

THE SECRETS OF CREATION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

In the beginning, God made the Heaven and the Earth. (Bereishis 1:1)

The words are so incredibly simple, and yet, of course, conceal the most remarkable secrets of Creation. Indeed, each of the Hebrew words can be and are dissected and explained in so many ways, so many Kabbalistic ways. In fact, the Tikunei Zohar does exactly that with only the first word, Bereishis, revealing 70 different explanations for this word alone.

The point of "Perceptions" all through the years has been to provide a unique perspective on already well-known ideas. It has been to open the mind of the reader to nuances in the parshah, and how they might apply to everyday life. And, above all, to show how the Torah is really the blueprint for Creation of all of history, by revealing how its seemingly simple words incorporate all that has ever occurred, and will occur.

For example, the Zohar teaches that the first verse of the parshah should actually be the second verse (Zohar, Bereishis 16a). In other words, the proper chronological order of the verses is as follows:

The earth was null and void, and there was darkness upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered above the water. (Bereishis 1:2)

In the beginning, God created the Heaven and the earth. (Bereishis 1:1)

God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. (Bereishis 1:3)

The obvious question that arises makes it clear as to why the verses are not actually written that way: If the earth was not created until the second verse, then which earth was null and void in the first verse? What, if anything, existed prior to the creation of Heaven and Earth? What was "bereishis" the beginning of, if not of everything that exists?

To the seasoned Kabbalist, that is not a question, or at least, not a difficult one, for Kabbalah, in essence, is only about that: The process of Creation up until physical creation as recorded in the Torah. From a Kabbalistic point of view, the Written Torah picks up the story in the middle, long after far more spectacular things have occurred just to make physical Creation possible. For the first time in this parshah sheet, we will discuss some of them briefly, very briefly.

STEP 1: OHR AIN SOF

In the beginning, there was Ohr Ain Sof, only Ohr Ain Sof. The Kabbalists are quick to point out that this light, literally "Light of Without End," is not the Essence of God, just a revelation of His light on an extremely sublime level. It was, and is, an expression of God's desire to reveal Himself, eventually, to beings that will be able to recognize and appreciate such a revelation.

However, at this point in the creation process, nothing else existed but this infinite light, emanating out in all directions, infinitely, something that is much easier to say than to imagine. On this level of revelation, the existence of anything else would be a contradiction of the very nature of the light, since the existence of something else could only be possible if the light ceased to be infinite on such a level of revelation.

STEP 2: TZIMTZUM

Therefore, the first thing that had to happen to the Ohr Ain Sof in order to make Creation possible, any of it-the spiritual and physical aspects of it-was a lessening of its infiniteness somewhere, just enough to allow other things to exist. This lessening of the infiniteness of the Ohr Ain Sof is called, in Kabbalah, "Tzimtzum," or "Constriction," and its creation is considered to be one of the largest and most important "miracles" of all Creation.

Hence, at what is technically called the "Center of the Ohr Ain Sof" (or the Malchus of the Ohr Ain Sof, but how do you find the center of infinity?), tzimtzum occurred. And, it kept occurring in a spherical fashion outward from that point, expanding the size of the spiritual void, until there existed a Divinely-specified ball-like hollow called the "Challal," or "Hollow," because that is exactly what resulted: a large-trillions of times larger than our physical universe, at least-hollow that was devoid of Ohr Ain Sof, or at least enough of it to begin the process of Creation.

STEP 3: THE CHALLAL

It is basically impossible to accurately imagine what the Challal is, but to get a very rough idea, imagine a room filled with light, with a basketball suspended in the middle of it. Even though light surrounds the entire ball on all sides, the rubber skin of the ball, kept in spherical shape by the air pressure inside of it, keeps the light from entering the ball, leaving the inside of the ball completely void of light.

In reality, there is no room, just Ohr Ain Sof emanating infinitely in all directions. The ball is the Challal, except that it is not physical, but completely spiritually, and the light is held back not by air proof rubber, but by the will of God, resulting in a spiritual void into which the Ohr Ain Sof is not allowed to penetrate-at least not yet-and in a reality of finiteness within the reality of infiniteness. This will be crucial for making possible a free-will being.

STEP 4: KAV OHR AIN SOF

When they build a house, they first dig a hole and remove all the dirt. What is left is a big hole, a challal. After that, they begin to refill the hole, except this time with building materials and in a very orderly fashion, from the bottom up. New materials are only added as they are needed to further the building process, until completion.

Likewise, after the Challal was complete, it became time to allow light to re-enter it the spiritual void, Ohr Ain Sof, but in a very measured, methodical, and orderly manner. Relatively speaking, a thin line of light was allowed to penetrate the darkness, what the Kabbalists refer to as the Kav Ohr Ain Sof- the Line of the Light of Ain Sof. All of spiritual and physical Creation will be constructed from this light.

As the Kav Ohr Ain Sof enters the Challal, it moves further away from its Source, which has the effect of weakening the light, or of filtering it, increasing the effect of tzimztum. And, as the light becomes less spiritual, it also becomes more "physical," so-to-speak, eventually making possible the existence of actual physical elements of Creation, including man.

Hence, unlike the actual Ohr Ain Sof beyond the Challal, which is infinite and equal in intensity everywhere, the Kav Ohr Ain Sof is comprised of levels, making possible the concept of measurement-middos-of "up" and "down," "good" and "evil," and therefore, of positive and negative growth. It is this that gives man's free-will meaning, for it provides him with a stage on which to act out his free-will decisions with real and measured impact.

STEP FIVE: SEFIROS

What is Creation made of? Light, Divine Light. That, of course, is hard to accept, since our notion of light is that it is something that can never result in something material, and the Ohr Ain Sof itself is not the least bit physical. That's like saying that the same light that makes up the spiritual soul is the same light that results in a physical body.

Well, that happens to be true. It's just that the light that creates body has become far more constricted than the light of the soul, resulting in a physical container for the light of the soul. It is like pouring water into a glass that is made from ice: they are both the result of water molecules, except that the water molecules of ice move slower as a result of freezing temperatures.

But it is the glass that gives form to the water, just as the body gives form to the soul, so-to-speak. Likewise, infinite light (Ohr Ain Sof) requires a finite vessel (Challal) to hold it, if it is to be distinguishable from the rest of the infinite light, and make possible a world in which man can exist and use freewill choice in a meaningful way. Such vessels are called, in Kabbalah, the Sefiros.[1]

And, just as everything in the physical world is a composite of molecules of different combinations, likewise is everything in Creation a function of Sefiros, or subsets of the Sefiros, over subsets of the subsets of the Sefiros, etc., until there is a sefirah, or set of sefiros, for everything that exists.

STEP SIX: PARTZUFIM

Literally, a partzuf is a face, and represents the revelation of inner existence, just as a human face reveals the inner reality of a person. There are generally 10 sefiros in any given system within all of Creation:

Keser : Crown Chochmah : Wisdom Binah : Understanding Chesed : Kindness Gevurah :
Strength Tifferes : Beauty Netzach : Dominance Hod : Glory Yesod : Foundation Malchus :
Kingdom

Therefore, each of the above sefiros also consists of their own set of 10 sefiros, and when considered in this fashion, they are called a "partzuf," or world, a unique reality unto itself within the larger reality and system. For example, the timber used to build the walls of a room in a house are like the sefiros, whereas the room that results, which is the sum total of all the materials used, is like a partzuf, a world unto itself.

Having created the Challal, the Kav Ohr Ain Sof, the Sefiros, and the Partzufim, all the necessary ingredients to make all of Creation exist. It just becomes a question of levels, of filtering, of tzimtzum, of combinations, etc., when it comes to determining what is created, and how. It also becomes a question of many processes along the way, such as Sheviras HaKeilim-the Breaking of the Vessels-in order to assure that Creation results in the perfect environment for a free-will being, much of which is discussed extensively in the holiest of Kabbalistic works.

But at least we now have an inkling that something existed prior to Ma'aseh Bereishis-the Work of Creation-as we know it, and what it was, is.

[1] In Hebrew, the word "sefirah" comes from the word "to count," since the Sefiros represent measured amounts of Divine Light, which is also why they are called "middos," or "measurements." However, each sefirah is perfectly round, echoing the shape of the Challal and a symbol of Divine perfection, which is probably why the English word for a ball is "sphere."

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