

KNOW THAT YOU KNOW NOTHING

by Shlomo Katz

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B'reishis

Today's Learning Yoma 5:4-5 O.C. 60:4-61:1 Bava Metzia 102 Yerushalmi Rosh HaShanah 21

This week's parashah tells of the creation of the world, but the story is incomplete, and it does not really tell us how the world was created. When pondering this, it is instructive to recall the following teaching of Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv, the "Alter of Kelm" zatz'l.

The Alter writes that the greatest knowledge of Hashem is lack of knowledge. When it comes to knowing G-d, the greatest student is the one who recognizes that he knows nothing.

We find this idea in the verses which describe how angels praise G-d. There are several levels among angels--those known as "Ofanim" are closer to the "Throne" than those known as "Malachim." Yet when the latter angels praise Hashem they say, "Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh. . ." repeating three times that Hashem is holy; the former by contrast say simply and without fanfare, "Blessed is Hashem's honor wherever He is." They do not claim to actually know anything about Hashem.

(HaSefer HaKattan)

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

Chazal learn from a verse in BeMidbar (21:27) that there is an obligation of self examination. However, says Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zatz'l, we learn something even greater from this verse: We learn that Hashem Himself conducted an examination of His deeds. Accordingly, we learn that self examination is not only worthwhile, it emulates the Divine. (The Rav Speaks p.99)

"On the seventh day G-d completed His work which He had done..." (2:2)

Rav Achai Gaon writes in his Sheiltot (No. 1) that Shabbat is like the dedication of a house; for six days Hashem builds His palace, and every seventh day He celebrates its dedication.

With this in mind, writes Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl shlita, we can understand why work is prohibited on Shabbat. Imagine if a king were dedicating a palace; human nature would be that his subjects would come and murmur among themselves, "This room is too long" or "This ceiling is too low" or similar critiques. However, when we visit Hashem's palace, we need to learn that we cannot possibly improve upon His creation. Six days a week we may work at improving the world, but on the day when we are Hashem's guests, we must be totally at rest. (Sichot L'Rosh HaShanah p.110)

From the Haftarah. . .

"Everyone who is called by My Name and whom I have created--for My glory I created him. . ."
(Yishayah 43:7)

Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin ("Netziv") zatz'l writes that the creation is sized precisely in order to spread Hashem's glory throughout the world, for that is the purpose of creation. A person is not complete if he is not fit to spread Hashem's honor to that extent--not that every person is expected to accomplish that, but he must be ready and willing. (HaEmek Davar)

"A river issues forth from Eden to water the garden, and from there it is divided and becomes four headwaters." (2:10)

The verses list four rivers. Two of these are known today by their same names--Chidekel and Perat, i.e., the Tigris and Euphrates. Another of these, Pishon, is identified by Rashi as the Nile.

How can it be, asks Rav Yosef Shani shlita, that the Nile shares a source with the Tigris and Euphrates, which are on a different continent? The answer may be found in a dispute between the sages Rav and Shmuel regarding the first verse of Esther. One says that the two places Hodu (India) and Kush (Ethiopia) are adjacent; the other says that they are at far ends of the [known] world. Rav and Shmuel are not arguing about facts, says Rav Shani. The one who says that India and Ethiopia are adjacent is merely teaching [some 15 centuries before scientists discovered the same thing] that the continents were at one time connected and perhaps shaped differently than they are today. (Afikim BaNegev)

"Hashem, Elokim, took man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it." (2:15)

Chazal say that Adam HaRishon was given 613 commandments. The midrash learns this from the verse which states that Adam was placed in Gan Eden "to work it"--this refers to the positive commandments-- "and to guard it"--this refers to the negative commandments.

Why then does the Torah list only one, i.e., the commandment that Adam not eat from the Tree of Knowledge? Rav Yitzchak Hutner zatz'l writes in a letter (No. 24) that all of Adam's 613 commandments were parts of his one commandment. How so? We don't necessarily know. However, he writes, we must believe the Torah and Chazal's interpretation of it.

Moreover, he writes, we are obligated to accept and internalize teachings such as the above (that Adam's 613 commandments were parts of his one commandment not to eat from the Etz HaDa'at) even though we cannot possibly picture how they could be true. (Pachad Yitzchak: Igrot U'Chetavim)

Rav Moshe Shmuel Glasner **21 Adar I 5617 - Shemini Atzeret 5685 (1924)**

Rav Moshe, a great-grandson of the Chatam Sofer, was born in Pressburg and later moved with his family to Klausenberg, where his father served as Rabbi. Rav Moshe succeeded his father in that post in 1878 and filled it until 1923, when he settled in Yerushalayim. Throughout, he was active in the Mizrachi.

Rav Moshe's best known work is Dor Revi'i on Tractate Chullin. The title page explains that the purpose of the work is to explain those places where Rambam's understanding of the tractate differs from that of other Rishonim. His other works include responsa and a Torah commentary.

In his introduction to Dor Revi'i, Rav Moshe writes that although he was a child prodigy, his father taught him not to be haughty by telling him that his forbearers already had paved the way for him. In this way, he explained the last verse in our parashah, "And Noach found favor in G-d's eyes." Since

Noach was the son and grandson of tzaddikim, he found G-d's favor ready made for him. Not so Avraham; he had to work hard and withstand ten trials before Hashem told him (B'reishit 22:12), "Now I know that you fear G-d."

Also in the introduction to Dor Revi'i, Rav Moshe discusses the nature of the Oral Torah. He explains the reference in this week's parashah (2:3) to "[G-d's] work which G-d created to make," to mean that Hashem created the world and the Torah so that man could further build them with his mind.

Our thanks to Dr. David Glasner for providing material for this biography.