava falter by eating from the forbidden tree, they hide, which prompts G-d to ask them, "Where are you?" (3:9). Why would G-d rhetorically ask them where they were?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (grandson of Hagaon HaRav Yaakov Kamenetsky) explains that G-d was impressing upon Adam and Chava as well as teaching future generations that even when we make mistakes, He is still looking for us. G-d isn't seeking out our errors but for us to own up to our mistakes and improve our behavior going forward. Our mistakes don't define us unless we let them determine our future.

May we not consider errors as deficiencies in our character, and instead, associate our positive actions with our authentic selves.

DETERMINING THE MOTIVE

Kesav Sofer

"[G-d said to man,] 'Did you eat of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?'" (3:11)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: "Did you eat from the tree because I commanded you not to do so?"

Some may have a craving for forbidden food because it is delicious. Others have a craving for it not because it tastes good but because it is forbidden, and they allow themselves to be persuaded by the evil impulse to eat it, as it is written (Mishlei 9:17): "Stolen waters are sweet..."

G-d said to the man: "You ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil not because you considered the fruit to be good to eat, but only because I commanded you not to eat from it."

The first man sought to justify his behavior and replied: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." To this the Midrash adds: "He meant: 'I ate and am still eating of it.' I ate of it not because You forbid it but only because the fruit was really good, and I wanted to eat more of it."

SNOWBALL EFFECT

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I will eat.'" (3:12)

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 19:12) notes that in Adam's defense for eating from the Tree of Knowledge, he should have said, "she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Why does Adam say that he "will eat," implying that he still plans to eat from it in the future despite the fact that he knows he would be sinning?

The Pri Tzaddik (Bereishis #8) answers that Adam realized the gravity of what he did. He knew that his sin was more than a single sin; rather, it was a catalyst for future sins. Because, by lowering his spiritual level through his transgression, he placed himself on a slippery slope which he knew would lead to further transgressions.

This concept does not only apply to the first man, but to each of us too, as it says in Pirkei Avos (4:2), "Sin leads to further sin."

If we think of this in terms of an immune system, it means that even allowing ourselves to be involved in a relatively minor transgression lowers our spiritual immune system. At this lower level, we are now more susceptible to sin.

This message was powerfully demonstrated as millions of people watched the Space Shuttle “Challenger” explode mid-air just seventy-three seconds into flight. The cause of the explosion was discovered to be a malfunctioning O-Ring - a small flexible band, worth a fraction of everything else on the spacecraft which cost close to ten billion dollars. The snowball effect of the faulty O-Ring resulted in the entire system being thrown out of sync, which broke up the orbiter, causing a ball of fire to swallow the entire spaceship, leading to the deaths of all seven on board.

We see from this fateful story that although everything else in the system was in perfect condition and worth millions of dollars, when even the smallest thing went wrong, it created a chain effect spiraling out of control, eventually causing everything to be destroyed.

Applying this lesson to ourselves, we need to make every effort to distance ourselves from any wrongdoing - however slight - and if we ever fail, immediately rectify the issue by building up our immune system through sincere *teshuvah* and a genuine commitment to try harder.

CUTTING ALL TIES

Chiddushei HaRim

“[And G-d said to the serpent,] ‘...you shall eat dust all the days of your life...’” (3:14)

The Sages point out that as a result of this curse, i.e., that he may eat only dust, the serpent finds food ready for him wherever he goes. Furthermore, our Sages say (Berachos 57), “If one sees a serpent in a dream, it means that one’s livelihood is assured.”

Where, then, does the curse lie? The serpent’s curse is that he had gone so far from the G-dly way that G-d did not want him to look Heavenward for his food. All other creatures must search for their food, and there are times when they look up to G-d for their sustenance (compare with: “The young lions roar for their prey and seek their food from G-d” - Tehillim 104:21). But G-d wants no part of this serpent. Hence, He says to him, in effect: “Here is all the food you want. Take it and get out of My sight.”

FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And Adam called his wife Chava, because she was the mother of all living things...” (3:20)

The previous verses in the Torah tell us that Chava was responsible for bringing death into the world as punishment for eating from the tree of knowledge and subsequently convincing her husband to do the same.

This being the case, it is very strange that Adam would name his wife “Chava,” a name which refers to her being the source of all life; surely the opposite was true?!

After the sin, when Adam and Chava were about to be expelled from the Garden of Eden, Adam was faced with a choice: To dwell on his wife’s mistake (the Ohr HaChaim for instance learns that Adam did not know that he was eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and therefore was not as responsible as Chava) and consequently live out the rest of his life in bitterness and regret? Or, to put the past behind him and focus instead on his wife’s positive qualities and attributes, valuing her despite her sin?

The Gemara (Sotah 17a) says that a husband and wife who live in harmony merit that Hashem’s presence will dwell amongst them. Adam knew that being exiled from the Garden of Eden meant that they were leaving Hashem’s close company. So, in order to ensure that Hashem’s presence would actually accompany them throughout their exile, Adam committed himself to maintain a state of marital harmony and only focus on Chava’s positive attributes.

Thus, by calling his wife “Chava - the mother of all living things,” Adam would always be reminded of her greatness, instead of her terrible mistake. In so doing, he guaranteed that Hashem would be with them at all times.

IMPRESSIONABLE CHILDREN

Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein (Volozhin)

“And He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim...” (3:24)

Cherubim, meaning angels of destruction. (Rashi)

The Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant “...spread out their wings on high, screening the Ark cover with their wings...” (Shemos 25:20). To this, the Sages comment: “The Cherubim had the form of a child’s face.”

If a child is trained properly, the child may grow up to be like the Cherubim who guarded the Holy Ark. But if a child doesn’t receive the proper training, he or she can become like the Cherubim at the east of Gan Eden, who were angels of destruction.

SELF-SACRIFICE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“Kayin brought an offering to Hashem from the fruit of the soil...” (4:3)

When one learns the story of Kayin and Hevel (4:1-16), one can’t help but wonder why Kayin’s *korban* was rejected when Hevel’s was accepted. If anything, Kayin was the one who initiated the idea of bringing a *korban*, yet Hevel was the one who seemed to get the credit!

The Slonimer Rebbe (Nesivos Shalom) explains that if you study the *pesukim* which describe Kayin and Hevel’s *korbanos*, you will notice the difference between them.

When Kayin offers his gift to Hashem, the Torah states: *vayavei Kayin mipri ha'adamah minchah l'Hashem* - "and Kayin brought fruit from the earth as an offering to Hashem." Yet, when Hevel bestows his gift, the Torah states: *V'Hevel heviy gam hu mibechoros tzono* - "And Hevel also brought from his firstborn sheep."

The Slonimer Rebbe explains that the distinction between what Kayin and Hevel gave to Hashem was where it came from. Kayin offered from the fruit of the land, but it wasn't anything which came from him personally. Hevel, on the other hand, gave Hashem his most precious firstborn sheep.

Similarly, the Sfas Emes points out that when it came to Hevel's gift, the Torah states: *V'Hevel heviy gam hu* - "and Hevel also brought himself." Like we just mentioned, Hevel gave Hashem part of himself and not just some generic impersonal offering.

When we try to strengthen our relationship with Hashem through self-sacrifice, Hashem welcomes us with open arms. Yet, when our efforts do not involve giving from ourselves, Hashem seems less interested. It is for this reason that Hevel's *korban* was accepted, while Kayin's was rejected.

This is the time of year when we get to put all those promises, which we made to Hashem, into action. Were we just giving Hashem lip service during the *Yomim Noraim*, or did we really mean what we said? Are we prepared to give a part of ourselves to Hashem, or are we just looking for a convenient relationship with Him?

Let us show Hashem that we are serious about our relationship with Him by giving from ourselves, which is most precious to Him.

GIVING WITH JOY

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"In the course of time [lit, "in the end of days"] it came to pass that Kayin brought [an offering] of the fruit of the ground... and Hevel also brought... and Hashem respected Hevel and his offering." (4:3-4)

The expression "and it came to pass" implies grief. Kayin brought his offering because he saw "the end of days," that is, he realized that the years of his life were coming to an end and the thought grieved him.

Hevel, on the other hand, brought his offering with joy and zest for life. He did it not because he felt he was about to die, but because he wanted to serve G-d, and therefore "Hashem respected Hevel and his offering."

BE CAREFUL OUT THERE

Kesav Sofer

"[G-d said to Kayin,] 'If you improve yourself, you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin crouches at the door...'" (4:7)

When one is at home it's easier to adhere to one's accustomed way of life. But once one leaves one's house and goes into the street, one's evil impulse will gain ground because one must now face obstacles that will hinder his service of G-d.

"Sin crouches at the door" - the evil impulse lies in wait outside the door of your home, waiting for you to emerge so that he may take you unawares.

LEARNING FROM OUR FAILURES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d said to Kayin,] 'If you improve yourself, you will be forgiven...'" (4:7)

Kayin's true failure was that he did not learn from G-d's positive response to Hevel, who had offered up the choicest of his animals. Had Kayin presented a second offering, this time from the choicest of his crop, G-d would have forgiven him and accepted it.

G-d here tried to teach him that if an individual learns from his errors, his slate can be wiped clean. However, Kayin refused to admit his error. Convinced of the rightness of his action, he felt that if Hevel were eliminated, his own view would necessarily prevail.

Our challenge, as well, is to learn from our failures, rather than to stubbornly refuse to admit them and even rationalize them. By learning from our failures, we can transform every one of them into an impetus for further spiritual growth. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, p. 22) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

RESPONDING WITH LOVE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"And it happened when they were in the field, that Kayin rose up against his brother Hevel and killed him." (4:8)

As we begin Bereishis, after recounting Creation and Adam and Chava's sin of eating from the forbidden tree, life seemingly settles down for Adam and Chava. Adam goes off to work, they have two children, and after a mere six *pesukim*, their world is rocked by one child (Kayin) killing the other (Hevel) (4:8). How do Adam and Chava make sense of what happened, and how do they (and we) move forward after tragedy?

The Midrash relates that Adam and Chava wept by Hevel's body, not knowing what to do until they saw a raven burying its dead in the ground, which they decided to mimic. The irony was that the raven is typically cruel to its young, yet it buried a dead bird, an act of absolute kindness that cannot be repaid. Rabbi Menachem Feldman explains that this loving kindness is the proper response to senseless evil. The appropriate response to cruelty is love, something that comforted Adam and Chava and can bring us closer to G-d, and each other, today. We all have within us the greatest power there is: the power to be kind.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

“G-d said to Kayin, ‘Where is Hevel, your brother?’ And he said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s guardian?’” (4:9)

What was the purpose of this exchange? It almost seems as if G-d and Kayin were trying to fool each other. Didn’t Kayin understand that “all is revealed and known before Him”?

The dialogue served to fix the responsibility for Hevel’s death. G-d said to Kayin: “Where is Hevel, your brother? You are responsible for him. It was within your power to choose between right and wrong; hence, you are to blame for his death and are deserving of punishment.”

Kayin, however, mistakenly thought that since he had succeeded in killing Hevel, his death must have been decreed by G-d Himself and he, Kayin, was not to blame since he had merely acted as an instrument to carry out the Divine plan. Therefore, he replied: “Am I my brother’s guardian? You, G-d, are the Guardian of the world with all its creatures. (‘No man so much as strikes his finger on earth except if it is ordained from Above’ - Chullin 7). Hence, it must have been Your plan that I should kill him and I am not liable to punishment.”

This is a terrible error, for doing good or evil depends on free choice, which is unaffected by Divine decree. G-d never forces one’s hand, and therefore one is held strictly accountable for all of one’s actions.

THE TRUE SOURCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Adah gave birth to Yaval; He was the forerunner of all those who live in tents and keep herds...” (4:20)

The Hebrew word for “and keep herds” also means “and provoke”; indeed, Yaval was the first person who provoked G-d by building shrines for idolatry. (Rashi, citing Yechezkel 8:3)

Idolatry arose from the mistaken notion that since G-d has chosen to channel His control of the world through various natural forces, it is fitting for us to respect and honor these forces. This seemingly harmless notion eventually led people to worship the forces of nature exclusively, forgetting about G-d.

In our own lives, it is tempting to think that in order to secure the blessings of happiness, wealth, social acceptance, etc., we have to obey the mundane laws of nature, devoting excessive efforts to our jobs, our bodies, and our social circles. Of course, G-d wants us to live our lives naturally, but at the same time to realize that true success is only possible with His blessings.

In contrast, ascribing absolute power to the forces of nature and therefore “serving” them is a subtle form of idolatry. Only by serving G-d do we accrue all the true blessings in life. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5685, pp. 98-99) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

POWER OF MUSIC

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[Yaval’s] brother’s name was Yuval; he was the forerunner of all those who play the harp and flute.” (4:21)

Music has the power to transform us. It can create an environment, put us in a mood or take us out of one, uplift us, deject us, refine us, or profane us. It is one of the quickest ways for us to lose our self-awareness as we become absorbed in the experience. This loss of self can temporarily wipe out our ego, thereby opening us up to new insight.

Music is therefore an integral part of the sublime rites of the holy Temple in Jerusalem, as well as of Jewish prayer, both communal and individual. By way of contrast, music also figures prominently in non-Jewish spiritual paths and pursuits, whether religious or secular.

It is therefore essential that we become musical connoisseurs, developing a finely-honed sensitivity to what types of music enhance our Divine consciousness and what types are detrimental to it. Harnessing the power of music can be an effective tool in promoting spiritual growth. (Torah Ohr 7c-d; Ohr HaTorah, Bereishis, vol. 3, pp. 585-589) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“This is the book of Adam’s descendants...” (5:1)

After describing Creation, the Torah starts a new chapter with the words “This is the book of Adam’s descendants” (5:1); adding that when G-d created man, He made him in His likeness, and then details Adam’s descendants. Considering that we were already told of Adam’s descendants, what is the purpose of this apparent restart of the story?

The Ohr HaChaim suggests a different reading of the *pasuk*: “This is the book of Adam’s creations,” suggesting that man was initially created as G-d had intended and that distortions and events that happened subsequently were of man’s creations. We often get caught up in the rat race - in the pursuit of things that we think will make us happy. The Torah tells us that the key to happiness is simplicity, not the pursuit of what we perceive will bring us happiness. Ironically, rather than pursuing happiness, we should pursue simplicity, which will bring us true happiness.

DON’T KEEP TO YOURSELF

Chasam Sofer

“Chanoch walked with G-d, and then he was no more, for G-d had taken him...” (5:25)

Chanoch was righteous, but he was easily convinced to turn from the righteous ways and become wicked. He was therefore taken quickly, before his time. (Rashi)

Chanoch kept aloof from others and, consequently, did not instill any of his righteousness into his generation. G-d therefore feared that he could be corrupted by his contemporaries and grow wicked. For the Sages say (Pirkei Avos 5:21), “whoever leads the people to righteousness, no sin shall occur through him...,” but one who does not do so, preferring to keep to himself, may be influenced by those around him to become evil.

It was because “Chanoch walked with G-d,” keeping aloof from others to serve G-d by himself, that “he was no more, for G-d had taken him.” G-d took Chanoch before his time for fear that he would be affected by the evil of his generation.

HEAVENLY IMPACT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Chanoch walked with G-d...” (5:25)

Chanoch was a shoemaker, yet, because of his holiness, his mundane occupation did not distract him from his service of G-d. On the contrary, we are taught that with every stitch he brought about a further degree of harmony within the spiritual spheres.

We, too, on our own level, can follow in Chanoch’s footsteps: We can so infuse our earthly activities with holy intentions that can positively influence the heavens. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

GROWTH MINDSET

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and he begot a son. And he called his name Noach...” (5:28-29)

When Lamech (different than Lemech, who had Yaval, Yuval, Tuval-Kayun, and Na’ama) had Noach, the Torah tells us that Lamech begot a son (*ben*) and, in the following *pasuk*, that he named him Noach (5:28-29). What is the significance of telling us these two pieces of information separately? Further, the Torah says that Lamech named him Noach because this one will provide rest from our work (“*yenachamenu*” is the Hebrew word used). Wouldn’t “*Yenachem*” or “*Menachem*,” then, be a more appropriate name?

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the root of *ben* (son) is the same as *boneh*, meaning “build.” We quickly discover that Noach is a builder, applying the lessons learned from previous generations to improve himself and his character. Perhaps it was this attribute as well as his personal growth that made him uniquely suited to lead humanity after the flood.

This could also explain why he was given the name Noach in the present tense, exhibiting the quality of improving in the present, not waiting for the future. A growth mindset doesn’t just refine you when you grow but makes you a better person even before all the personal growth - which we are destined to manifest - actually happens.

HIGHER THAN ANGELS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“The fallen ones were on the earth in those days, and also later, for these princes and judges continued to consort with women and had children. They were the mighty ones of old, men of name.” (6:4)

Angels are spiritual creatures, normally invisible to us. They are typically either a personification of some Divine attribute or an emissary created by G-d to perform some mission.

When the angels took on physical form and entered the physical world, they “fell”; they could not resist the materialism and arrogance of the world. An angel does not have the spiritual wherewithal to exist in the world and at the same time remain attached to Divinity. Only human beings, who are created in G-d’s image, can, like G-d, unite heaven and earth. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, p. 15) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“G-d saw how great was humanity’s wickedness...” (6:5)

When G-d saw humanity’s moral state, He did not at first express His decision to wipe out the world with a flood. Only after He formulated a way for humanity to survive (i.e., through Noach) did He pronounce His decision. This was because once an idea descends from thought into speech, its reality becomes more concrete and therefore it becomes harder to revoke.

Similarly, we should always be aware of the awesome power of speech: By articulating a negative assessment of someone - even if they are unaware that we have done so - we have unwittingly reinforced their negative traits and made it harder for them to rid themselves of them.

We should therefore think twice before uttering a negative judgment about anyone; on the contrary, we should always seek to make positive, constructive comments about others. Doing so reinforces their positive traits and raises them to greater spiritual heights. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

THE POWER OF RESOLVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Noach found favor in the eyes of G-d...” (6:8)

Noach was the only righteous person of his generation, yet his uniqueness incredibly did not negatively affect his morality or ethics. This thought can serve to inspire us whenever an inner voice torments us: “Why do you even bother to pursue the path of spirituality and holiness, studying the Torah and fulfilling G-d’s commandments? After all, you are just one very small person in a very big world that is often cold and even hostile to goodness and holiness.”

The story of Noach provides a fitting response to this inner voice: Noach resolved to behave properly, living a moral life despite the antagonistic behavior of his contemporaries, and furthermore, his conduct brought salvation to the entire world. If Noach, who was truly on his own, was capable of this, certainly we today, who are not alone in our commitment to G-d's Torah, can courageously withstand the moral challenges of our contemporary world. (Hitva'aduyot 5743, vol. 1, pp. 412-413) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

HAFTARAH

VARYING DEPTHS

Chida

"G-d desires for the sake of His righteousness, that the Torah will be made great and glorious..." (Yeshayahu 42:21)

Elsewhere (11:9) Yeshayahu declares that in the end of days "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea." According to the Sages, this statement should not be taken to mean that everyone will have the same knowledge and the same ability to study, for how could scholars, who have spent their lives poring over the Torah, ever be considered on the same level as people who are ignorant? Rather, each person will become "like the waters that cover the sea," which look uniform on the surface but conceal areas of varying depths. Each person will be filled with knowledge of G-d, but the knowledge of the scholars who have devoted their lives to the Torah will have greater depth than that of all the rest, though on the surface it will appear as if all are equal.

All this is implicit also in the *pasuk* of Yeshayahu quoted above, "G-d desires for the sake of His righteousness" - when G-d causes the whole world to "become righteous and impart knowledge to everyone, Torah will be made great" so that all will know it; "and glorious" - He will strengthen and deepen its knowledge even more in the minds of those who studied it in the past; He will cause scholars to become even stronger in the Torah than they were before.

OUR SHIELD AND PROTECTOR

Verses: 42:6 – 42:8

I am Hashem who called you.

I will strengthen your hands, I will create an alliance with the Jewish nation in front of all the other nations, to show that we are united in front of the world.

I will open the blind eyes and free the prisoners sitting in the dark.

Verse: 42:13

Hashem goes forth like a warrior, whipping up rage like a fighter - yelling, roaring aloud, then charging upon the enemy.

Verse: 42:16

I will turn darkness before them to light, rough places into level ground. These are the promises - I will keep them without fail.

Verse: 42:22

A nation got massacred, the young died, people who were hiding, they were dehumanized and belittled and there was no one to save them.

Verses: 43:1 – 43:5

But now thus said Hashem, Who created you, O Jacob, Who formed you, O Israel:

Fear not, for I will redeem you; I have singled you out by name, You are Mine.

When you pass through water, I will be with you; Through streams, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be scorched, through flame, it shall not burn you.

For I am Hashem your G-d, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... For you are precious to Me, and honored. And I love you...

Fear not, for I am with you.

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