

CLASS 24 - BEREISHIS

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"Breishis Bara Elokim - It does not say 'Hashem' created, because His first intent was to create the world with the attribute of strict justice. But, He saw that the earth would not survive, and gave priority to the attribute of mercy, and merged it with the attribute of strict justice, as it is written (2:4): "B'Yom Asos Hashem Elokim Eretz V'Shamayim". " (Rashi, 1:1)

The original plan of creation was never actualized. Our world is maintained with a mixture of justice and mercy that tempers G-d's stern Hand. The Divine name 'Elokim' is cited as the basis of creation, but subsequently appears together with the name 'Yud' - 'Heh' - 'Vuv' -, revelation of Divine mercy.

The Maharal finds this teaching to be quite puzzling.

"And you may ask, whatever happened in the past - happened, what is the difference if this plan was G-d's first intent?" (Maharal, Gur Aryeh, ad. loc.)

This one question of the Maharal should give us pause before studying the Torah any further, for with this small query, he transforms our outlook on the nature of Torah, showing a new perspective to the essence of creation.

Let us explain.

1

What is it about this statement of Rashi that the Maharal finds so disturbing?

The narrative of creation, along with the entire book of Breishis, is generally perceived as a description of the earth's origin, and the physical foundation of life.

This, the Maharal teaches, cannot be.

Torah is not a storybook, nor a repository of faith and legend. Every word is eternally relevant, and of practical purpose, necessary information for a productive human being. What impact could there be in a plan that G-d rejected? Our interest is only in the world that G-d created, not in ideas that never materialized.

It follows, then, that if the Torah begins with the attribute of Din, this trait is still present. Though hidden, superseded by a different method of Divine direction, strict justice remains the heart of creation. The admixture of Din and Rachamim is only a temporary framework devised to maintain

our physical world, ultimately, pure Din will stand alone, a world of a unified One where only the will of G-d is possible.

Within this transient setting, Olam HaZeh exists.

Man generally sees his world as solid ground, a sturdy rock at the foundation of existence, providing structure and substance, a place for life to thrive. The presence of a deeper dimension to creation, however, teaches that Olam HaZeh actually has no sustenance of its own, but, rather, this world is merely a fleeting window of time in the vast expanse of Heaven's realm.

The differing values of religious and secular societies are a reflection of these opposing perspectives.

Much of the world views Olam HaZeh as the totality of existence, and for this reason, the prevailing culture encourages the pursuit of excitement and pleasure as the realization of life's dream - 'living life to its fullest'.

The Jewish conception of worldly existence is as a passage to eternity, hence, we idealize proper utilization of the physical world; fulfilling its purpose and design.

With this in mind, we can now turn to Rashi's opening comment in Breishis, his introduction to Torah itself.

"Rebbe Yitzchak said: the Torah should have begun from 'HaChodesh Hazei Lachem', which is the first Mitzva which Israel was commanded. What is the reason that it opened with Breishis?.....should the nations of the world say to Israel: "you are thieves because you conquered the land of the seven nations", Israel can say to them: "the entire earth belongs to G-d, He created it, and gave it to whomever He saw fit. He gave it to the seven nations when He so desired, and He took it from them and gave it to us."

The Ramban questions the supposition of this statement.

Why should the Torah have skipped these chapters? Is it not crucially important to have knowledge of the world's creation? One who denies the divinity of the earth's origin is incapable of faith, and detached from the Torah!

His answer requires much reflection.

The creation narrative is actually a secret revealed. That is, while in much of the Torah, Pshat is the surface meaning and hidden allusions remain concealed, the story of Ma'aseh Breishis is precisely the opposite. The basic translation of the text is nearly indecipherable, and the physical mechanics of creation are known only to a select few. Our own basic understanding of the text actually refers to G-d's secret plan for His world, the definitive function and meaning of existence, the 'Nistar'.

As far as one needs for faith, the description of creation in the Aseres HaDibros would suffice. As it

stands in any case, beyond knowing that the world was created in six days, the physical details of G-d's actions in Ma'aseh Breishis are not understood.

What then, is the purpose of the Book of Breishis?

Certainly, Rashi's proposal for political debate would not sweep the United Nations. In fact, this comment seems a bit oddly placed. Is an answer for those who dispute our claim to the land of Israel the best way to introduce the Torah? Interesting though this may be, is this the central tenet of our faith? A basic principle of Torah?

Rather, the point is this: the essential foundation of this world, its precise definition, is not its physical being, but as a vehicle that carries out G-d's will. Olam HaZeh has no independent material sustenance, nor does it exist without Torah and the Jewish people. The physical entity of this world merely leads to Torah, making possible the revelation of G-d's word. Therefore, the Torah incorporates the origin of creation as an introduction to Torah, for this alone illuminates the nature of existence.

To summarize: Our world exists ONLY to the extent that it serves G-d's will. Olam HaZeh is not life - but merely the means to a true and lasting existence. This is the real Breishis - a beginning that leads to an end.

2

What is this strange dialogue between Israel and the nations, and why is it the opening of Sefer Breishis?

The argument of the nations is predicated on Breishis, the realization that this world is only part of a much broader dimension. The great horizon of eternity is the true home of the Bnai Yisrael, their presence on this world only temporary.

We truly are transients, strangers in a foreign land.

The nations are right. This world does belong to them. Hence, their claim: 'the Torah is based upon HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem; you are as the moon, alluding to a higher existence, one destined to illuminate the distant future. At the very least, leave us this world, and go back to where you belong!'

Yet, we respond: 'the world is G-d's, and everything in it. He created all of existence, giving you the land, and taking it away. This world exists for a purpose, its role in the Divine scheme. With your disdain for a spiritual world, you have abdicated your place in creation, a void we are destined to fill.'

This land is ours, as well.

We have learned the hard way, through years of bitter history, that the world of fame and fortune has no room for people of the Book. Time and again, we wait with trepidation for the angry mob to tear us away from our home and property.

Wouldn't it be easier if we learned this lesson on our own?

"Derech Eretz Kadmah L'Torah".

This world leads to Torah.

Torah is the meaning and purpose, the end-result for a nation that keeps its bearings in a world sgone astray.

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