

בראשית

THE CURTAIN OF CREATION

Our first image of Hashem, in *Bereishis*, is of Hashem the Creator, exercising His awesome power as He calls every aspect of the universe into being. The Torah leads us through the seven days of creation, in which Hashem, with a few simple words, turns void and nothingness into night and day, the firmament, the seas and dry land, vegetation, the sun and moon, the stars and the planets, sea creatures and land creatures. All are called into being and installed in their specific niches, armed with a unique, precise Divine instruction to provide an ideal environment for the crowning creation, man, and ultimately for *Klal Yisrael*.

A primary principle of Scripture is that the Torah deals only with the most important issue of each particular moment in time. In relating the process of creation, the Torah focuses on the primary concern of each of the six days. Once man was created on the sixth day, the Torah never again discusses the natural order of the universe, because these issues are of little consequence compared to the ensuing developments in the generations springing from Adam. Once Avraham Avinu appears on the scene, no further reference is made to the rest of mankind (unless it directly affects Avraham or his children), because everyone else is of secondary interest. Once *Klal Yisrael* appears on the landscape, no further mention is made of any other nation (unless it directly affects *Klal Yisrael*), because *Klal Yisrael* is the crowning glory of creation.

Nevertheless, it is important to discuss *ma'aseh bereishis* in order to understand the setting within which man is expected to function. Hashem designed His creation to project the illusion that it perpetuates itself. So convincing is this illusion that the ancient Greeks denied Hashem as the Creator, and invented the term “nature” to describe the forces and principles that guide the functioning of the vast and complex universe.

But the term “nature” is wholly inadequate, because even if one could understand all of astronomy, architecture, biology, chemistry, physics, geology, botany, astrophysics, medicine, mathematics, nuclear physics, psychology, engineering, etc., he would only comprehend a drop in the great sea of wisdom inherent in creation. It is that wisdom itself that creates the impression that the sun is the ultimate source of light and heat, that the soil produces food, and the clouds furnish us with rain. We perceive only nature at work when, for instance, two stones are rubbed together and a spark emanates, or a few doses of antibiotic defeat a deadly illness.

Creation follows a system of rules, and once man masters them, it seems to him that he has mastered creation. In fact, Hashem Himself adheres to these rules, avoiding the performance of outright miracles (Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim* III:15), for He wants His creation to follow the system He designed for it.

Adam *Harishon* was created as an adult. He was therefore capable of appreciating every facet of creation. He understood that nature is governed by rules and regulations, but he also

recognized the Creator who continually perpetuates those rules. Following Adam, every generation has entered into this world as infants, incapable of appreciating their surroundings. As these infants grow into adulthood, they take for granted the wonder of creation. Only when a person's first encounter with the phenomena of nature is through adult eyes is he awed enough to perceive the existence of the "Mover."

The *Mesilas Yesharim* suggests, in his introduction, that the obvious is often ignored and forgotten. This principle causes us to overlook the Hand of Hashem in the millions of natural phenomena we witness every day. Thus, the laws of nature serve to conceal Hashem from sight.

The singular greatness of Avraham Avinu was his ability to discern the existence of Hashem from nature. At the age of three (*Nedarim* 32•), Avraham began studying the various marvels around him. He concluded that the inherent powers he observed could not spring from any visible source. All evidence pointed to a Prime Mover. He examined every facet of creation and concluded that there had to be a single *manhig* (director) who conducted the affairs of the world on a moment-to-moment basis (Rambam, *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 1:3). As Avraham grew older, he traveled to various cities and kingdoms, assembling thousands of disciples and expounding on his message of monotheism (*ibid.*).

The Rambam (*ibid.* 1) explains how the world fell into error in the first place: In the generation of Enosh, the elders taught the masses that in order to show respect to Hashem, they should pay homage to His servants, the stars. While this generation did not deny Hashem's existence, it did erroneously attribute power to His servants, albeit only as servants. Certainly there is nothing wrong with showing respect to the messenger of a King; in doing so, one shows respect for the King himself. Their error was that they ascribed even a minimum of authority to the servants; what they should have understood is that the servants possessed absolutely no ascendancy at all. All power and ability comes only from Hashem. Without Hashem pushing all the buttons every second of every day, there could be no existence. Hashem is, in fact, the be-all and end-all of existence. By recognizing the servants as even minor deities, the people soon neglected Hashem entirely. All this was possible because the universe is designed to conceal Hashem.

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa once noticed that his daughter looked sad. When he questioned her, she apologized for her mood and explained that it was due to her mistakenly filling the *Shabbos* lamp with vinegar instead of oil. She lamented the fact that they would not have light for *Shabbos*. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa responded that: "He Who commands the oil to burn, He can command the vinegar to burn" (*Ta'anis* 25•). Rabbi Chanina understood that everything was ordained by Hashem; nothing happens without Hashem willing it to happen. Conventional wisdom dictates that oil burns. Why? The fact that oil actually does burn is only a manifestation of G-d's will. If Hashem "wishes" oil to burn, then He can also "wish" the vinegar to burn. The world is governed by rules and regulations ordained by Hashem, but one must never forget that every act and every breath of life is directly engineered by Hashem. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa intimately understood that it is not the sun which produces light and heat, nor the soil which supplies us with food, nor the clouds which provide rain; it is Hashem Who furnishes it all. It is not medicine which cures; it is Hashem Who cures. There is no "servant" with the independent power to provide anything; all of nature is a facade designed to conceal Hashem's presence (Rambam, *Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah* 1:1-3).

Yeshayah cries out:

שאז-מרומ עיניכם וראו מי ברא אלה

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold Who created these things (*Yeshayah* 40:26).

Hashem did not have to go to the trouble of creating a vast universe for the maintenance of mankind. All life and Earth itself could have prospered well enough with just a sun and a moon. What need is there for the planets, the Milky Way and all the galaxies? They were created, the *Navi* reveals, just to give mankind an inkling of Hashem's greatness. The universe G-d fashioned does not reflect the limits of His powers; it was created within these limits in order to achieve a desired result (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto, *Da'as Tevunos* 1). Mankind is supposed to begin to fathom the greatness of the Creator and understand the impossibility of truly knowing Hashem. Hashem actually restrained His great, infinite ability, so that it would manifest itself only to the extent necessary to inspire awe of Hashem (ibid.).

To the astute observer, all of creation points to Hashem as the Creator, as Scripture states,

השמים מספרים כבוד קל

The heavens declare the glory of Hashem (*Tehillim* 19:2).

To the unaware, on the other hand, creation manages to hide Hashem's guiding Hand.

David *Hamelech* describes the universe vis-a-vis Hashem:

עטה אור כשלמה, נוטה שמים כיריעה

Enwrapped in light, garment-like; He spreads out the heavens like a curtain (*Tehillim* 104:2).

We can understand this, by way of analogy, by considering clothing. There are two functions to clothing: one is to reveal, and the other is to conceal. In its first role, clothing identifies the wearer as belonging to a select group (for example, as a *Kohein* or soldier). Without his uniform, the policeman looks like any civilian; but in uniform he is identifiable (see page 219). The second purpose of clothing is to conceal, to cover up. Without clothing, man is on the same level as the animal. By concealing his nakedness, man differentiates himself from the beast.

After Adam and Chava ate the "fruit of the trees in the midst of the garden" (*Bereishis* 3:6), the Torah reveals:

ותפקחנה עיני שניהם, וידעו כי עירמם הם, ויתפרו עלה תאנה, ויעשו להם חגרת

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they realized that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons (ibid. 7).

Adam and Chava made clothing for themselves in order to conceal their nakedness. After the sin, they discerned that certain parts of their bodies should be concealed, so they fabricated aprons. Their only concern was to conceal that which should not be viewed.

Subsequent to chastising them and outlining the punishments for their indiscretions, Hashem then made for them garments:

ויעש ה' אלקים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבשם

And Hashem made for Adam, and his wife, tunics of skin, and clothed them
(*Bereishis* 3:21).

Hashem clothed them in tunics of skin which covered them entirely. Hashem's purpose was not merely to conceal private parts, His purpose was to reveal, through the use of clothing, the exalted status of man. Animals were intended to remain unclothed, because they are of relative unimportance. Man, the primary purpose of creation, had to be distinguished, and as a mark of royalty he is enwrapped in a tunic from head to toe (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 20).

Similarly, all of nature can be seen as Hashem's clothing, created to both reveal and conceal (*Tehillim* 104:2). On the surface, it was designed to conceal Hashem; built into the structure of creation is the ability of every element of nature to be self-perpetuating. However, Hashem demands more of man. For while the system was indeed intended to conceal Hashem, to the discerning eye His creation openly reveals Him. Man is required to look beyond the superficial and recognize the Creator.

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