

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Bereishit

Genesis 1:1-6:8

Torah reading for September 29-October 5, 2002

In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep; and the spirit of G-d hovered above the surface of the waters. And G-d said: Let there be light; and there was light. And G-d saw the light, that it was good; and G-d divided the light from the darkness. And G-d called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

And G-d said: Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide water from water. And G-d made the firmament, and divided the waters which were below the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And G-d called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

And G-d said: Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together to one place, and let the dry land appear; and it was so. And G-d called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters he called Seas; and G-d saw that it was good. And G-d said:

Let the earth sprout grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after its kind; and G-d saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

And G-d said: Let there be luminaries in the firmament of 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 luminaries in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth; and it was so. And G-d made the two great luminaries; the great luminary to rule the day, and the small luminary to rule the night; and the stars also. And G-d set them in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth. And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and G-d saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

And G-d said: Let the waters swarm abundantly with moving creatures that have life, and let birds fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And G-d created the great sea-creatures, and every living creature that moves, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and G-d saw that it was good. And G-d blessed them, saying: Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply in the earth. And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

And G-d said: Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind, cattle, and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after their

Commentary

IN THE BEGINNING G-D CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH (GENESIS 1:1)

The Torah says: "I was the tool of G-d's artistry." An architect who builds a palace does not do so on his own: he has scrolls and notebooks which he consults how to place the rooms, where to set the doors. So it was with G-d: He looked into the Torah and created the world.

(Midrash Rabbah)

G-d looked into the Torah and created the world. Man looks into Torah and sustains the world.

(Zohar)

The Torah's first word, *bereishit*, is an acronym for *B reishit*—"two firsts" (in Hebrew, the second letter of the alphabet, *Bet*, is also the number "2"). This is to say that the world was created for the sake of two things called "first" (*reishit*)—the Torah (Proverbs 8:22) and the people of Israel (Jeremiah 2:3).

(Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)

IN THE BEGINNING G-D CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH (1:1)

Said Rabbi Yitzchak: The Torah ought to have started with "This month shall be to you..." (Exodus 12:2), which is the first mitzvah commanded to the people of Israel. Why, then, does it begin with, "In the beginning [G-d created the heavens and the earth]"? ... So that if the nations of the world say to Israel, "You are thieves, for having conquered the lands of

the seven nations," they would reply to them: "The entire world is G-d's; He created it, and He grants it to whoever He desires. It was His will to give it to them, and it was His will to take it from them and give it to us."

(Rashi, Genesis 1:1)

The above dialogue between the "nations of the world" and the "people of Israel" also takes place in the "miniature universe" within the heart of man.

The Jew serves G-d in two ways: 1) by fulfilling the Divine commandments (mitzvot) of the Torah; 2) by living his or her ordinary life—eating, sleeping, doing business, etc.—as an exercise in experiencing the Divine and serving G-d's purpose in creation (as expressed by the ideals "All your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven" (Ethics of the Fathers 2:12) and "Know Him in all your ways" (Proverbs 3:6)).

It is regarding the second area that the Jew's internal "nations of the world" (—worldly outlook) argues: "You are thieves, for having conquered the lands of the seven nations!" What business have you commandeering the "secular" areas of life? Must you turn everything into a religious issue? Serve G-d in the ways He has explicitly told us to serve Him, and leave the rest to their rightful, worldly owners!

To answer this argument, the Torah begins not with its first mitzvah, but with the statement, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth." "The entire world is G-d's, He created it"—the Torah is saying—not just the matzah eaten on Passover or the percentage of the onene's income given to charity.

With its opening statement, the Torah is establishing that it is not merely a rulebook, a list of things to do or not to do. It is G-d's blueprint for creation, our guide for realizing the purpose for which everything in heaven and earth was made. Every creature, object and element, every force, phenomenon and potential, every moment of time, was created by G-d toward a purpose. Our

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kind; and it was so. And G-d made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the earth after its kind; and G-d saw that it was good.

And G-d 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 on the earth.

And G-d created Man in His own image, in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them.

And G-d blessed them; and G-d said to them: Be fruitful, and multiply, fill the earth, and conquer it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. And G-d 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 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 everything that creeps on the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for food; and it was so.

And G-d saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

And the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And G-d completed on the seventh day His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. And G-d blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because on it He rested from all his work which G-d had created, to make.

The Creation of Man

These are the chronicles of the heaven and of the earth when they were created, in the day that G-d made the earth and the heavens.

And no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet grown; for G-d had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the earth.

And G-d formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

And G-d planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground G-d made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food;

Commentary

mission in life is to “conquer the lands of the seven nations” and transform them into a “Holy Land”—a world permeated with the goodness and perfection of its Creator.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

IN THE BEGINNING (1:1)

“In the beginning” refers to the beginning of time—the first, indivisible moment, before which time did not exist.

(Soforno)

Therein lies the answer to the question, posed by certain philosophers, as to why did G-d create the world only when He did? Why not one year, a hundred years or a million years earlier, since whatever reasons He had for creation were certainly just as valid then? But time is itself part of G-d’s creation. We cannot ask why the world was not created earlier, since there is no stretch of time that can be termed “before” creation.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

Time was the first creation; thus the first mitzvah is *Kiddush Hachodesh*—the sanctification time by setting the months and seasons of the Jewish calendar.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

IN THE BEGINNING G-D CREATED (1:1)

The Hebrew verb *bara* (“created”) employed by this verse specifically means the creation of something from nothing.

(Ibn Ezra; Nachmanides)

THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH (1:1)

The School of Shammai says: First the heavens were created, then the earth; as it is written, “In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth.” The School of Hillel says: First the earth was created, and then the heavens; as it is written, “In the day that G-d made the earth and the heavens” (Genesis 2:4).

Said the sages of Hillel to the sages of Shammai: According to your interpretation, would one build a loft before one builds the house? For it is written (Amos 9:6), “Who builds His upper chambers in the heaven, and has founded His stairway upon the earth.” Said the sages of Shammai to the sages of Hillel: According to your interpretation, would one make the footstool and then make the chair? For it is written (Isaiah 66:1), “So said G-d: Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool.”

The Sages say: Both were created together; as it is written (Isaiah 48:13), “My hand also founded the earth, and my right hand spanned the heavens; when I call to them, they stand up together.”

(Talmud, Chaggigah 12a)

IN THE BEGINNING G-D CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH (1:1)

Why does the Torah begin with a *Bet* (i.e., the number “2”)? Because G-d said: I built two palaces—one above and one below. I formed the laws of nature, and I established the life of the World to Come.

(Otiyot d’Rabbi Akiva)

He lifted the revolver which lay on the table and pointed it at me, saying:

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the Tree of Life also in the midst of the garden, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and branched into four streams. The name of the first is Pishon; that it is which compasses the whole land of Havila, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; there is bdellium and the shoham stone. And the name of the second river is Gichon; it compasses the whole land of Kush. And the name of the third river is Chiddekel; that is it which goes toward the east of Assiria. And the fourth river is Perat.

And G-d took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

And G-d commanded the man, saying: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, you shall not eat of it; for on the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Commentary

"This toy does away with 'principles'. Fear of it has opened many a mouth—also the dumb have become talkative before it."

"You are mistaken," I replied. "This toy impresses only the atheist, who has but a single world and many gods... But as for us, who have but a single G-d and believe in two worlds, the toy which you are brandishing makes no impression whatsoever."

(From the memoirs of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch)

AND THE EARTH WAS FORMLESS AND VOID... (1:2)

Said Rabbi Judah in the name of Rav: Ten things were created on the first day: heaven and earth, formlessness and void, light and darkness, wind and water, the measure of day and the measure of night.

(Talmud, Chaggigah 12a)

AND THE EARTH WAS FORMLESS AND VOID, AND DARKNESS WAS ON THE FACE OF THE DEEP (1:2)

First comes darkness, then light.

(Talmud, Shabbat 77b)

AND THE SPIRIT OF G-D HOVERED ABOVE THE SURFACE OF THE WATERS (1:2)

"The spirit of G-d hovered" - this is the spirit of Moshiach.

(Midrash Rabbah)

And G-d said: It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helpmeet opposite him.

And out of the ground G-d formed every beast of the field, and every bird of the air; and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helpmeet opposite him.

And G-d caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his sides, and closed up the flesh in its place. And G-d built the side which He had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man.

And the man said: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother, and cleaves to his wife; and they become one flesh."

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they felt no shame.

The Sin

Now the serpent was craftier than all the beasts of the field which G-d had made. And he said to the woman: "Has G-d said, You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?"

And the woman said to the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst

AND G-D SAID, "LET THERE BE LIGHT!" AND THERE WAS LIGHT... AND G-D SAID, "LET THERE BE A FIRMAMENT"... AND G-D SAID, "LET THE EARTH SPROUT GRASS"... (1:3, ET AL)

The world was created with ten utterances.

(Ethics of the Fathers, 5:1)

It is written: "Forever, O G-d, Your word stands firm in the heavens" (Psalms 119:89). Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, explained the verse thus: Your word which You uttered, "Let there be a firmament"—these very words and letters stand firmly forever within the firmament of heaven and are forever clothed within the heavens to give them life and existence... For if these letters were to depart even for an instant, G-d forbid, and return to their source, all the heavens would become naught and absolute nothingness, and it would be as if they had never existed at all, exactly as before the utterance, "Let there be a firmament."

And so it is with all created things, down to the most corporeal and inanimate of substances. If the letters of the "ten utterances" by which the earth was created during the six days of creation were to depart from it for but an instant, G-d forbid, it would revert to absolute nothingness.

This same thought was expressed by the Ari (master Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria) of blessed memory, when he said that even in completely inanimate matter, such as earth and stones and water, there is a soul and spiritual life-force—that is, the letters of Divine "speech" clothed within it which continually grant it life and existence.

(Tanya)

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of the garden, G-d has said, 'You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

And the serpent said to the woman: "You shall not surely die. For G-d knows that on the day you eat of it, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her; and he did eat.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the voice of G-d walking in the

garden in the breeze of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of G-d amongst the trees of the garden.

And G-d called to the man, and said to him: "Where are you?"

And he said: "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

And he said: "Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

And the man said: "The woman whom You did give to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."

And G-d said to the woman: "What is this that you have done?"

And the woman said: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."

And G-d said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, cursed be you above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you

Commentary

(The Chassidic Masters)

The world was created with ten utterances. What does this come to teach us? Certainly, it could have been created with a single utterance. However, this is in order to make the wicked accountable for destroying a world that was created with ten utterances, and to reward the righteous for sustaining a world that was created with ten utterances.

(Ethics of the Fathers, 5:1)

When the *Ethics* says that the world "could have been created with a single utterance" it is not just speaking of a theoretical possibility, but of an aspect of our present reality—an aspect deriving from the primordial potential (the "could") of G-d's creative power.

In other words, there are two dimensions to our existence:

1) Its essential being. G-d brought all things into existence out of a prior state of absolute nothingness so that together they should form the world He desired. This is the essence of their "somethingness"—a feature that they all share equally, their individual traits fading to insignificance before this fact. This most basic dimension of creation derives from the Divine "could"...

2) The individual qualities and features of the different creations. These are the product of the "Ten Utterances" (corresponding to the ten *sefirot* which constitute the spiritual "building blocks" of creation).

Of course, G-d could have created our world, in all its infinite detail, with a singular expression of his desire for a world. But had He done so, the only truly meaningful aspect of our existence would have been the common denominator of all reality—the fact that is exists to serve the ultimate realization of G-d's purpose in creation. The particulars of each existence would not possess any significance of their own. That G-d "bothered" to create the world with ten different utterances means that the particular traits of each being are significant—not just as a means to the ultimate end, but as things of value in their own right.

AND G-D SAID, "LET THERE BE LIGHT!" AND THERE WAS LIGHT (1:3)

The Midrash compares G-d's creation of the universe to the work of a human architect. When a person wishes to build something, first he fixes in his mind his purpose. Then he starts his labor.

"Let there be light" was the first statement in Creation, because "light" is the true purpose of existence: through the study of Torah and fulfillment of the Mitzvot, Divine radiance is revealed.

'Light' is the purpose of existence as a whole. Further, each individual is a microcosm of the world. 'Light' is therefore the purpose of each Jew: that he or she transforms their situation and environment from darkness and negativity to light and goodness.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND LET IT DIVIDE WATER FROM WATER (1:6)

Why doesn't it say "It was good" on the second day? Because on that day divisiveness was created.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND G-D... DIVIDED THE WATERS WHICH WERE UNDER THE FIRMAMENT FROM THE WATERS WHICH WERE ABOVE THE FIRMAMENT (1:7)

The lower waters weep: We wish to be in the presence of the King.

(Tikkunei Zohar)

A covenant was made, in the days of creation, with the "lower waters," that they will be offered up on the Altar in the salt brought with each offering and the water poured upon the Altar on the festival of Sukkot.

(Rashi, Leviticus 2:13)

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shall bruise his heel."

Unto the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply the pain of your child bearing; in sorrow you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you."

And to the man he said: "Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it'; cursed is the earth because of you, in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you; and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread, till you

return to the ground, for out of it were you taken; for dust you are, and to dust shall you return."

And the man called his wife's name Eve (Chavah), because she was the mother of all living (chai). And G-d made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

And G-d said: Behold, the man is become like one of us, knowing good and evil. And now, what if he put forth his hand, and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live for ever?

And G-d banished him from the Garden of Eden, to till the earth from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and he placed the cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden, and the bright blade of a revolving sword, to guard the way to the Tree of Life.

Cain and Abel

And the man knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain saying, "I have acquired a man from G-d." And she again bore, his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the earth.

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the

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AND G-D MADE THE TWO GREAT LUMINARIES; THE GREAT LUMINARY TO RULE THE DAY, AND THE SMALL LUMINARY TO RULE THE NIGHT (1:16)

It says, "And G-d made the two great luminaries"; but then it says, "The great luminary... and the small luminary"?

Indeed, at first they were both great; but then the moon said to G-d: "Master of the Universe! Can two kings wear the same crown?"

Said G-d to her: "Go diminish yourself."

Said she to Him: "Master of the Universe! Because I have said a proper thing, I must diminish myself?"

Said He to her: "You may rule both during the day and at night."

Said she to Him: "What advantage is there in that? What does a lamp accomplish at high noon?"

Said He to her: "The people of Israel shall calculate their dates and years by you."

Said she to Him: "But the sun, too, shall have a part in that, for they shall calculate the seasons by him."

Said G-d: "The righteous shall be called by your name—'Jacob the Small,' 'Samuel the Small,' 'David the Small.'"

Still G-d saw that the moon was not appeased. So G-d said: "Offer an atonement for My sake, for My having diminished the moon." This is the significance of what Reish Lakish said: "Why does the he-goat offered on Rosh Chodesh (the first of the month) differ from the others in that it is specified as 'for G-d'? G-d is saying: "This he-goat shall atone for My diminishing of the moon."

(Talmud, Chulin 60b)

MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM (1:27)

G-d created the first man as a two sided creature—one face male, and one face female. He then hewed him in two and made a back for each half.

(Midrash Rabbah)

If G-d desired mankind to be comprised of both male and female, why did He not create them that way in the first place—as He did with the other animals?

Because if they were to be originally and intrinsically two, each would be trapped in the exclusivity of his or her identity. Their encounter would be a "relationship" at best, a war at worst. Neither would have it in them to transcend the individuality into which they were born. The two would remain two, however integrated.

But neither did G-d desire man to be a singular being. As a single individual, man was without match, without challenge, and thus without potential for growth and creation. "It is not good that man be alone," said the Creator; he requires a "helpmeet" and an "opposite".

So G-d created them one, and then split them into two. Thus man searches for woman and woman yearns for man. Thus each has it within their power to reach within their splintered self and uncover their primordial oneness. Thus man and woman cleave to each other and become one.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND G-D LOOKED UPON ALL THAT HE MADE AND, BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY GOOD (1:31)

"Behold it was very good"—this is the good inclination; "'and behold it was very good"—this is the inclination for evil..

"Behold it was very good"—this is good fortune; "'and behold it was very good"—this is suffering..

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fruit of the earth an offering to G-d. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat parts thereof; and G-d paid heed to Abel and to his offering. But to Cain and to his offering He paid no heed; and Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

And G-d said to Cain: "Why are you angry? and why are you crest-fallen? If you doest well, shall you not be accepted? and if you doest not well, sin crouches at the door, and to you shall be his desire; Yet you may rule over him."

And Cain had words with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

And G-d said to Cain: "Where is Abel your brother?"

And he said: "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?"

And He said: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's

blood cries to Me from the ground.

"And now cursed are you from the earth, which has opened her mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the earth, it shall not henceforth yield to you her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shall you be on the earth."

And Cain said to G-d: "Is my sin too great to forgive? Behold, You have driven me out this day from the face of the earth, and from Your face I shall be hid; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth, and it shall come to pass, that anyone that finds me shall slay me."

And G-d said to him: "Therefore whoever slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And G-d set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should smite him. And Cain went out from the presence of G-d, and dwelt in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden.

And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived, and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.

And to Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mechuyael; and Mechuyael begot Metushael; and Metushael begot Lemekh.

And Lemekh took to him two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Tzillah. And Adah bore Yaval; he was the father those who dwell in tents and keep herds. And his brother's name was Yuval; he was the father of those who handle the harp and the flute. And Tzillah, she also bore Tuval-Cain, forger of every sharp instrument in brass and iron; and the sister of Tuval-Cain was

Commentary

"Behold it was very good"—this is paradise; "'and behold it was very good"—this is hell..

"Behold it was very good"—this is the angel of life; "'and behold it was very good"—this is the angel of death..

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND THERE WAS EVENING AND THERE WAS MORNING, THE SIXTH DAY (1:31)

The six days of creation embody the whole of history, for the world shall exist six thousand years (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 31a); which is why it is said that "G-d's day is a thousand years" (Midrash Rabbah).

The first day of creation, which saw the creation of light, corresponds to the first millennium of history—the millennium of Adam, "the light of the world," when the world was still saturated with knowledge of its Creator and was sustained by the indiscriminate benevolence of G-d. The second day, on which the Creator distinguished between the spiritual and the physical elements of His creation, yielded a second millennium of judgment and discrimination—as reflected in the Flood which wiped out a corrupt humanity and spared only the righteous Noah and his family. The third day, on which the land emerged from the sea and sprouted forth greenery and fruit-bearing trees, encapsulates the third millennium, in which Abraham began teaching the truth of the One G-d and the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. The fourth day, on which G-d created the sun and the moon, "the two great luminaries: the greater luminary... and the lesser luminary," corresponds to the fourth millennium, during which the First Temple and the Second Temple in Jerusalem served as the Divine abode "from which light emanated to the entire world." The fifth day, the day of fish, birds and reptiles, represents the lawless and predatory Dark Ages of the fifth millennium. The sixth day, whose early hours

saw the creation of the beasts of the land, followed by the creation of man, is our millennium—a millennium marked by strong, forceful empires, whose beastly rule will be followed by the emergence of Moshiach, the perfect man who brings to realization the divine purpose in creation and ushers in the seventh millennium—the e "World to Come"—a time of perfect peace and tranquility..

(Nachmanides)

Ten things were created on the eve of Shabbat at twilight. These are: the mouth of the earth (where it swallowed Korach) the mouth of the well (of Miriam, that provided water for the Israelites in the desert); the mouth of the (ballam's) ass; the rainbow; the manna; (Moses') staff; the shamir (that cut the stones of the Altar in the Holy Temple); and the writing, the inscription, and the tablets [of the Ten Commandments].

(Ethics of the Fathers, 5:6)

AND G-D COMPLETED ON THE SEVENTH DAY HIS WORK WHICH HE HAD DONE; AND HE RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORK WHICH HE HAD DONE (2:2)

What was the world lacking? Rest. When Shabbat came, rest came.

[This is to explain the apparent contradiction between the first and second part of this verse: Did G-d conclude His work on or before the seventh day? Were there six or seven days of creation? The answer is that "rest", too, is a creation.]

(Rashi)

AND G-D TOOK THE MAN, AND PUT HIM INTO THE GARDEN OF EDEN TO

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Bereishit

Genesis 1:1-6:8

Torah reading for September 29-October 5, 2002

Naamah.

And Lemekh said to his wives: "Adah and Tzillah, hear my voice; wives of Lemekh, hearken to my speech; for I have slain a man by wounding, a child by hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lemekh seventy and sevenfold."

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son, and called his name Seth; For G-d, has set me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enosh; then men began to call upon G-d by name.

The First Ten Generations

This is the book of the chronicles of Man; in the day that G-d cre-

ated mankind, in the likeness of G-d he made him. Male and female He created them; and He blessed them, and called their name Man, in the day when they were created.

And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth. And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years; and he begot sons and daughters. And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.

And Seth lived a hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. And Seth lived after he begot Enosh eight hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died.

And Enosh lived ninety years, and begot Kenan. And Enosh lived after he begot Kenan eight hundred and fifteen years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died.

And Kenan lived seventy years, and begot Mahalalel. And Kenan lived after he begot Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

Commentary

WORK IT AND TO KEEP IT (2:15)

"To work it"—these are the positive commandments; "and to keep it"—these are the prohibitions.

(Zohar)

A HELPMET OPPOSITE HIM (2:18)

If he is worthy, she is a help to him; if he is not, she opposes him.

Rabbi Yossei encountered Elijah the Prophet, and asked him: It is written, "I will make him a helpmeet"; in what does a woman help a man? Said he to him: A man brings home wheat; does he chew wheat? He brings home flax; does he wear flax? Does she not then light up his eyes and set him on his feet?

(Talmud, Yevamot 63a)

G-D FORMED EVERY BEAST OF THE FIELD AND EVERY BIRD OF THE AIR, AND BROUGHT THEM TO THE MAN TO SEE WHAT HE WOULD CALL THEM. AND WHATSOEVER THE MAN CALLED EVERY LIVING CREATURE, THAT WAS ITS NAME (2:19)

When G-d came to create man, He consulted with the angels. He said to them: "let us make a man." Said they to Him: "This man, what is his worth?" Said He to them: "His wisdom is greater than yours."

G-d brought before them the beasts, the wild animals and the birds and asked them, "This, what is its name?" and they did not know. He then brought them before the man and asked him, "This, what is its name?" and the man said, "This is a *shor* (ox), this is a *chamor* (donkey), this is a *sus* (horse) and this is a *gamal* (camel)."

Said G-d to him: "And you, what is your name?"

Said he: "Me, it is proper to call Adam, since I was created from the earth

(adamah)."

"And I, what is My name?"

"You it is proper to call *A-do-nai*, ("lord"), for You are Master of all Your creations."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND G-D CAUSED A DEEP SLEEP TO FALL UPON THE MAN... AND HE TOOK ONE OF HIS SIDES, AND CLOSED UP THE FLESH IN ITS PLACE (2:21)

An unbeliever said to Rabban Gamliel: You G-d is a thief; as it is written, "And G-d caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man... and He took one of his sides..."

Said the man's daughter, "Allow me to reply." Said she to him: "summon me a guardsman."

"Why do you require one?" asked her father.

"Thieves came upon us in the night, took a silver flask, and left us a golden flask."

"If only they would come every night."

"And was it not beneficial for Adam that a side was taken from him and a handmaid to serve him was given him in its place?"

"What I mean to ask," said the man, "is why could it not have been taken in his presence?"

Said she: "Bring me a piece of raw meat."

It was brought her; she charred it in the ashes of the hearth, handed it to him, and said: "Eat of this!"

Said he to her: "It is repulsive to me."

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Bereishit

Genesis 1:1-6:8

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And Mahalalel lived sixty five years, and begot Jared. And Mahalalel lived after he begot Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and he begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety five years; and he died.

And Jared lived a hundred and sixty two years, and he begot Enoch. And Jared lived after he begot Enoch eight hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty two years, and he died.

And Enoch lived sixty five years, and he begot Methuselah. And Enoch walked with G-d after he begot Methuselah three hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty five years. Enoch walked with G-d; and he was not, for G-d took him.

And Methuselah lived a hundred and eighty seven years, and begot Lemekh. And Methuselah lived after he begot Lemekh seven hundred and eighty two years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty nine years; and he died.

And Lemekh lived a hundred and eighty two years, and begot a son. And he called his name Noah ("comfort"), saying: This one

Commentary

Said she to him: "Adam, too, if the woman had been formed in his sight, she would be repulsive to him."

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 39)

AND SHE TOOK OF ITS FRUIT, AND DID EAT(3:6)

What was the tree from which Adam and Eve ate? Rabbi Meir says it was wheat... Rabbi Judah ben I'llai says it was grapes... Rabbi Abba of Acco says it was an *ethrog* (citron)... Rabbi Yossei says they were figs.

Rabbi Azariah and Rabbi Judah ben rabbi Shimon said in the name of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi: G-d forbid that we should conjecture which tree it was! G-d did not, and will not, reveal its name.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND THE WOMAN SAW THAT THE TREE WAS GOOD TO EAT, AND THAT IT WAS A DELIGHT TO THE EYES, AND A TREE TO BE DESIRED TO MAKE ONE WISE; AND SHE TOOK OF ITS FRUIT AND DID EAT (3:6)

The fearsome things You bring upon us, You bring about by contrivance. Look: when G-d created the world, He created the angel of death on the very first day... as it is written, "And darkness was upon the face of the abyss" (Genesis 1:2). Man was created only on the sixth day, and it is a plot that was contrived against him that he is the one who brought death

shall comfort us for our work and the toil of our hands, because of the earth which G-d has cursed. And Lemekh lived after he begot Noah five hundred and ninety five years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Lemekh were seven hundred and seventy seven years; and he died.

And Noah was five hundred years old; and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japeth.

A World Gone Awry

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them. And the sons of god saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took them wives of all whom they chose.

And G-d said: My spirit shall not always strive on account of man, for that he also is flesh; and his days shall be a hundred and twenty years. There were Nefilim in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of G-d came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them; these were mighty men of old, men of renown.

And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that all the impulse of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, all day long continually. And G-d regretted that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And G-d said: I will obliterate man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man, and beast, and creeping things, and the birds of the air; for I regret that I have made them.

But Noah found favor in the eyes of G-d.

upon the world [by eating from the Tree of Knowledge] as it is written, "For on the day that you eat from it, you shall die" (ibid. 2:17).

What is this comparable to? To one who wished to divorce his wife. On the way home, he has a bill of divorce written up. He comes home, with the bill of divorce in his hand, plotting a way to give it to her. He says to her: "Pour me a cup, that I may drink." She pours out a cup for him. As soon as he takes the cup from her hand, he says to her: "Here is your divorce." Says she to him: "What is my crime?" Says he to her: "Leave my house, for you have poured me a lukewarm cup." Says she to him: "You knew in advance that I would pour you a lukewarm cup-you have already written the bill of divorce and brought it with you in your hand!"

By the same token, Adam said to G-d: "Master of the World! For two thousand years before You created Your world, the Torah was safeguarded with You... and in it is written, 'This is the law: If a man should die in a tent...' (Numbers 19:14). Had You not prepared death for Your creatures, would You have so written? And then You come and attach the blame to me." Hence (Psalms 66:5): "His fearsome plot upon the children of man."

(Midrash Tanchuma)

G-D CALLED OUT TO THE MAN AND SAID TO HIM: WHERE ARE YOU? (3:9)

In 1798, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was imprisoned on charges that his teachings undermined the imperial authority of the czar. For 52 days he was held in the Peter-Paul Fortress in Petersburg.

Bereishit

Genesis 1:1-6:8

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Among the Rebbe's interrogators was a government minister who possessed broad knowledge of the Bible and of Jewish studies. On one occasion, he asked the Rebbe to explain the verse, "G-d called out to the man and said to him: Where are you?" Did G-d not know where Adam was?

Rabbi Schneur Zalman presented the classic explanation offered by the commentaries: the question "Where are you?" was merely a "conversation opener" on the part of G-d, who did not wish to unnerve Adam by immediately confronting him with his wrongdoing.

"What Rashi says, I already know," said the minister. "I wish to hear how the Rebbe understands the verse."

"Do you believe that the Torah is eternal?" asked the Rebbe. "That its every word applies to every individual, under all conditions, at all times?"

"Yes," replied the minister.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman was extremely gratified to hear this. The czar's minister had affirmed a principle which lies at the basis of the teachings Chassidim, founded by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov—the very teachings for which he, Rabbi Schneur Zaman, was standing trial.

"Where are you?" explained the Rebbe, "is G-d's perpetual call to every man. Where are you in the world? What have you accomplished? You have been allotted a certain number of days, hours, and minutes in which to fulfill your mission in life. You have lived so many years and so many days—Rabbi Schneur Zalman spelled out the exact age of the minister—Where are you? What have you attained?"

(Told by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch)

THORNS AND THISTLES SHALL IT BRING FORTH TO YOU (3:18)

Kotz ("thorns") is artichokes, while *dardar* ("thistles") is cardoon.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND G-D SAID: BEHOLD, THE MAN IS BECOME LIKE ONE OF US, KNOWING GOOD AND EVIL (3:22)

Freedom of choice has been granted to every man: if he desires to turn to the way of good and be righteous—he has that ability; and if he desires to turn to the way of evil and be wicked—he has that ability. This is what it says in the Torah, "Behold, the man is become unique, of himself knowing good and evil," meaning: this species, man, has become unique in the world, and there is no other species similar to him in this matter—that he, on his own, from his own mind and thought, knows good and evil and does whichever he desires, and there is none that prevents him from doing either good or evil.

[Maimonides follows Onkelus' rendition of the Hebrew words *k'echad mimenu*—commonly translated "like one of us"—to mean "unique, of himself."]

This concept is a fundamental principle and a pillar of the Torah and its commandments. As it is written (Deuteronomy 30:15): "See, I have set before you life and good, and death and evil"... For were G-d to decree that a person be righteous or wicked, of if there were to exist something in the essence of a person's nature which would compel him toward a specific path, a specific conviction, a specific character trait or a specific deed...how could G-d command us through the prophets "do this" and "do not do this," "improve your ways" and "do not follow your wickedness"...? What place would the entire Torah

have? And by what measure of justice would G-d punish the wicked and reward the righteous...?

(Maimonides)

Evil, and freedom of choice, existed before Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge. But then evil was something external from the person, and the two domains were completely separate. Man's mission in life was to "work and keep the Garden"—to cultivate the good and keep out the bad. By eating from the Tree, man gained intimate knowledge (*daat*) of evil, ingesting it into himself and—man being a microcosm of creation—into his world. From that point on the two realms were confused, there being no evil without good and no good without evil. The task of man became the "work of refinement" (*avodat habirurim*)—to distinguish and separate good from evil and evil from good.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

AND G-D MADE GARMENTS OF SKINS FOR THE MAN AND FOR HIS WIFE, AND CLOTHED THEM (3:21)

In Rabbi Meir's Torah it was found written, "garments of light."

[In Hebrew, the word *or*, spelled with an *ayin*, means "skin", while *or*, spelled with an *aleph*, means "light"]

—this refers to Adam's garments, which were like a torch [shedding radiance], broad at the bottom and narrow at the top..

Isaac the Elder said: They were as smooth as a finger-nail and as beautiful as a jewel.

Rabbi Yochanan said: They were like the fine linen garments which come from Bet-Shaan, "garments of skin" meaning those that are nearest to the skin.

Rabbi Elazar said: They were of goats' skin.

Rabbi Joshua said: Of hares' skin, Rabbi Yossei bar Rabbi Chanina said: It was a garment made of skin with its wool

Resh Lakish said: It was of Circassian wool, and these were used [later] by first-born.

Rabbi Samuel ben Nachman said: They were made from the wool of camels and the wool of hares, "garments of skin" meaning those which are produced from the skin.

Rabbi Levi said: The Torah teaches you here a rule of worldly wisdom: Spend according to your means on food; less than you can afford on clothing, but more than you can afford on a dwelling. Spend according to your means on food, as it is written, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" (Genesis 2:16). Less than you can afford on clothing, as it is written, "And G-d made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them" (i.e., simple clothes). More than you can afford on a dwelling, for they were but two, yet they dwelled in the whole world...

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND THE MAN KNEW EVE HIS WIFE; AND SHE CONCEIVED, AND BORE CAIN SAYING, "I HAVE ACQUIRED A MAN FROM G-D" (4:1)

Adam was created from the ground, and Eve from Adam; but henceforth it shall be, "In our image, after our likeness"—neither man without woman nor woman without man, nor both of them without the *Shechinah* (divine presence).

(Midrash Rabbah)

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Bereishit

Genesis 1:1-6:8

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AND ABEL, HE ALSO BROUGHT OF THE FIRSTLINGS OF HIS FLOCK AND OF THE FAT PARTS THEREOF; AND G-D PAID HEED TO ABEL AND TO HIS OFFERING (4:4)

By the same token, everything that is for the sake of G-d should be of the best and most beautiful. When one builds a house of prayer, it should be more beautiful than his own dwelling. When one feeds the hungry, he should feed him of the best and sweetest of his table. When one clothes the naked, he should clothe him with the finest of his clothes. Whenever one designates something for a holy purpose, he should sanctify the finest of his possessions; as it is written (Leviticus 3:16), "All the fat is to G-d."

(Maimonides)

AND G-D PAID HEED TO ABEL (4:4)

"G-d seeks out the victim" (Ecclesiastes 3:15); whether a righteous person persecutes a righteous person, a wicked person persecutes a wicked person, a wicked person persecutes a righteous person, or even if a righteous person persecutes a wicked person—G-d will always heed the victim. See: Abel was persecuted by Cain, and G-d paid heed to Abel.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

AND CAIN HAD WORDS WITH ABEL HIS BROTHER (4:8)

About what did they quarrel? "Come," said they, "let us divide the world." Cain took the land, and Abel took other the movables (the cattle). Said Cain: "The land you stand on is mine"; retorted Abel, "The clothes you are wearing are mine." One said: "Strip!"; the other said "Fly!" Out of this quarrel, Cain rose up against his brother Abel.

Rabbi Joshua of Siknin said in Rabbi Levi's name: Both took land and both took movables, but about what did they quarrel? One said: "The Holy Temple must be built in my area," while the other claimed, "It must be built in mine."

Judah ben Ami said: Their quarrel was over the first Eve. Said Rabbi Aibu: The first Eve had returned to dust. Then about what was their quarrel? Said Rabbi Huna: An additional twin was born with Abel and each claimed her. (according to the Midrash, twin sisters were born together with Cain and Abel for them to marry—one with Cain and two with Abel). The one claimed: "I will have her, because I am the firstborn"; while the other maintained: "She is mine, because she was born with me."

(Midrash Rabbah)

THE VOICE OF YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES TO ME FROM THE GROUND (4:10)

His blood, and the blood of all his descendents. Another explanation: Cain made many wounds in him, not knowing how he may be killed.

[In the Hebrew original, the words for "blood" and "cries" are written in the plural form, so that a literal translation would read, "The voice of your brother's bloods cry out to Me."]

(Rashi)

THE VOICE OF YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES TO ME FROM THE GROUND (4:10)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: It is difficult to say this thing, and the mouth cannot utter it plainly. Think of two athletes wrestling before the king; had the king wished, he could have separated them. But he did not so desire, and one overcame the other and killed him; and the victim cries out: "Who will plead my case against the king"

[The verse can also be read, "The voice of your brother's blood cries against Me."]

(Midrash Rabbah)

THIS IS THE BOOK OF THE CHRONICLES OF MAN (5:1)

Said Reish Lakish: This comes to teach us that G-d showed Adam each and every generation of history and its leaders.

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 38b)

AND G-D REGRETTED THAT HE HAD MADE MAN ON THE EARTH (6:6)

To say that G-d "regrets" something is obviously at odds with our understanding of His omniscience and omnipotence. Regret implies that one now knows something that one did not know before; that one's earlier decision or deed was flawed or ill informed; that one has now matured to the point that he can look back and reject a deficient past. None of this, of course, can be related to G-d. In the words of the verse, "G-d is not a man that He should lie; nor a son of Adam that He should regret" (Numbers 23:19).

Attributing regret to G-d represents a further problem: if G-d regrets the creation of something, how could that thing continue to exist for even a single instant? As the Chassidic masters explain, creation is a perpetual act on the part of G-d. When the Torah tells us that "G-d said: 'Let there be light!' And there was light," it isn't describing a one-time event which took place on the first day of creation; it is telling us that what we experience as "light" is the embodiment of G-d's continued articulation of His desire that there be light. In every fraction of every moment of time, G-d "says" "Let there be light!" and it is this divine utterance that constitutes the essence of physical light. For no being or phenomenon can possibly exist independently of G-d's constant involvement in its creation.

In discussing G-d, we inevitably use terms whose meaning is colored by the dynamics of our experience—an experience bounded by time, space and our human limitations. Our only other option would be not to speak of G-d at all (which is not an option, since G-d has command us to not only believe in His existence, but also to know and comprehend it to the extent to which we are capable). So in using these terms, we must always take care to strip them of their mortal trappings and apply only their pure, non-corporeal essence to our understanding of G-d's relationship to our existence.

Thus, when the Torah tells us that G-d regrets something, it expects us to strip the term "regret" down to its bare conceptual bones; to divest it of all connotations of failing, past ignorance—indeed, of time itself—before applying it to G-d.

Regret, to us, means that something is both desired and not desired—desired in the past, but not desired in the present. Applied to a time-transcendent G-d, "regret" implies both these states simultaneously: something that is both desired and not desired, with the desire belonging to the more distant dimension of the thing (its "past"), and the non-desire belonging to its more apparent and immediate dimension (its "present")....

(From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

**PARSHA SUMMARY AND COMMENTARY -
FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS**

TO BE OR TO BE NOT

For two-and-a-half years, the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel debated. These said, "It is better for man not to have been created than to have been created"; and these said, "It is better for man to have been created than not to have been created."

Talmud, Eruvin 13b

Is it possible to envision a Judaism that views the creation of man as a negative phenomenon? Is not the basis of the Jewish faith that human life is a meaningful, purposeful and joyous endeavor?

The Torah tells us that man is the apex and crown of G-d's creation. That through our observance of the mitzvot we are "partners with G-d"—the implementors of His purpose in creating all of existence. That our lives are therefore to be permeated with sense of pride and joy at the specialty of our role.

And yet, the sages of Shammai are of the opinion that man would be better off not to have been created—an opinion which the Talmud cites as a legitimate Torah viewpoint. Indeed, it is regarding the debates between the schools of Shammai and Hillel that the Talmud declares: "These and these are both the words of the living G-d"!

First Things First

To understand the significance of their debate, we must first examine another point of contention between them that is recorded in the Talmud:

The School of Shammai says that first the heavens were created, then the earth... The School of Hillel says that first the earth was created, and then the heavens& (Talmud, Chaggigah 12a).

The teachings of Kabbalah describe G-d's creation as a gradual unfolding from spirit to matter: first G-d emanated a series of Divine Attributes (*sefirot*), out of which He proceeded to evolve a chain of "worlds"

and realities, each further "removed" from His utterly abstract and intangible being. In other words, G-d began by creating all existences in their most sublime and spiritual form; He then caused them to evolve and metamorphose, in many steps and stages, into their more concrete incarnations, ultimately producing our physical world, the final and most tangible embodiment of these realities.

According to this, the spiritual heaven preceded material earth. The debate, then, between schools of Shammai and Hillel is not which came first in sequence, but which is the *primary focus* of G-d's creation. Did G-d create all of existence, including the physical universe, for the sake of the spirituality of the heavens? Or, does the Divine purpose in creation lie in the existence of material life on earth, and everything else exist to serve this end?

Final in Deed, First in Thought

But in this, too, there seems to be a prevalent view: That the entirety of the created existence, from the most sublime spiritual entity to the most corporeal creature, was created so that physical man should implement the Divine will in the physical world by observing the mitzvot of the Torah.

It is to this end that the soul of man, which the Zohar describes as "carved out of the heavenly throne of G-d" descends to earth to assume a physical body, character and life. It is to this end that the Torah, which originates in the heavens, has not only been revealed on earth but has been *given over* to man; after Sinai, the Torah "is not in heaven" but in the hands of its earthly students and observers (Deuteronomy 30:12; see Talmud, Bava Metzia 59b).

The following passage in the Talmud says it all:

When Moses went up to heaven, the angels said to G-d: "What is a human being doing amongst us?" Said He to them: "He has come to receive the Torah." Said they to Him: "This hidden treasure, which was secreted with You for nine hundred and seventy four generation before the world was created, You wish to give to flesh and blood? ... Place Your glory upon the heavens!"

Said G-d to Moses, "Answer them."

**PARSHA SUMMARY AND COMMENTARY -
FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS**

Said [Moses]: “Master of the Universe! This Torah that You are giving to me, what is written in it? ‘I am the L-rd Your G-d who has taken you out from the land of Egypt.’ Have you been descended to Egypt?” asked Moses of the angels, “Have you been enslaved to Pharaoh?”

“What else does it say? ‘You shall have no alien gods’—Do you dwell amongst idol-worshipping nations? ... ‘Remember the day of Shabbos’—Do you work? ... ‘Do not swear falsely’—do you do business? ... ‘Honor your father and your mother’—Do you have parents? ‘Do not kill,’ ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not steal’—Is there jealousy between you? Do you have an evil inclination?” (Talmud, Shabbat 89a).

The Midrash puts it this way: “G-d desired a dwelling place in the lowly realms.” He desired that there be a realm that is lowly and distant from Him, a world that is inhospitable to His presence—in other words, a mundane, physical world—and that man transform this world into an abode for His manifest presence. “This is what man is all about, this is the purpose of his creation and of the creation of all the worlds, supernal and ephemeral,” writes Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi in his Tanya.

So the objective of creation lies in our earth-bound existence. Indeed, it is to this very purpose that G-d first created the spiritual heavens: so that they yield a physical world that is “descendant” of a higher, more G-dly reality, and thereby possesses the potential to transcend its lowliness and corporeality and become a “dwelling” that houses and expresses the Divine.

Which comes first, the heavens or the earth? In sequence, the heavens, in essence, the earth. That much is clear. So what is the dispute between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel?

The Cosmic Experiment

But there are two ways in which the Divine desire for “a dwelling in the lowly realms” may be understood.

A muscular fellow lifts a barbell at a weightlifting competition. A scientist conducts an experiment to prove the accuracy of his calculations. What is the purpose of these acts? Is the objective to lift a few hundred pounds of lead several feet off the ground, or to push up the mercury in the scientist’s thermometer that many millimeters? Obviously not. These things are being done not because we wish for certain physical developments to take place, but in order to establish the truths they reflect: the strength of the weightlifter or the validity of the scientist’s theory. Here, the actual deed is not an end in itself, but the means by which to express a potential.

The purpose of creation may be seen in a similar light: as G-d’s desire to express His infinite potential. The intensity of a lamp is measured by the farthest point its light reaches; the true mark of genius is the ability to explain the most profound idea to the simplest mind. In the same way, a physical world that conveys the Divine truth is the most powerful indicator of G-d’s infinity and omnipotence. If G-d is truly infinite, then His light can extend everywhere, even to the darkest corners of finiteness and corporeality; if the Divine truth is truly absolute and unequivocal, then it can manifest itself everywhere, even in the brute physicality of our existence.

This is the Shammai perspective on reality. What is the primary element of G-d’s creation? The spirituality of the heavens. True, the soul and the Torah descended from heaven to earth, but this a “descent for the sake of ascent”—a descent whose objective is manifest their heavenly potential. True, our material world is the arena in which the Divine purpose is realized. But what is this purpose, if not that the material itself should be made to express a higher truth?

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov expressed this concept thus: “G-d makes the spiritual physical; the Jew makes the physical spiritual.” When a Jew does a mitzvah, utilizing his physical faculties and elements of his physical environment to fulfill G-d’s will, he is, in effect, reversing the Divine act of creation. G-d first projected from Himself the spiritual potential of creation, and then embodied it in a physical reality; conversely, a mitzvah penetrates the mundanity of its object to reveal the spirit within; it redefines

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reality in terms of its Divine essence and function.

Simple Desire

The school of Hillel disagrees. Does G-d “need” to prove or express His potential? Indeed, can there be *any* rationale for His desire, any motive that drives Him to want for a something? Ultimately, not. If “G-d desired a dwelling in the lowly realms,” then this is what He desired, period. No reason or utility can fully describe this desire, much less cause it or define it.

G-d created the heavens and the earth because He desired that His will, as expressed in the mitzvot of the Torah, be implemented by our physical selves in a physical world. If this is G-d’s desire, it is an end in itself, not an exercise in the fulfillment of some other goal.

The fulfillment of this desire may also prove the infinity and the all-pervasiveness of His truth; but this is not its ultimate source and objective. On the contrary: the spiritual dimension to creation—the potential to express the Divine—ultimately exists to serve this desire, by aiding and inspiring our observance of the mitzvot.

From the Hillel perspective, the ultimate purpose of creation is not to “spiritualize” the material existence, but that the material existence, as it is, should serve the Divine will. Everything else is of secondary significance.

Being or Naught

This also explains the debate between the schools of Shammai and Hillel on the issue of whether “it is better for man to have been created” or not.

Before the soul of man assumes a body and physical identity, it is a wholly spiritual entity—that is, an entity devoid of ego and individuality, one whose very being is defined solely as an expression of its supernal source.

So from the Shammaian perspective, the soul would indeed have been better off not to have fused with a body and become “man.” If, as the School of

Shammai maintains, our mission in life is to divest ourselves and our world of their material nature, then the initial state of our soul is also its most perfect state. Its corporeal embodiment is truly a “descent”—a departure from its true essence and function.

True, the soul endures this “descent” in order to carry out the Divine objective in creation. But this objective itself is defined as the endeavor to regain its initial spirituality. So there is no intrinsic value to the material: it is only the testing ground upon which the Divine potential invested in the soul and in creation “proves” itself by making the journey to mundane earth and back.

Thus, according to the School of Shammai, the stated aim of creation is its reversal. Every mitzvah is an exercise in nullification: that man “nullify his will before G-d’s will” (ethics of the Fathers 2:2); that he establish the truth that “There is none else beside Him” (Deuteronomy 4:35) by demonstrating that everything exists only to serve the Creator. In a Shammaian world, man is created so that he uncreate himself; spirit evolves into matter only that it revert to its quintessential insubstantiality.

Born to Be

The school of Hillel, however, maintains that “It is better for man to have been created.”

True, the soul in its “uncreated” state is more spiritual than when saddled with a materialistic self and character. True, the self-focusing human ego is far less expressive of the Divine truth than its selfless spirit. But only through its “descent” into being and individuality does the soul of man come to relate to its Creator in a far more meaningful way: by implementing His will.

For it is a “dwelling in the lowly realms” that G-d desired. Not a “dwelling” that transforms the lowly realm into a lofty realm, but a dwelling within the lowly realm itself. The ultimate purpose of creation is realized specifically in the physical reality—as it retains its physicality and realness—and specifically by the human being—as he retains his humanity and beingness. G-d wanted this “lowly” world—as it retains its “lowliness” and worldliness—to welcome Him and house His truth.

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From the perspective of the Hillel school the ultimate function of a *mitzvah* is to involve the physical creation, *as it is*, in the fulfillment of the Divine will. For a “dwelling for G-d in the lowly realms” means more than physical deeds and materials being used to fulfill G-d’s commandments. It also means that the very essence of physicality—the very features which deem it lowly—are also enlisted to serve this end. Ego, individuality, pride—the antitheses of the soul’s affirmation of the Divine truth—these, too, are forces to be harnessed and directed to drive our efforts to build the world that G-d desires.

The Dichotomous Soul

Which are we to adapt, the vision of the Shammai school or that of the Hillel?

Which should come first in the “miniature universe” that is man, heavens or earth? Should we see our world as spirit or as matter? Should we grant validity and significance to the material demands of life or view it all as nothing more than a test of our spiritual integrity?

Should we strive for self-abnegation or for the constructive application of ego?

“These and these are both the words of the living G-d.”

The Torah instructs that when there is disagreement among the sages in a matter of Torah law, the majority opinion is to be followed. Indeed, when it comes to *halacha*, the pragmatic “bottom line” of Torah law, only one of two differing opinions can be implemented in actuality: the hundred dollars belong either to the plaintiff or to the defendant; the piece of meat is either kosher or it is not.

But when it comes to the spiritually nebulous world of the soul, we have no such limitations: here, conflicting perceptions can exist side by side and be constructively applied in unison. Here, we can embrace both the perspective of Shammai and that of Hillel and apply them both to the manner in which we view

ourselves, our world and our mission in life.

*Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s “Hadran on the Mishnah
5748”*

G-D’S BUSINESS

The purpose of a business venture is to make a profit: no self-respecting businessman would invest capital and expend time and talent where the figures did not show a definitive potential for profit.

And yet, the greatest profits are to be harvested under the very conditions that the responsible businessman seeks most to avoid—in the wake of completely unforeseeable developments, in environments over which he has no control and in which his entire venture (and perhaps his own self) are in jeopardy.

Thus, the mind of the businessman can be said to operate on two levels. On the manifest level, he seeks stability and control. On this level, being caught unawares is anathema to business. While he knows that there are risks to every venture, his aim is to *avoid* the risks, to steer clear of the unforeseeable, to have a contingency plan for every possibility.

But on a deeper, subconscious level, the businessman craves the unforeseeable. In his heart of hearts, he *wants* to be caught unawares, to be plunged into the very circumstances that his business is structured to avoid. For here, and only here, lies the potential for profits greater than any analyst could forecast. On this level, having everything go according to plan would be a disappointment rather than an achievement.

These are scenarios that he will never present to his investors, or even to his own conscious self. But in the final analysis, it is these very possibilities, lurking behind the official figures and projections, that are his greatest motivation for engaging in business.

The Fearsome Plot

The Talmud declares that, “The kingdom of Heaven is similar to the kingdom of earth”—that the structures of human society and the patterns of human behavior reflect the manner in which the Creator

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relates to and runs His world.

G-d has a business strategy: the Torah, which the Midrash calls, “G-d’s blueprint for creation”, catalogues the profit that the Creator desires to see from His enterprise. The Torah’s laws detail what should and what should not be done, and what should and what should not happen, to safeguard the divine investment in creation and assure its “profitability”.

But on the very first business day of history, the plan went awry. Adam and Eve, by eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, violated the first mitzvah (divine commandment) commanded to them. Their deed jeopardized the entire venture, unleashing a chaos of good and evil upon the controlled, orderly world into which they were born.

Yet our sages tell us that this was G-d’s “fearsome plot upon the children of man.” It is I who caused them to sin, G-d admitted to Elijah the Prophet, by creating them with an inclination to evil.

For it is the process of *teshuvah* (return) from sin that yields the greatest profits of the endeavor of life. There is no greater love than the love experienced from afar, and no greater passion than the quest to return to a forsaken home and an alienated self. When a soul’s bond to G-d is stretched to the breaking point, the force with which it rebounds to its Source is greater than anything that can be generated by the soul that never leaves the divine orbit. And when a soul wanders off to the most alien corners of life, and exploits the very negativity and evil of its environment as the impetus to return to G-d, it redeems those parts of G-d’s creation that lie beyond the pale of a righteous life.

This is G-d’s “fearsome plot upon the children of man”: to create man with an inclination to evil, so that when he succumbs to it, he should rebound with a greater love for G-d, and with a greater harvest of transformed and redeemed resources, than is generated by a life lived in conformity with the divine

will.

However, it cannot be said that G-d wanted that man should sin: a sin, by definition, is an act that G-d does *not* want done. Also, if G-d’s plan was that man should sin, this raises the question of what would have happened if Adam and Eve had not chosen (for this was an act of choice on their part—had it not been, it would not have been a sin) to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Would the purpose of G-d’s creation not have been realized?

What G-d Wants

This is where the analogy of the businessman comes in. As is the case with the conventional businessman, there are two levels of motivation behind the divine act of creation.

On the manifest level, the world was designed and created to carry out the plan outlined by the Torah. This plan calls for the existence of an inclination to evil in the heart of man, in order that our conformity to the divine will should have meaning and significance. As Maimonides writes, “If G-d were to decree that a person be righteous or wicked, of if there were to exist something in the essence of a person’s nature which would compel him toward a specific path ... What place would the entire Torah have? And by what measure of justice would G-d punish the wicked and reward the righteous...?”

This plan does not require actual evil to be committed—only the *potential* for its actualization. It must be possible for us to violate the divine will, so that our not violating it should be a moral triumph for us and a source of pleasure for G-d. It must be possible for us not to do good, so that our good deeds should have value and significance. The risks must be there—they are what make the business venture rewarding and profitable—but the point of it all is that they be avoided.

But on a deeper, subconscious level, G-d plots man’s succumbing to sin. This is not what He wants—indeed, it is at variance with His express will. But when it does happen, it unleashes a wealth of possibilities that are infinitely more potent than anything the official business plan could have yielded. And it