

UNDERSTANDING CREATION

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bereishis

Understanding Creation

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Today's Learning:
Berachot 1:5-2:1
O.C. 293:1-3
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Temurah 26
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 39

When studying the story of creation, writes R' Shlomo ibn Aderet z"l ("Rashba"; Barcelona, Spain; 1235-1310), one must read the first chapter as a summary and the later chapters as filling in the details. For example, we read (1:11) that on the Third Day Hashem declared, "Let the earth sprout vegetation--herbage yielding seed, fruit trees yielding fruit each after its kind, containing its own seed on the earth." Much later we read (2:5, 9), "Now all the trees of the field were not yet on the

earth and all the herb of the field had not yet sprouted, for Hashem Elokim had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil. . . And Hashem Elokim caused to sprout from the ground every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food; also the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad." Do these verses contradict each other? No! The first verse is a summary and the second is a more detailed account.

This understanding answers another, very difficult question.

From a simple reading of the verses it seems that G-d changed His mind a few times during the Creation process. For example, first He made the sun and the moon the same size; then He shrank the moon. First He created man alone; then He "realized" that it was not good for man to dwell alone. In reality, explains Rashba, we must use the details in the later chapters to fill in what is missing in the earlier chapters. Hashem always intended man to have a partner. However, He wrote the Torah in a way that would illustrate His "thought" process to us. To help us understand His design, Hashem created man alone and "realized" that man needed a partner. Of course, though, Hashem knew all along that He would create the woman as well. Likewise, Hashem always intended the moon to reflect the sun's light, but He brought this about in a way that we could relate to and learn from. (She'eilot U'teshuvot Ha'Rashba Vol. I, No. 60)

"In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth. . ." (1:1)

Rashi writes: "Rabbi Yitzchak said: 'The Torah which is the Law book of Israel should have commenced with the verse (Shmot 12:1), "This month shall be for you the first of the months"--which is the first commandment given to Yisrael. Why, then, does it commence with the account of the Creation? Because of the thought expressed in the text (Tehilim 111:6) "He declared to His people the strength of His works, in order that He might give them the heritage of the nations." Should the peoples of the world say to Yisrael, "You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan," Yisrael may reply to them, "All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He, He created it and gave it to whom it was yashar in His eyes. When He willed He gave it to them, and when He willed He took it from them and gave it to us".' " [Ed. note: The word "yashar" literally means "straight," but the concept of yashrut actually encompasses a combination of justice, fairness and integrity.]

Does Rashi mean that the nations of the world will accept this explanation for the Jews' presence in Eretz Yisrael? Clearly not, writes R' Simcha Mordechai Ziskind Broide z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim; died 2000). Rather, the answer is meant for us. We must know that our habitation of the Land is yashar.

R' Broide elaborates: Yashrut is a fundamental precept on which Torah observance is based and which Torah observance furthers. On the verse (Devarim 6:18), "You shall do what is yashar and good in the eyes of Hashem," Ramban explains that yashrut means the following: The Torah cannot spell out how we should act in every situation. Rather, the Torah gives us enough information to allow us to choose proper values and to extrapolate from the laws that are stated expressly how we should behave in new situations. For example, from the fact that the Torah tells us: Do not gossip, do not take revenge, do not stand-by idly when another is suffering, stand up for elders, etc., we can understand that the Torah's code of morality includes extending ourselves for others beyond the point that some would consider "normal."

Given the importance of yashrut, says R' Broide, it is critical that we not think for a moment that G-d acted without yashrut when He gave us the Land or that we lack yashrut by inhabiting it. The Land is His, and He gives it to whomever He pleases. This is the lesson that the first Rashi in the Torah is teaching us.

[Ed. note: R' Broide notes that our Sages refer to the Book of Bereishit as "Sefer Ha'yashar," and he therefore traces the concept of yashrut through several of the parashot in this Book. Next week we will present R' Broide's comments on the display of yashrut in Parashat Noach.]

(Hayashar Ve'hatov p.2)

Why exactly do the nations of the world so resent the Jewish People's habitation of Eretz Yisrael?

R' Moshe Wolfson shlita (mashgiach in Yeshiva Torah Va'daas in New York) explains: When a bird flies, it is not doing so because it is the nature of birds to fly. Rather, it is following G-d's commandment, as the Torah records (1:20), "G-d said, 'Let the waters teem with teeming living creatures, and let fowl fly about over the earth across the expanse of the heavens'." The birds fulfill G-d's Will when they fly no less than a man does when he dons tefilin.

There is a difference, of course--man has free will, while birds do not. G-d's design was that man's exercise of free will would set the course for the other creatures as well. Thus, when man strayed, as described at the end of this week's parashah and the beginning of Parashat Noach, he caused all of creation to stray. Even the animals behaved immorally. This is why the Torah's description of earth's vegetation (2:9) --"And Hashem Elokim caused to sprout from the ground every tree"--is followed almost immediately by the verse (2:15), "Hashem Elokim took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it." Our Sages teach that "to work it and to guard it" refers to observing mitzvot. Performing mitzvot is how we safeguard the earth.

Before Avraham Avinu came along, all nations were stewards of the earth's health through their

deeds. However, when Avraham's generation built the Tower of Bavel, as described in next week's parashah, Hashem stripped them of their power over nature. Those men knew of their power. Their attempt to climb to the Heavens symbolizes their desire to assert their spiritual powers over the world to the greatest extent possible. And for this reason, Hashem took away their power and gave it to Avraham's descendants.

There is only one place that was not affected by the sins of Noach's and Avraham's generations, and where the balance between man's deeds and nature remains in effect. That place is Eretz Yisrael. That is why, according to our Sages, the flood did not affect that Land. Accordingly, the nations argue, expelling the Canaanites from Eretz Yisrael is not like expelling a vanquished nation from any other land. The ordinary laws of war--winner takes all--should not apply in Eretz Yisrael, they argue, for that is the only place where man can live as G-d intended.

What is our answer to this? It is the Book of Bereishit. It relates how the first 20 generations failed to live up to G-d's "expectations," and He therefore chose one man--Avraham. This book also relates how only one of Avraham's children merited to continue his legacy, and, so too, with Yitzchak's children. This is how Hashem "decided" that only one nation could fulfill then Land's promise, and that nation should have the Land.

(Emunat Itecha: Tziyon Ve'areha p.13)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter, published in Likkutei Yehuda, Volume I, was written by the Gerrer Rebbe, R' Avraham Mordechai Alter z"l (died 1948), to survivors of the Holocaust. R' Alter himself experienced a miraculous escape from Europe, but he lost children and other family members in the death camps.

B"H, Yerushalayim, may she be rebuilt speedily in our days, amen 7 Tevet 5706 [December 11, 1945]
The week in which the parashah contains the verse, "To give you a remnant in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance." To our brothers, Bnei Yisrael, refugees from the sword, wherever you are! May Hashem be with you that you may live.

The nation of Hashem, strengthen yourselves and be strengthened! The most important thing is to know that all comes from Hashem, may He be blessed. No evil goes forth from Him, and we must accept His Will, for it is all for our good. It is written in the holy books regarding the verse [in this week's parashah], "There was evening [darkness] and there was morning [light] -- one day," that whether in the darkest hour or the brightest, the ultimate result is "day," i.e., light, for us. We must

believe that just as all the curses and punishments foretold by the Torah have come true, so will all the promises and consolations come true, as Rabbi Akiva taught when he saw a fox emerging from the place where the Holy of Holies had stood. [See end of Tractate Makkot.] When G-d hides Himself, it is to test us, in order to reward us in the end. Place your trust in Him, strengthen yourselves in the matters of Torah and prayer, and Hashem will strengthen you.

Rabbeinu Maimon z"l [father of Rambam / Maimonides] wrote in his famous letter that Torah and mitzvot are a rope tying together the heavens and earth. In proportion to the strength with which one grasps the rope, so will he himself be strengthened . . .

May the Master of Consolations console us all, and may you merit to ascend quickly to our Holy Land and to see Hashem bring back the returnees of Zion and a complete redemption, soon in our days, amen.

From the one who loves you and shares in your pain, looking forward to salvation and consolation,
Avraham Mordechai Alter

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

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