

CHAPTER 5, MISHNA 1(A) : SPIRITUAL GLOBAL WARMING - PART I

by Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld

The world was created in ten utterances. What does this come to teach us? Could not the world have been created in a single utterance? It was in order to exact punishment from the wicked who destroy the world which was created in ten utterances and to grant reward to the righteous who sustain the world which was created in ten utterances.

As an introductory note, we'll find Chapter 5 to be of a somewhat different style than previous chapters. Much of this chapter is factual. The first 18 mishnas provide us with lists and totals -- lists of miracles, types of punishments, different classes of people, etc. It is fascinating in its own right, but it is perhaps a little less "straight" ethics. We will try, all the same, to approach the wise words of the Sages with the same reverence -- and will hopefully reveal in them the same profound messages and life lessons we have always discovered.

The ten utterances through which the world was created appear in the story of Creation, primarily in the first chapter of Genesis. They correspond to the expression "and the L-rd said" which appears throughout the story. (E.g., "And the L-rd said: 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (v. 3).) The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 32a) explains that although "and the L-rd said" appears only nine times in the story of Genesis, the first verse of Genesis itself -- "In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth" -- is also considered a statement. It too refers to an act of creation. And, continues the Talmud, all acts of creation were achieved via Divine utterance, as the verse states, "By the **word** of G-d were the heavens made" (Psalms 33:6).

An interesting aside to our mishna is the concept that the world was created through G-d's utterances alone. When G-d stated "Let there be light," we might have thought this was simply a statement of intent -- G-d was merely talking to Himself, so to speak, that He would then proceed to create light. The verse, however, implies a far more immediate result: "And the L-rd said: 'Let there be light,' and there was light." The light resulted directly from G-d's utterance.

Kabbalistically speaking, the idea of this is that G-d's utterances are not merely "plans". His words themselves **were** acts of creation. G-d's "statements" are a creative force. At Genesis they were actual projections of His will -- and began a long process of concretizing spiritual intent into physical reality and the universe we know.

(This concept also reveals a bit about the wisdom and sanctity of the Hebrew language. G-d "spoke"

in Hebrew when He created the world. In Kabbalistic thought, Hebrew words do not just "mean" something by convention. The words themselves contain the spiritual essences of their physical counterparts. Each letter corresponds to a spiritual force; each word the combination of such forces. Actually, Hebrew words **really** mean their interpretations.)

This concept -- of ten Divine utterances -- is a Kabbalistic one (as you may have guessed by now...). We are taught that there are ten "sefiros" or levels of emanation from G-d to the world. The concept, loosely speaking, is that G-d's infinite reality filters down to the physical world via ten gradations. The world is a reflection of G-d, but ten steps removed -- the higher emanations being entirely beyond man's ability to comprehend. (Kabbalists generally deal with at most the lower seven -- and often just the lower six.) The physical world we know is inextricably bound to the spiritual, infinite realm of the Almighty, but it requires ten degrees of dissipation to span this infinite gap. From a Kabbalistic sense, our mission is to span that distance, bringing the physical world in harmony with the spiritual and making the world a reflection of the Perfect Being from which it emanated.

This concept is meaningful to non-mystics as well, among whom I number myself. And that is the simple, profound message of our mishna. (Pirkei Avos, to be sure, is not a work on Kabbalah. However, we will find the more literal approach to life and reality here taken by the Sages to be entirely consistent with the depth of their understanding of the metaphysical world.) What practically is our mishna teaching us with this concept that the righteous/wicked sustain/destroy a world of Ten Utterances?

The idea, simply, is that if G-d created the world in ten utterances or emanations, the layers of the universe are inextricably bound together. And so, if I do good or evil, I do not only harm myself or even the physical world about. I damage all levels of existence -- from the lowest to the highest. And thus, the acts of the righteous or wicked sustain or destroy the world in ways infinitely above and beyond what we are able to comprehend.

For better or worse, however, this idea is far too broad and far-reaching to be dealt in the remainder of this class. (And we didn't even decipher this week's corny title...) ;-) G-d willing, we will build on this further next week.

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