

# ...AND THE EARTH HE SORT OF GAVE TO MAN

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

And you will take from the first of all the produce of the Land...and you will place it in a basket. You will come to the Kohen who will be in those days. The Kohen will take the basket from your hand, and place it before the mizbe'ach of Hashem your G-d.

Be'er Mayim Chaim: The famous pasuk in Tehilim<sup>2</sup> is puzzling. "The heavens, the heavens are G-d's; the earth He gave to Man." Were we indeed given complete license to do with this world what we wish? Doesn't the Torah repeatedly warn us about overindulgence, about losing ourselves to our desires and becoming mired in the physical?

We understand that everything in our lowly, material world comes into existence only through an ohr of kedushah that emanates from the Upper Worlds. This light not only creates, but sustains everything. Nothing physical could exist if it were abstracted from its spiritual core.

Furthermore, we know that these oros are defined and shaped by the Torah. Specifically, the Ten Utterances of Creation<sup>3</sup> contain within them all the oros necessary for the creation of all the complexity of the universe, of all the myriad creatures that inhabit our world.

How could this be? Our holy seforim teach that the twenty letters of the Torah are themselves rooted in the upper, supernal Chochmah. These letters (and the oros attached to them) combine with other letters. The combinations are almost endless, because it is not only the letters that combine with others, but the letters in their "full" or extended spelling (e.g the letter "yud" in its fullness is a combination of three letters - yud, vav, and dalet), and the further extension of their extended spelling. Not to mention the components of letters, that are themselves letters. (E.g., the letter "alef" is formed by writing two yuds and a vav.)

Each particular combination becomes, in a sense, the soul of some physical being. The vitality associated with that combination becomes implanted in a spiritual "earth," the Eretz Ha-Chaim, or lower Shechinah. From there, it sprouts into physical existence. This is the true meaning of the familiar maamar Chazal<sup>4</sup>, that says that no blade of grass grows without a Heavenly mazal striking it and ordering it to do so. This Heavenly mazal is none other than the vitality that is associated with the particular combination of Torah letters that generates the blade of grass.

Again, all the combinations originate in letters of the Ten Utterances of Creation. These, in turn, are

all sourced in Divine Chochmah, associated with the yud of the four-letter Name of G-d. The combination of letters, implanted in the lower spiritual world, is separated from its own source. We conceive of it as "longing" to be reunited with it.

Here is where we come in, and where we find the answer our original question. Our job, our Divinely-appointed task, is to reunite these letter combinations with their source through our mitzvah activities. This is the Jewish mission in a word: to humble and subjugate the coarse effect of pure physicality, and thereby elevate the ruchniyus contained within.

The upper worlds do not require any of this. They are self-contained and united by their essence with Hashem. So the Heavens indeed are Hashem's; they are so by their nature. The earth, however, functions in a kind of strained connection with its Source. To make it truly G-d's, Man must tend to it, like Adam in the Garden, by "working" it, and by "guarding" it, or, in other words, by following affirmative mitzvos and refraining from transgressions. "The earth He gave to Man" - for the purpose of making it G- d's! Only Man can do it!

The Torah's first word alludes to this process. Tikunei Zohar in several places takes Bereishis to mean ב' ראשית, or two kinds of beginning. The pure power of Hashem's ohr would overwhelm us. It had to be softened, attenuated. The beginning of that usable ohr is in Upper Chochmah; the beginning of its translation into physical reality is in the beginning of the sefiros seen from the bottom up, or Malchus - which is also known as the lower Shechinah, the "place" where the oros are planted.

We return to our parshah. A grower stands in the beis ha-mikdosh with some of his first fruit of the season. The Torah urges him not to focus on the manifest and obvious, which is the physical object in front of him. Instead, he is to focus on the reishis in that fruit, the Heavenly ohr resident within, without which the fruit could not have grown. The basket, the Kohen himself, symbolize other kabbalistic concepts.<sup>5</sup> The upshot, however, is that the Kohen stands with the fruit before Hashem's altar, and waves it upward. The reishis of the earthly fruit is directed back to its source in the Heavenly reishis, the ohr through which everything came into being.

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#### Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Devarim 26:1
2. Tehilim 118:16
3. I.e. the ten "sayings" of the opening of Bereishis through which the process of Creation occurred.
4. Bereishis Rabbah 10:6
5. Specifically, Tiferes and Chesed.

