

IN LIGHT OF CREATION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

In the beginning G-d created the Heaven and the Earth. The earth was null and void . . . (Bereishis 2:1-3)

Bereishis - In the beginning. The Tikunei Zohar has seventy different explanations for this very first word of the Torah, some more basic than others, some profoundly deep. One could spend years just trying to understand the meanings and the impact on each explanation.

As tradition teaches, G-d used the Aleph-Bais to make Creation. The letters of the Aleph-Bais embody Divine concepts to which the Talmud barely hints (Shabbos 104a), but into which Kabbalah ventures in great detail. Not only does Kabbalah explain the meaning of each of the letters, but also reveals how they can be used to change physical reality, as Betzael did when constructing the Mishkan and its vessels (Brochos 55a).

Indeed, if you think a human body is complex, you should see the Torah through the eyes of Kabbalah. If you think the human body is unbelievably miraculous, and you should, then you should see the Torah on the level of Sod. It is enough to bring tears of joy to your eyes, and it is quite overwhelming when you think about it.

Not too long ago, someone questioned me on my web site (www.thirtysix.org), about why it is necessary to know any of this information. He was not interested in knowing about the past, was worried about worrying about the future, and was uninspired by the opportunity of being a partner with G-d in rectifying Creation. He didn't seem to appreciate the opportunity of learning what Sod has to offer, and thus it would seem that the Talmud is addressing him when it says:

Rebi Yosi said, "Woe to the created beings who see but do not know what they see, who stand but do not understand upon what they stand . . ." (Chagigah 12b)

We take so much for granted in Creation, beginning with our own bodies. Human beings are capable of so much, so many amazing actions from the most general to the most precise. It is also amazing that we know how we do it, physically-speaking, of course. We have been dissecting human beings long enough to map out even the most minute parts of the human body in phenomenal detail and with breath-taking accuracy. But in all honesty, what are all those parts doing there? How did they get there? How do they work so well together, and how can they be so vulnerable and yet so protected?

I suspect that the body really isn't capable of all the things it does. Rather, it is just a mask to make it less clear that we live by the hand of G-d, for the sake of free-will. I suspect that the miracle of life does not end at birth, but continues every second of one's life, hidden beneath the so-called natural functions of the human body.

In other words, the body is precise enough that if you don't look too close, you can be fooled into thinking that life is not that big a deal. However, for the one who does look closely, it becomes clear that the sum reality of the total human is far greater than the sum of its working parts. Just like the rest of Creation ever since it's beginning in this week's parshah.

Even more so, the Torah is exactly like this. We see black letters on white parchment. We read words and sentences that seem to flow together quite nicely, making up stories we can understand, and for the most part, we relate to it. It is not clear that the Torah is more than this from its simple reading, which is why learning Rashi and the other major commentaries is so crucial. In trying to help us better relate to the Torah, they expose us to the many sources that shed light on the inner and often hidden meanings of Torah.

For example, explains the Ramban in his introduction to his commentary, the entire Torah is really just names of G-d. Eskimos are specialists in snow, so they have a couple dozen names for the various different types of snow they have experienced. Jews are G-d-specialists, so they have many different names for the various different manifestations of G-d's Presence within Creation.

However, these are not names that men have made up. Rather, they are names that were taught to us by G-d Himself, through Torah and its tradition. There are many names, made up of different combinations of letters of the Aleph-Bais, having different gematrios, that is, numerical values. Each name means something else, gives us a different insight into Creation and life, and is capable of being used to accomplish a certain specific task.

Is that so hard to believe? If everything exists within G-d and is therefore, by definition, a part of G-d, then G-d must be written all over everything. Every aspect of Creation, from the largest celestial body to the most minute creation, is made up of names of the Creator. You just have to know how to look for this and see it, which is more a function of one's mind's eye than one's physical eyes.

Adam HaRishon understood this. This is why he fasted for 130 years after being expelled from the Garden. He knew that his sin damaged five names of G-d, so-to-speak, each one having the gematria of 26, five of which had the total of 130. This is why after 130 years, he finally gave birth to a righteous son, Shais.

Even Nimrod understood this. The Torah tells us that Nimrod was a mighty trapper, but in those days everyone had to be one if he wanted to survive. Thus, the Leshem explains, this phrase means that Nimrod knew how to use holy names to trap angels to do his bidding. Just wait until you hear what the Kabbalistic foundation of the Tower of Bavel was (in Parashas Noach)!

We may be technologically advanced, but we have greatly regressed as far as accurately perceiving Creation.

SHABBOS DAY:

And G-d separated between the light and the dark . . . (Bereishis 1:4)

Recently at the Shabbos table, my daughter asked me to prove the existence of G-d. She wasn't asking for proof for herself, thank G-d; she was asking what I would tell some of the girls she recently met who do not share her belief (even though they were raised in religious families).

I am the product of one of the foremost outreach yeshivos in the Jewish world; I was nurtured on seminars designed to provide "evidence" for the existence of G-d. (No one can actually PROVE G-d to anyone at this stage of history; you have to prove G-d to yourself. You can convince yourself with 100 percent certainty that G-d exists, and that Torah is from Sinai. However, the most someone else can do for you is to provide you with the information that can allow you to come to your own conclusions. It's the principle of free-will on this side of history.)

So what did I answer my daughter? I told her that in the universe, intelligence does not occur spontaneously. For example, even the most sophisticated computer is only a well-organized heap of metal and circuitry capable of doing nothing else than to keep the door open on a windy day, until it is programmed. And not programmed by monkeys, but by intelligent human beings.

True, once the initial input has been made with the proper wiring in place, the brain can teach itself. (Scientists and programmers are still at a loss to artificially create what the human brain does so naturally.) The initial input had to come from somewhere else, and more than likely, from something far more intelligent than any human being could ever be.

You may recall that the movie "2001: A Space Odyssey" addressed this issue. However, in projecting an answer the author pointed the finger at some super-alien race that came to earth to nurture us to higher levels of intelligence. G-d didn't figure into the equation of Stanley Kubrick.

Since that time, I have read many papers by reputable scientists that have echoed this claim. And, I must admit, I remain stupefied by man's inability to accept that which he cannot see or touch. What they refer to as super-alien, we religious people call G-d, the only difference between the two being that the latter has expectations of the human race.

Indeed, not one super-alien has contacted us claiming responsibility for the puzzle that we call human life, to tell us what to do with it. In fact, people who claim to have been contacted by such aliens usually do not do so well under psychological testing, as would hundreds of generations of Jews who claim to have been contacted by G-d.

However, my daughter didn't buy it. It wasn't that she thought I was wrong. It was just that, well, my explanation didn't talk to her, and she told me that it certainly wouldn't talk to the girls she sat next

to at a class the night before. But I wasn't surprised, and I said what I did because I was making a second point . . .

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

And G-d separated between the light and the dark . . . (Bereishis 1:4)

First there was total darkness, and then G-d made light. Apparently, that was not enough to distinguish one from the other so G-d actually separated the two, making day and night possible. The deeper explanation:

[G-d] made a separation in the illumination of the Light, that it should not flow or give off light except for the righteous, whose actions draw it down and make it shine. However, the actions of the evil block it, leaving them in darkness, and this itself was the hiding of the Light. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 133)

In other words, the light being referred to here is not the light to which we have become accustomed. That light did come into being until Day Four of Creation, when G-d put the great lights into the firmament. This light was and is, a spiritual light, commonly referred to in Kabbalah as the Ohr HaGanuz (the Hidden Light).

As the Talmud explains, after this Primordial Light came into Creation, G-d knew that it would be abused by the evil people of history. Therefore, He hid it for the righteous people at a future time (Chagigah 12a), and that was the separation that G-d made on the first day of Creation.

However, though "future time" sounds like Yemos HaMoshiach and onward, in truth, it is not so:

[G-d] made a separation in the illumination of the Light, that it should not flow or give off light except for the righteous, whose actions draw it down and make it shine. However, the actions of the evil block it, leaving them in darkness, and this itself was the hiding of the Light. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 133)

The Haftarah of Shabbos Shuvah summed it up perfectly:

Who is wise and will understand these things; understanding and will know them? For the ways of G-d are straight; the righteous walk in them and sinners will stumble over them. (Hoshea 14:10)

We're not talking about two paths, a right one for the righteous and a left one for the evil. We're talking about only one path that can either be walked or stumbled over, depending upon your point of view in life. Either you see Creation as a random result of the Big Bang, or as an awesome product of the hand of G-d. Either you see the human body as just a super-computer, or as a spectacular monument to the kindness and thoughtfulness of its Divine Creator.

For example, did you know that the Name of G-d, Elokim, is mentioned 32 times in the Creation story? And, did you know that this corresponds to the 32 Paths of Wisdom that bring the Light of Ain Sof to the next level to become the Nun Sha'arei Binah (the Fifty Gates of Understanding)? This is why the altar in the Temple was 32 amos square, and why the average person has 32 teeth. (Think

about THAT the next time you chomp on something, or lie there in the dentist's chair.)

In fact, the posuk from Hoshea explains it all. In Hebrew, the word "wise" is chacham, an allusion to the sefirah of Chochmah, from which the light flows to the sefirah of Binah, alluded to by the word "who," spelled Mem- Yud in Hebrew. These two letters have the gematria of 50, as in the Nun Sha'arei Binah (the Fifty Gates of Understanding).

The word "these" is spelled: Aleph-Lamed-Heh, for a total gematria of 36, an allusion to the six sefiros of Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod. These six sefiros govern our six thousand years of history, one sefirah per one thousand years. Ideally, each should have ten sefiros of its own, but while in exile they only have six each: six times six is thirty six, an allusion to the Ohr HaGanuz, which shown for thirty-six hours before being hidden - necessary to rectify the situation.

It is with THIS light that righteous people of history, of which there are thirty-six in every generation (Succah 45b), walk the walk without stumbling.

In the meantime, the non-righteous stumble. They stumble when they look at Creation, stumble when they take their own lives for granted, and they stumble when they analyze the events of history, even simple ones like this:

Jerusalem Post, Sep. 19, 2004 10:24
Superstition changes name of pullout operation

Superstitious concern led the IDF to change the code name that had been given to the disengagement plan. The name, "Zohar ha-rakia" (brightness of the heavens), which was chosen randomly by a computer, is a line from the El Male Rahamim prayer, recited for the repose of the souls of the dead. Rabbis who had learned of the name assigned to disengagement operations appealed for it to be changed, because they warned, it doesn't herald good news, Yediot Ahronot reported.

MELAVE MALKAH:

The heavens and the earth were completed with all their components. (Bereishis 2:1)

It is also the name of a very holy Kabbalistic work, but that is beside the point. What the point is, is that there is no such thing as coincidence, and the computer chose that name for a reason. It means something. It is meant to have an effect, and it does. A statement was made from Heaven, and everyone who is meant to hear it will, without fail; everyone capable of understanding it will, without fail.

Perceptibility depends upon the following:

Rav Hamnuna said: Anyone who says, "The heavens and the earth were completed with all their components" (Bereishis 2:1) on Friday Night, the posuk considers to be a partner with G-d in the making of Creation. (Shabbos 119b)

Sounds simple enough. Just say a few possukim with some intention, and you become a partner with the Almighty in the most spectacular invention ever. (Who gets copyright and under whose name is the patent filed?) What could be more simple and more rewarding? There must be more to this than meets the eye, the physical eye that is.

It is interesting how the verse is passive: they were completed, as opposed to G-d completed them. For some reason the Torah waits until the next posuk to make a definitive statement:

G-d completed His creative work that He had done, and abstained from such creative work on the seventh day. (Bereishis 2:2)

It's as if the Torah is making a comment, or perhaps providing a warning. It is as if the Torah is saying, built into Creation is two possible perspectives: the possibility of looking at Creation in a passive way, as if it just happened to come into existence, as if everything just evolved and history randomly unfolds.

And, there is the second way: Creation is the product of a loving and thoughtful G-d, who remains involved in every aspect of life, communicating with us in every way He can, whenever He can. He shows us things, remarkable things, spectacular things, awesome things, but seeing them is dependent upon our seeing them, and not just with our physical eyes, but with our mind's eye.

He provides the path for each and every one of us, but leaves the choice of how to walk it completely up to us. He provides the light to guide us down that path, but we have to provide the vessel to contain it and channel it. There may be seventy explanations for the first word of the Torah, but they all converge into a single message, and this is the message. We are the judges as to how accurately we interpret it, and the quality of lives is dependent upon how well we live it.

Have a great Shabbos,
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