

REASSESSING B'RESHEET 1-3

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

In memory of Rabbi Aaron M. Wise HK"m

I THE B'RESHEET PROBLEM REVISITED

Two years ago, our "B'resheet" discussion focused around the "two creation stories" found in our Parashah. As mentioned there, and was quite clear to Hazal and the M'farshim, there are two distinct and radically different presentations of the Creation within the first three chapters of Sefer B'resheet. In that essay, I suggested that we look at the two stories as complementary, each one presenting a different perspective on this world. This year, I would like to add a literary component to that analysis - and, thereby, bring to light a significant "message" which is being communicated in these opening chapters.

First, a recap of the problem:

II B'RESHEET - THE "GENESIS" OF A PROBLEM

Following the Torah's recounting - how long did Creation take? When (in that sequence) was Man created? When were the animals created? Where does the creation of Woman fit within this matrix?

Although most people would give unidimensional answers to each of these questions (Creation took six or seven days, depending if you reckon Shabbat; Man was created on the sixth day; the animals were created just before that; Woman was created from Man's rib [sic]), the reality of the Torah's narrative is far more complex.

Not only are there two different stories of Creation; but, from a purely text-driven read of the information, the accounts are contradictory! In the first story, creation takes six or seven days, Man is created as a complete (single male-female) being at the apex of Creation. In the second story, Creation takes one day, Man is created as a lonely being at the beginning of the process. Woman is formed from Man - and is his "completion" - at the end of this "Creation process". Among the most pronounced differences between the two stories is the Name for God; in the first story, God is exclusively referred to as the generic "Elokim"; whereas in the second story, He is consistently called

"Hashem Elokim".

These differences are among the stronger "arguments" marshaled by the school of "Bible Criticism", which, for the past 300 years, has been at the forefront of secular (and non-Orthodox) study of Tanakh. This school of thought (which is really many different schools, each with its own variation) maintains that the Torah is not the unified Word of Hashem; rather they see it as a patchwork of narratives, legal texts and prophecy/poetry, each produced by a different community of priests and scholars during the 10th-6th centuries BCE, which were woven into the Torah as we know it - sometime around the era of Ezra's leadership (5th c. BCE).

The Bible critics maintain that each of these communities had a different "version" of Creation, a different Name for God etc. - thus explaining the many apparent discrepancies and stylistic variations within the text.

For a myriad of reasons both in the areas of creed and scholarship, we absolutely reject this "Documentary Hypothesis". Our belief is that the entire Torah was given by God to Mosheh (ignoring for a moment the problem of the last 8 verses and the various "Sod haSh'neim Asar" occurrences cited by Ibn Ezra) and that the authorship is not only singular, it is exclusively Divine. These two statements of belief - whether or not they can be reasonably demonstrated (and there is much literature, both medieval and contemporary, coming down on both sides of this question) - are two of the 13 principles enumerated by the Rambam.

As mentioned above, Haza"l were quite aware of these discrepancies. In some approaches, the second story was understood to be a detailed clarification of the first; in others, the first represented the ideal of creation, whereas the second was the actual creation of the world and of mankind. Yet others saw the first story as representing the goal of each component of creation, and the second story describing the way in which it served man and, thus, served God's purpose. Each of these approaches, among others, was adopted by one or more of the Rishonim in their assessment of the text.

I would like to suggest that although a superficial perusal of the text leaves the impression that we are dealing with two distinct - and diametrically opposite - stories which demand reconciliation, that is not necessarily the case. If we take a closer look at the literary structure of these two descriptions, we will note an interesting pattern that suggests one integrated presentation.

III

DEFINING THE METHOD

As we have mentioned several times in these shiurim, the text of the T'nakh is often presented in a form of parallel inversion, in which an idea ("A") is presented, followed by a second ("B"); there is then a variation on the second idea ("B1") followed by a variation on the first ("A1"). However we understand the purpose of this literary structure, it is well-documented and there are countless valid

examples of this form (known as "chiasmus") in T'nakh. An inverted parallelism (as any parallelism) can be identified in one of two manners:

- 1) common words or phrases are used, or
- 2) similar ideas are presented.

I would like to suggest that if we look at both creation stories, we will find some interesting parallels between them which suggest a chiastic structure. For our purposes, the second creation story ends at the conclusion of chapter 3 (v. 24), with the exile of Man from the Garden.

IV

THE STRUCTURE

A: ULTIMATE SEPARATION

A1: "In the beginning, God had already created the Shamayim and the Aretz".

Although some have interpreted the entire first story as one of repeated and intensified separation, where each species is assigned a role, the text itself suggests a different approach. As Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (Netzi"v) points out, "Shamayim" (which cannot mean the same as the "Heavens" of v. 8, as pointed out by Ramban ad loc.) refers to all sources of giving, impacting and influencing. "Aretz" refers, in kind, to all spheres of receptivity. In other words, the first thing that God created was the possibility of giving and receiving, of impacting and of being impacted. Everything which unfolds is the development of the interaction between those two poles.

That being the case, the Torah begins with a description of total separation between the spheres. There was "Shamayim", and there was "Aretz" - as yet, there was no interaction between the two.

A2: "And Hashem God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from where he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed Kerubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way of the tree of life." (3:23-24)

Man is permanently and forcefully barred from his abode - the model for exile. Not only is this a parallel model of separation, it also parallels the disengagement of impact described in the first verse. Man, whose job (as we will see further on) is to work the Garden and protect it, has been removed from his sphere of influence.

B: ANTICIPATION OF INTERACTION

B1: "And the earth was Tohu and Bohu; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And a wind from God moved upon the face of the waters." (1:2) (Tohu and Bohu have been interpreted several ways; hence they have been left without translation. Ramban understands Tohu as matter and Bohu as form).

We are riveted by anticipation that God's spirit, hovering over the water, is going to act in such a way

as to cause dynamic interaction, thus enabling the process of creation. That is, of course, what happens in the very next verse.

B2: "And Hashem God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, what if he puts forth his hand, and takes also from the tree of life, and eats, and lives forever" (3:22)

Note that the concern - that Man might "live forever" - neatly parallels the "spirit of God" in B1. The spirit which animates man, as described in 2:7, is the spirit of God. More significantly, this verse, the motivation for Man's exile, anticipates Man's inappropriate interaction in the garden - which necessitates his removal.

C: VEHICLE FOR INTERACTION: THE CREATION OF LIGHT

C1: And God said, Let there be light; and there was light...and there was evening and there was morning, one day. (1:3-5)

As is clear, both from the textual evidence and from a plethora of statements in Midrashic literature (followed by all of the major Rishonim), the "light" created on the first day was not the sunlight with which we are accustomed. The implication of the creation of light here is best put by the comment in B'resheet Rabbah:

R. Yitzchak says, the light was created first [before the world]; this is similar to a king who set out to build a castle in a dark place. What did he do? He lit candles and torches in order to ascertain how to establish the foundation (B. Rabbah 3:1)

The light is presented here as the vehicle for creating interaction between the Shamayim and the Aretz.

C2: "For Adam and for his wife Hashem God made Kot'not 'Or (coats of skins), and clothed them." (3:21)

In response to the punishments meted out to the first couple and the serpent (see below), God fashioned clothes for Adam and his wife. This should not be seen only as a preparation for their ouster from the garden; even while there, they fell out of harmony with their surroundings to the point where they were in need of protection from their own environment.

Whereas the light created on the first day was a vehicle for more intense interaction, the clothes fashioned by God were a vehicle for a more disjointed and isolated existence.

Curiously, we find a textual "emendation" in the Midrash attributed to R. Meir (who had a reputation as a reliable scribe - see BT Megillah 18b):

"In R. Me'ir's Torah it says Kot'not Or" ("Or" with an Alef, meaning "light", as opposed to the conventional "Or", meaning "skin" - see Mirkin's illuminating comments ad loc.). R. Me'ir understood

that their garments were fashioned from the light of the first day's creation.

D: ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES

D1: "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters...And there was evening and there was morning, the second day." (1:6-8)

Before enabling any interaction, clear boundaries between the impacter and recipient must be drawn - as well as defining the various recipients. For example, any successful classroom experience will only take place once the difference in the roles of the teacher and students is established and clarified to all - as well as identifying the range of needs of the various students. This is the sense of the "accomplishment" of the second day of creation.

D2: "And Hashem God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, you are cursed...and I will put enmity between you and the woman...To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply the pain of your child bearing; in sorrow you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said... cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you; and you shall eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return to the ground; for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust shall you return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. (3:14-20)

Subsequent to the sin, and the consequential finger-pointing (Man to his wife, she to the serpent), all three actors are punished. The one thread which holds these punishments together is the absolute disharmony from environment. The serpent, previously able to converse with Man (see S'forno's approach to this and, more radically, Ralba"i's take on the entire story), is now a mortal enemy to Man. The woman, created as a helper to man, becomes his subject (politically incorrect though this may be, that is exactly what the text says) and man, given the job of tilling the garden, is now at odds with the earth.

This profundity of this separation can be discerned in the verse which follows Adam's punishment: Adam gave his wife a name. Why wasn't this name mentioned earlier?

Before the creation of woman (in Ch. 2), Man was given the opportunity to find a companion among the animals. What indicated that none of these matches was appropriate? Man gave names to all of the animals (2:19-20), the result of which was "but for Adam there was not found a help to match him." From woman's entry onto the stage of creation, Adam does not name her, except to call her "Mrs." - ("Ishah" - female "Ish"). It is only when they have been turned against each other, as their environment has been turned against them, that Adam has the dispassion of separation which allows him to name her.

Just as we found on the second day, we see a description of clear boundaries established, not only limiting the range of operation (the serpent) but creating a permanent divide between the species.

E: FIDELITY OF THE SPECIES

E1: "And God said... Let the earth bring forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. (1:9-13)

The Milah Manhah (key word) in this section is l'Mineihu - "according to its kind". In one form or another, it shows up three times in the two central verses here. The creation of regenerative vegetation is built on fidelity to the species - each seed brings forth its own kind. In an earlier shiur, we used this model to explain the "reversal of creation" which was the underlying theme of the Flood narrative.

Although the creation story has now moved towards active integration, allowing the forces of heaven and earth to combine to create the environment which Man will enjoy, the integration is still bound by "l'Mineihu".

E2: "And they heard the voice of Hashem God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...And Hashem God called to Adam, and said to him, Where are you?...And he said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree, which I commanded you that you should not eat? And the man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate. And Hashem God said to the woman, What is this that you have done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I ate. (3:9-13)

Until this point, as indicated by the first verse quoted here, there is a sense not only of harmony but of boundlessness in the garden. Not only are man and woman "of one flesh" (2:24), but God Himself "walks in the garden" (for a beautiful example of this imagery in Midrashic literature, see Kohelet Rabbah 7:19).

At this point, God and Man are (for the first time) turned against each other. God seeks Man, who hides from him, denying any wrongdoing. When faced with the reality of his sin, Man points to an "other" - the woman. She, in turn, points to an "other" - the serpent. Each species (and gender is drawing the lines for themselves. As opposed to the legendary R. Aryeh Levin's "my wife hurts us", every actor here is isolating him/herself from the others. Just as the third day of creation focused on "each after its own kind", that's exactly how this scene was played out. [On a related note, Haza"l explain that the "task" of the second day was not completed until the third day, which is why there is no assessment of "it is good" on the second day. Similarly, the separation between the species and the genders outlined in this segment of the Garden narrative becomes complete when God announces the punishment, presented in section D above.)

F: ILLUMINATION AND POWER

F1: "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night;

and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth; and it was so. and God made two great lights; the large light to rule the day, and the small light to rule the night...and there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day." (1:14-19)

This description, in the first creation story, of the establishment of the "heavenly lights", highlights their purpose: To rule over the day and night, as well as dividing between those two realms. (The Midrash developed this theme of "rulership" in a beautiful Aggadah - BT Hullin 60b). The link between the power to illumine and the ability to rule and control is firmly established here - as well as the interrelationship between visual acuity and discernment (the ability to distinguish one day from another).

F2: " 'For God knows that in the day you eat of it, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate, and gave also to her husband with her; and he ate. And the eyes of them both were opened..." (3:5-7)

The essential seduction of the serpent is power - to wit, "by eating of this fruit, you will gain a vision heretofore reserved for God, and, as a result, you will have a godly power"; indeed, that is not far from what actually transpired. Just as the purpose of the lights of the fourth day of creation was their dominion, similarly, the vision acquired through eating of the fruit was designed to empower Man.

G: REPTILES

G1: "And God said, Let the waters be filled with many kinds of living creatures, and birds that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created the great crocodiles, and every kind of creature that live in the waters, and every kind of winged birds, and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply in the earth." (1:20-22)

Among all of the birds and fish (and beasts, created on the sixth day), the only one that is deemed to be "created" (*Bara*) is the Tanin (crocodile/sea-monster?). The verb Bara appears in only three contexts in this chapter: The general introduction (v. 1, 2:3), the creation of Man (v. 27) - and the creation of these sea-beasts. The first two are easy to explain - the overall act being described here is creation, even if the individual components were, as Ramban describes it, the evolution and unfolding of all of the potential in that original creation. The second one, referring to Man, is eminently reasonable as it highlights the unique nature of Mankind, being formed singularly in God's Image. The mention of creation in reference to the Taninim is a bit odd; commentators have raised several suggestions to solve this riddle. I'd like to suggest that this sea-monster, something of an amphibious reptile, is portrayed as the marine parallel of the primordial serpent. The serpent is presented as the cleverest of all beasts, able not only to communicate with, but even able to seduce Man. Yet, by the time the story is over, his station is severely reduced to that of the snakes we all

know. In the same manner, the early sea-monsters were clearly the most powerful and/or significant of the non-human beasts, thus explaining their being described as "created" (and singled out for a detailed listing of their creation), even though, from our perspective, they are a thing of the very distant past and occupy no place in our world. See the parallel quote from the second story:

G2: 1. Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which Hashem God had made. And he said to the woman, Has God said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?...and the serpent said to the woman, surely you shall not die; (3:1-4)

H: CREATION OF BEASTS

H1: "And God said, Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures, cattle, and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after their kind; and it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creeps upon the earth after its kind; and God saw that it was good." (1:24-25)

The animals, unlike Man, are "formed" from the ground. In addition, they have no specific purpose, except, as we will soon see, to serve Man. (1:28)

H2: "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help to match him. And out of the ground Hashem God formed every beast of the field, and every bird of the air; and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them; and whatever Adam called every living creature, that was its name. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the bird of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help to match him. And Hashem God made Adam fall into a deep sleep...And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." (2:18-25)

The entire purpose of the creation of animals is to alleviate Man's loneliness. When that doesn't work, a woman is fashioned from his side - but, even after her creation, the two of them are described in animal-like terms. Note especially, the description of their lack of shame at their nakedness. Although we may wish to see this as child-like innocence, the lack of shame explicitly mentioned seems to point more to the "animal" side of Mankind.

I: UNIQUENESS OF MAN

I1: "And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in His own image...And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (1:26-28)

Man is the crown of creation, formed in God's Image. In addition, Man is presented as the caretaker of the earth, who will rule (as proxy for the Creator?) over all of the other creatures.

I2: 7. And Hashem God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. and Hashem God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom he had formed. and out of the ground made Hashem God every tree to grow that is pleasant...And a river went out from Eden to water the garden...And Hashem God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it. And Hashem God commanded the man, saying... (2:7-16)

The description of God lovingly forming (as it were, with His own hands) Man from the dust and breathing the spirit of life into his nostrils highlights, again, Man's esteemed station in God's universe. Man is the only creature capable of being commanded, as he is the only one endowed with the ability to err - and the conscience to keep from erring.

J: MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

J1: "And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, on which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to every thing that creeps upon the earth, where there is life, I have given every green herb for food; and it was so." (1:29-30)

Man is given charge of the earth, even to make sure that the other creatures stand in proper relation to each other.

J2: "... in the day that Hashem God made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew; for Hashem God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. And a mist went up from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." (2:4-6)

The whole world is waiting for the arrival of Man, who will take charge - "and there was not a man to till the ground". Man's unique character, exalted among all creatures, obligates him to act responsibly towards all lesser creatures.

K: SHABBAT

This section, which has been marked off in two opposing manners, sits at the convergence of our inverted parallelism. Whereas our traditional divisions ("s'darim") have placed this Parashah at the end of the first creation story, the "chapter" divisions (of Christian origins) reckons this section as part of the second story (or an independent unit). Within the scheme we are suggesting here, it is both the end of the first story as well as the beginning (or introduction) to the second:

"And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all his work which God created and made. These are the

generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created..."(1:31-2:4)

The pinnacle of creation, where every creature stands in perfect and ideal relation to every other component of creation, is realized with the Shabbat. Ultimately, all things return to God, as do all of His creatures. The focus on Man, so prevalent in the previous (and coming) section, is absent here, as the world of Shabbat, a world filled with the sanctity and blessing of God's "rest", overwhelms Creation itself.

V

ANALYZING THE STRUCTURE

As in any inverted parallel, the focus point is at the fulcrum, or nexus, of the parallel. The extreme points of each story describe a total and ultimate separation. With each step, interaction and integration are enabled, enhanced and realized. At the final step, not only are all creatures in place, but they all stand in proper relation to each other. Man, the crown of creation, is charged with implementing God's plan of dynamic growth and synthesis on earth, all within the Divine mandate.

In these two, chiastically related stories, we have seen:

- A: Total separation;
- B: Anticipation of interaction;
- C: Vehicle for interaction;
- D: Firming of boundaries;
- E: "Species fidelity";
- F: The power associated with illumination;
- G: The formerly unique station of some unique beasts;
- H: The creation of animals;
- I: The unique creation of Man;
- J: Man's role on earth and
- K: The Shabbat

VI

ASSESSMENT: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

The "neat symmetry" presented here not only renders the challenges raised by the conflicting reports of creation moot, it serves to reorient our appreciation of the entire presentation of creation in the first three chapters and to see it as one integrated story. This is all fine and good - but what's the lesson here?

However we understand Teshuvah in its pure Halakhic sense (as an independent Mitzvah or one which attaches to all others as a contingency), we see a powerful thread of Teshuvah woven throughout these two stories of creation. Teshuvah, in its fullest sense (most beautifully adumbrated by Rav A. Y. haKohen Kook zt"l), does not attach itself only (or chiefly) to specific acts and omissions.

Teshuvah is, rather, the very life-spirit of all of creation. As we have seen in this analysis, the separation and isolation, be it heavens from earth or Man from the garden, stand at the polar extremes from the holiness of Shabbat. Shabbat is that singular experience, which we are blessed with each week, where all of creation stands at its perfect place in relation to the Creator - and to itself. Is it any wonder that Haza"l attributed the "Song of Shabbat" (Psalm 92) to Adam, after he learned of the power of Teshuvah? (B'resheet Rabbah 22:13)

"Great is Teshuvah, that it preceded the creation of the world." (Midrash T'hilim 90:12)

"Teshuvah preceded the world, therefore it is the foundation of the world. The fulfillment of life occurs specifically through the unfolding revelation of its essential nature." (Rav AY Kook, Orot haTeshuvah 5:6a)

Text Copyright © 2000 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom.

The author is Education Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles