

PARSHAS BEREISHIS

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

'In the beginning G-d created the Heavens and the Earth' (Bereishit1: 1) and another verse reads 'on the day the Lord G-d made Earth and Heaven' (Bereishit, 2: 2). These two different versions of the sequence of creation sparked a difference in the minds of the Talmudic sages, regarding human religiosity and the spiritual role of mankind on earth.

Bet Shammai maintained that first the heavens were created. This is like a king who first made his throne and then its footstool, as it is written, 'The Heavens are My throne and the Earth is My footstool' (Isaiah, 60: 1). It is the opinion of Bet Hillel that first the Earth was created. This is like the king who first made the foundations and the walls of his palace and then completed the upper portions and the roof; 'in the day that the Lord G-d created Earth and Heavens. Rabbi Yochanan taught that the Heavens had precedence in creation but the Earth preceded it in completion, while Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai held that they were created simultaneously just like a vessel and its lid. (Bereishit Rabbah 1).

This discussion of the Sages is a perspective on the religious value of human actions relative to Divine Grace and Mercy.

The Sequence of time is a reflection of the Sequence of Creation.

The Shabbat and the Festivals are like Heaven, radiating spirituality and elevation on the soul from above, while the Earth is the six days of Creation, where human effort and action raise them up from below. At Creation, the six days of creativity and action preceded the first Shabbat of rest that came as their completion. Does this also continue after the expulsion from Eden? Does humanity even now have the ability to create before Shabbat, or does it require a Shabbat first that will elevate and inspire?

Bet Shammai whose merit is that of Justice-Midat Hadin, maintain that now, on their own human actions are of little value or ability. People require the inspiration and spirituality of a Shabbat before they can create or achieve kedushah during the six weekdays. The Heavens were created first, Grace pours down to Earth and then mankind's weekday actions can justifiably create and achieve kedushah.

Bet Hillel, with their emphasis on Midat HaChesed, acknowledged that our actions are of limited value, yet the Chesed of HaShem recognizes and values them. 'Unto O Lord belongs Chesed, for

You reward us for our actions' (Psalm 62: 13) The Earth was created first, six days of human creation and spiritual striving and then the Heavens are reached and the sanctity of Shabbat radiates.

This difference between Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel, explains the halakhic discussion regarding one who is lost in the desert. Having lost sight of the sequence of time, he does not know when Shabbat is. Bet Shammai rule that one should stop immediately and make Shabbat, after which one counts six days to the next. The power of that Shabbat makes the six days of the week and their creativity, possible [First the Heavens were created]. Bet Hillel maintain that one counts six days and then observes Shabbat; according to the actions of these six days is the power of Shabbat [First the Earth was created]. The halakhah is according to Bet Hillel.

Rabbi Yochanan who makes a distinction between creation and fulfillment, says that first G-d created a Shabbat, thereby paralleling the opinion of Bet Shammai. However, that Sabbath alone does not produce the next Sabbath, but rather this comes as a result of man's perfection or of man's improvements, so to speak, of God's world during the subsequent six days of labor. This cycle continues until, through the ascending spiritual spiral we enter the world that, as a result of our actions and our improvements, is one of a complete Sabbath.

Simon bar Yochai, who taught that Heaven and Earth were created simultaneously and fitted together like a lid and a vessel, holds that all action is the fruit of thought, and, therefore the actions of man during the six days of creation find their inspiration or source in the original perfect Sabbath, so that in effect they are created together. As the Lecha Dodi that we recite on the Sabbath eve sings, 'Observe (Ten Commandments, Devarim, 5: 13).... And Remember (Ten Commandments Shmot, 20: 8) in a single sentence'.

The Sequence of Creation is reflected in the Nefesh.

Wisdom is like the Heavens and the heart is to be compared to the Earth. As the Rambam writes, 'how is one to come to love and fear HaShem? When a person considers the grandeur of creation and stands in awe thereof, his intelligence leads him to immediately come to love and praise HaShem, thereby bringing a great desire to know Him' (Hilkhos Yesodei HaTorah, Chapter 2). The love and desire that reside in the hearts of human beings flow from the observation and wisdom of the

mind. Bet Shammai, insisting that the Heavens were created first, maintain that spiritual growth and religiosity require the source of the mind and the intellect.

Bet Hillel, whose merit is that of Chesed, taught that the Earth was created first in His Mercy. HaShem mercifully delivered us out of Egypt even though we were unable to understand intellectually the Tumah and idolatry of Egypt. Through mercy a pure spirit was poured into our hearts at that redemption and only afterwards were we able to come to Sinai and begin to serve Him with our minds.

In the beginning the choice of Israel that was a new creation akin to that of the world flowed from Avraham. He, as the Maharal taught us, understood monotheism with his intellect and in his wisdom sought and found G-d. This nation was then purified and fulfilled through the Exodus and Matan Torah. So Rabbi Yochanan taught, that the Heavens were created first.

Shimon Bar Yochai maintains that heart and mind cannot exist separately and so religiosity requires both together. Heaven and Earth are created simultaneously.

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