THE ILLUSION OF NOTHINGNESS

by Rabbi Label Lam

In the beginning G-d made the heavens and the earth and the earth was void and astonishingly empty and darkness was on the face of the deep and the spirit of G-d was hovering over the face of the water. And G-d said, "Let there be light!" and there was light! (Breishis 1:1-3)

What's wrong with this picture? If you're reading the "Bible" in English perhaps everything is hunky dory. However if one is learning Torah in the original Holy Language then problems begin to percolate all over the place. A case in point: What was created first? According to the translation above you would be correct to guess; "heaven and earth". Upon careful examination Rashi informs us that that is not the intent of the verse to tell us 'what was created first'. So what was created first!

First of all the word "Breishis" is a compound word. The letter "Beis" at the beginning can be translated, 'for' or "in" hence the misleading reading "In the beginning G-d created..." Rashi goes on to explain that the second part of that first word - "Reishis" is always used in connection to another word that follows. It does not mean "In the beginning" but rather "In the beginning of G-d creating the heaven the earth and the earth was void and empty..." If the Torah was a cosmology book that wanted to teach chronology then the first word should have been 'B'rishona' - "At first". "Breishis" is something entirely different altogether.

Just as a point of curiosity, what was created first? Here comes the surprising answer! Why does the Torah start with the letter "Beis". Every school child knows that the first letter in the "Aleph -Beis" is Beis! Why start with the second letter, and large version of the letter Beis to boot!? It's interesting to note that the dominant theory at the end of the 20th century explaining how the universe came to be is known as the "Big Bang" theory! Prior to that the preeminent premise was a "static state" notion that everything always was the way it is! Hmmm! After detecting hints of expanding universe that new assumption is that everything started from a singular dense point of "whatever" that exploded forming the stuff of the world. This is more in agreement with what we have always understood. We have might call it "The Big Beis Theory". History has both a start and a direction!

I asked scientists at NASA if anyone has a slight idea or a theory or a hint about what may have preceded the "Big Bang" and the answer was unanimously "no". What preceded the Beis of Breishsis? Guess! You got it! The ALEF of "Adon Olam asher Malach b'terem kol y'tzir nivra- He was Master of the world that ruled before anything was created! What predated the creation of the world
was HASHEM Whose name is a contraction of three terms "He was, is, and will be" and is essentially beyond the boundaries of time.

Imagine an ocean of endless light, what the Zohar calls "Ohr Ain Sof". We cannot call it infinity because it's beyond our ken but rather what's it's not "light without end"! Now imagine in the middle of that ocean of endless light a dark bubble is created through the seeming withdrawal of the light. That dark empty space becomes the arena the stage for the drama that will be creation and human history. The Tanya quotes the Zohar in stating that although the physical world was created "something from nothing" in actuality it was created "nothing from something"! HASHEM is enduring existence while everything in the physical world has a "half-life", an expiration date if you will. WOW! Now we can go back to our original question! What was created first? The answer, based on the first verse is not heaven and earth, but the "big void" via the withdrawal of obvious Divine presence and hence the illusion of nothingness. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.