

# THE CHOAS OF CREATION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

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

Well, yes and no. If the assumption is that "beginning" refers to the beginning of *everything*, then the statement, according to Kabbalah, is false. If "beginning," however, refers to the beginning of *physical creation*, then it is, of course, true. But wasn't physical creation the beginning of *everything*? No. In fact, the Zohar points out that the verses, as they read, are not in chronological order (Zohar, Bereishis 16a). Historically-speaking, the second verse is really the first verse, and vice-versa. The Torah should read:

*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. In the beginning, God made the Heaven and the earth.*

If so, then the Zohar creates more questions than it answers, principally: *If the earth is not created until the second verse, then how can it be null and void in the first verse?* Ostensibly it is a simple and short question, but the answer is, in fact, the threshold to the entire world of Kabbalah, which is as vast as it is deep. For, if the Talmud is likened to a vast sea, then Kabbalah is the entire universe that encompasses it and everything else for that matter.

Uninterested? Then this is your stop. Curious? Then come take the journey.

In the Torah, the existence of *tohu*, usually translated as *void* or *chaos*, seems incidental, like the mess that results from baking a cake or building a house. In each case, the chaos that results is never intended, it is just part of the process to get to the end result.

While that was also true to some degree with respect to the original chaos of Creation, the *tohu* that resulted had been anything but incidental. Indeed, it was very much intended from the start, and God even went out of His way, in a matter of speaking, to make sure that it came into existence.

It was the will of the Creator that man have choice and free will, which necessitated that there be good and evil. For the root of evil to come [into existence], the vessels broke, and had this not been the case, then there would only be good in the world, and [no possibility of] reward and punishment. (Aitz Chaim, *Sha'ar HaKlallim*, Perek 2)

In Hebrew, it is called *Sheviras HaKeilim*, the *Breaking of the Vessels*, and the idea represents a lot of Kabbalah. That may not interest a lot of people, until, perhaps, they understand that it is behind all that goes wrong in Creation, from the Great Flood in Noach's time, to the golden calf, to the breaking

of the Tablets, to thousands of years of intense anti-Semitism and extreme persecution, including, in more recent times, the Holocaust, to whatever may be coming our way next, God forbid. It's even the reason why the Stock Market crashes when it does, and why evil dictators can rise to power and do a lot of diabolical things.

All said and done, it was a single event that occurred prior to Creation as we know it and it lasted very little time, relatively speaking. But its impact on Creation was profound, and remains profound, because it can cause tremendous devastation at any moment in time, and already has on countless occasions. It is the *'tohu'* that keeps rearing its ugly head every day we lose control of history.

However, it is ours to control:

Reish Lakish said: "Why is it written, '*And it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day—HEH-Shin-Shin-Yud*' (Bereishis 1:31)? What am I to learn from the extra *Heh*? That The Holy One, Blessed is He, made a condition with Creation and said to them: 'If the Jewish people accept the Torah, you can remain; if not, then you will revert back to *'tohu vavohu'*—null and void.' " (Shabbos 88a)

Thus, the *Heh*, which represents the number five, at the beginning of the Hebrew word for "sixth," is an allusion to the five books of the Torah. "*The sixth day*," though on a *Pshat* level refers to the sixth day of Creation, on a *Drush* level it refers to a future sixth day, the sixth day of Sivan in the year 2448 from Creation, when the Jewish people were destined to receive Torah.

All of this tells us, according to Reish Lakish, that the *tohu* of Creation is kept at bay by the Torah that the Jewish people learn and practice. Torah is the chair and the whip that keeps the beast in line, and the world safe for mankind, and especially the Jewish people. This is what the verse tells us when it says:

*I am God; I called you in righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; I formed you, and I made you for a people's covenant, for a light to nations. (Yeshayahu 42:6)*

How did God put an end to most of the *tohu* of Day One of Creation? The Torah tells us:

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

We find a similar idea in the Midrash with respect to the father of the Jewish people:

*And God said, "Let there be light!" And there was Avraham!*

In other words, Avraham functioned in the same way in Creation as did the Original Light of Creation, to dispel *tohu* and increase light and order within Creation. He did this quite deftly, as the Talmud explains:

Avraham had all those who passed by and stayed call out in God's name. How did he do it? After they ate and drank and stood up to bless him, he would tell them, "Was it mine that you ate? It was from that which belongs to God of the world that you ate! Thank, praise, and bless the One who

spoke and created the world!" (Sotah 10b)

This is how Avraham controlled the chaos in his time, and this is the way his descendants are expected to do it throughout the generations since then, especially after receiving Torah. The amount of chaos in the world at any given point in time is an indicator of how well we are doing at this, as the Talmud says:

*All punishment comes to the world because of the Jewish people. (Yevamos 63a)*

If we control the chaos, it must be true.

It also must dictate how we should approach learning Torah, especially as we begin a new cycle. By the end of this week's parshah, God will regret that He created man, and start making plans to flood him out of existence, except for Noach and his family. His saving grace: grace.

Well, at least that is the way most translate the word *chain*, which is what Noach found in the eyes of God to warrant being spared from the destructive force of the Great Flood. But, as Chanukah, a word whose root is *chayn*, and which is also known as the Holiday of Light will make clear, b"H, *chayn* has a lot to do with the original light of Creation, that God Himself used to put *tohu* in its place.

More on that in the coming weeks, b"H.

Text

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