

*Selected Parasha Shorts for Bereishit*  
*Rabbi Eliot Malomet Saturday, October 2, 2021 26 Tishri 5782*

**Post Script to Simchat Torah**

Ending the Torah and immediately starting it is one of the great moments of Jewish life. It conveys to us that the study of Torah never ends; that a new year in our lives brings new insights; that the Jewish people is co-eternal with the Torah. We bring to the first verses of the Torah the perspective of the last verses of the Torah; for example the death of Moses is juxtaposed with Creation. Moses dies *על פי ה' - at the mouth of God* which the rabbis have interpreted as *by a divine kiss*. And in the second account of creation, *God blows the breath of life into Adam's nostrils*. The first human and the Torah's most important human are attended to by God. The last words of the Torah are *לעיני כל ישראל - in the eyes of all Israel* and the first words are *ברא - In the beginning God created*. Putting these together we get *In the eyes of all Israel, in the beginning God created...* suggesting that what is unfolding for us now is a story for the world, but it is the story that unfolds before our very eyes. The juxtaposition of the end and the beginning reminds us of the universal and particular dimensions of the Torah.

**בראשית א:א' בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ:**  
1:1 *When God began to create heaven and earth.* On the first day of creation alone there are six paired elements. *שמים וארץ - heaven and earth, אור וחושך - light and darkness, יום ולילה - day and night, and ערב ובקר - evening and morning.* There only 'element' that is not paired on the first day is... God. The Torah's clue that God is One is iterated in the last line of the first day, --- which does not mean *the first day*, it means, *the Day of the One*.

**בראשית א:ד' ויגא אלקים את-האור כי-טוב**  
1:4 *God saw that the light was good...* This expression occurs every day during the creation story, except on Day 2 when the firmament is created. Why is it omitted on Day 2? Rashi states that it is because the work on Day 2, which had to do with the waters, wasn't finished until Day 3, and on Day 3 it occurs twice. Thus Tuesday is the preferred day for joyous events because *פעמים כי - twice (it is) noted that (that day) is considered good.* But the most startling thing about the expression is that it occurs altogether. Why does

God react to creation this way? Implicit in these statements is a sense of gratification and satisfaction, that God is also making discoveries and that God gets joy from Creation. On the last day, the expression is *and behold it was very good*. The Heavenly Creator is exceptionally delighted in Creation. By characterizing reality as *good* it is as if God is giving all of creation a positive valence. Unlike pagan creation myths or science, both of which present a different account to the origin of the world, the Torah imprints goodness onto creation. The implicit moral message is that if you want to see goodness, strive to be like God.

**בראשית א:כ"ב ויברך אתם אלקים...**

1:22 *And God blessed them...* Up until this point in the creation story, God is the subject of seven different verbs: *ברא - create, אמר - speak, ראה - saw, קרא - call, עשה - make, נתן - place.* The introduction of the verb *ברך - bless* - introduces a new idea into the story in that God is speaking directly to a specific entity rather than just speaking out loud as in *Let there be....* God's creation commands are addressed to the universe and not to any specific entity. But here the sea creatures and air animals are differentiated from the rest of creation by being the direct addressees of the divine blessing.

**א:כ"ח ויברך אתם אלקים ויאמר להם.. פרו ורבו...**

1:28 *God blessed them (the humans)...* Evidently, the land animals do not get a blessing, but the human creature (male and female) is blessed. Look closely: God blesses the sea and air animals **after seeing** them and discerning that they were *good*. In the case of the humans, God blesses them **without seeing** them and characterizing them. What do we make of this? Perhaps God didn't need to observe that they were *good* because they were created in God's image, so He would simply be paying Himself a compliment by saying - *they are good, just like Me!* Or perhaps by blessing them **without first characterizing them** as *good*, God is blessing them unconditionally. Regardless, the human beings are included in the summary statement about all of creation in v. 31 *God saw everything that He had made and behold it was very good.*

בראשית ב':ג' וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְקַלְמֵלֶאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

**2:3** *And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.* Leading up to this we have two more verbs: *and He completed*, and *He rested*. Now, rather than blessing a living creature, God blesses a day, and in the final act of creation, God sanctifies the day. We won't see the verb *ויקדש* again until Moses sanctifies the people at Sinai (Exodus 19:14).

בראשית ב':ז' וַיִּצְרֵף ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִדְּתָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגַפְשׁ חַיָּה:

**2:7** *the LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.* In this second account creation this creature is a single individual. The first account says nothing of what this creature was made of. Here we are told that this creature is made from *עפר* which is usually translated as *dust*. The thing about dust is that it is dry; it has no moisture. So somehow the dust has to hold together, and every person would know that there is one thing that does that: water. But God doesn't mix the dust with water. It's just dust. God's *breath* brings the creature to life. That's sufficient, but the divine breath must have also had the capacity to bind all the dust together.

#### לא טוב היות האדם לבדו

**2:18** Having established that all creation is *very good*, it is startling to read that there is one aspect of reality that is *not good* and that is *loneliness*. In this account, the human need for companionship is God's discovery; in the previous account, the double-gendered creation of the human being, builds companionship into creation. Compressed into the phrase *עזר כנגדו* is a conception of companionship that is layered with meaning. *עזר* – which we translate as *help* is often paired with *ישע* – *salvation*. It also conveys *strength*. So perhaps we can interpret God as saying, *I will make a salvation-strength opposite him*. The woman is much more than a *helpmate* – she is a partner, balance, a source of strength, collaboration and potentially, conflict.

ג':ו' וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל וְכִי תֹאנֶה-הִוא לְעֵינָיִם וַנְּחַמְדָּה הָעֵץ לְהַשְׁכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְרִיָו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם-לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּה וַיֹּאכַל:

**3:6** *When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.* Another subtlety: when God

plants all the trees in the Garden, the text refers to them as being *עץ נחמד למראה* *all the trees that are a delight to see*. But here the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is a tree that is *עץ נחמד להשכיל* *desirable (intellectually)*. The woman is the driver of the story here. Having discerned that this tree is good to eat and a delight to look at, she discerns that there is one more quality about this tree that distinguishes it from the rest. It has an intellectual dimension to it. She is not satisfied with simply taste and sight. She wants the other quality that it has.

ד':ב' וַתִּסַּף לְלָדֹת אֶת-אֶחָיו אֶת-הָבֶל וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה:

**4:2** *She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.* What do we make out of the fact that Cain tills the soil and Abel is a shepherd? Cain seems to be following in the divine structure. God cursed the ground and said that *you shall eat the grass of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread* (3:18,19). Cain works the ground. Abel on the other hand, tends to sheep. Where did that idea come from? Humans are able to control animals, but here Abel is taking that to the next level by herding them. Moreover, there is an unstated assumption here that he is also eating them – why else would he herd them? For wool? For milk? At some point early on, he discerns that meat is an efficient way of acquiring nourishment. Abel is someone to be noticed.

ד':ד' וַהֲבֵל הִבִּיא גַם-הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֶלְבֶהוּ וַיִּשַׁע ה' אֶל-הֶבֶל וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ:

**4:4** *and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering... And God notices him.* The verb *שעה* means to *notice*. We usually understand this as to *accept*. Here something is grabbing God's attention. A human being is being inventive, creative, and employs a violent act in rendering a living creature as an offering to God. This is the Torah's first account of something like this. It grabs God's attention. Cain is jealous of God's overwhelming attention to Abel. And when Cain draws Abel into the field (a conversation omitted by our text) he is basically saying to God, *I'll show You! You'll pay attention to me after this*. And that is the first act of violence. Does Cain intend to kill Abel? We'll have to leave that for another sheet! Shabbat Shalom!