

Parshat Bereishit Disassembling Progress

Simon Wolf

Much has been written about the differences between the story of creation described in the first chapter of Breishit¹ in contrast to that which is recounted in the second chapter of Breishit.² Without focusing on the details discussed in each chapter, it is interesting to look at the general theme and movement that characterizes each of these chapters. As Chazal have already noted, the name of God utilized³ and the most frequent word found in Breishit Perek Aleph is "Elokim (אֱלֹהִים)." This is in contradistinction to the second Perek where "Elokim (אֱלֹהִים)" is only found paired together with the Tetragrammaton name of God (יְהוָה) and the most common word is "man (אָדָם)." From a big picture standpoint, this would imply that God is center stage in the first chapter, whereas man is the focus of the second chapter.

Perek Aleph describes an ex-nihilo creation and the verb "to separate (בדל)" and the noun "species (מין)" are at the forefront of the narrative.⁴ The process of creation being described is one of bringing form to raw potential by subdividing, defining and extraction. Heaven and earth are separated and then earth is further divided into land and water. Then, that which "inhabits" each of those locations is defined. It is a constructive deconstructing that allows for independent entities to gain their significance. The name of God, "Elokim (אֱלֹהִים)," representing strict justice and nature, where every action has a defined reaction, is used to describe this creation of component parts and their features. It embodies a world with a certain amount of rigidity and where objects are defined by their differentiation and independence.

On the other hand, the second Perek is a creation characterized by combination, synthesis and symbiosis. Building blocks are combined or interact in order to produce an object or outcome whose whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Water, earth and work together produce plant life. Man is formed from the earth and together with a "life-force (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים)" from God becomes a living being. Vegetation and trees are not just placed or found on or separated from the land, they emerge

and grow from it. It is a creation defined by the combination of God's names; "Elokim (אֱלֹהִים)," representing strict justice and nature, together with the Tetragrammaton name of God (יְהוָה) that denotes mercy and the extra-natural. Similar to the way mercy and the supernatural blur the inflexible cause-and-effect relationship, this creation mutes the strict lines of division between different objects by emphasizing their mutualism and commonality.

Putting this together, it would indicate that the activities described in the first chapter are the purview of God while the undertakings of the second chapter are the domain of man. This would mean that man's charge in the world is to reverse the "entropy" set in motion by God. In the words of Rav Kook, in Orot HaTeshuva, just as there is a particular Mitzva of Teshuva for each individual, there is a global charge of Teshuva, to return the world to its former idyllic state of unity with God. Therefore, man is commanded to emulate God in fostering a creation of positive synthesis and harmony; to be productive and constructive in the physical, social and intellectual spheres. Of course, this is all with the caveat that those creations and progress bring the person and the world closer to God. Absent that context, those "advancements" will be deemed regressive and shunned by God. That means that sometimes there is a need for therapeutic regression in order to reorient the path of man's progress and creativity to be aligned with the process of personal and global Teshuva; to bring God and His will back into center-focus.

The biggest challenge for man in this charge is to utilize his Godly traits (צִלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים) in pursuit of a subservience to God rather than attempting to supplant God. It is a very fine line that makes a world of difference. In order to fulfill the will of God, one needs to emulate God. The more successful one is at mimicking God, the more likely they are to think of themselves as a God. That temptation is no better brought to bear than by the snake's seductive proposal to Chava when enticing her to eat from the Etz HaDa'at, "You will not die, but God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, who knows good and evil."⁵ That allure proved to be too great a temptation for Adam and

¹ לשיעור הזה פרק א כולל גם ארבעה פסוקים הראשונים של פרק ב שעל פי הפרשיות הפתוחות וסגנונם של הפסוקים נראה שהם שייכים לפרק א

² וכמוכן בראשית פרק ב הוא בראשית ב, ד-כ

³ ה' אלקים, למלך שהיו לו כוסות ריקים אמר המלך אם אני נתון לתוכן חמין הם מתבקעין, צונן הם מקריסין, ומה עשה המלך ערב חמין בצונן ונתן בהם ועמדו, כך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא אם בורא אני את העולם במדת הרחמים הוי חטייה סגיאין, במדת הדין היאך העולם יכול לעמוד, אלא הרי אני בורא אותו במדת הדין ובמדת הרחמים, והלואי יעמוד. (בראשית רבה יב, טו) || ברא אלקים - ולא אמר ברא ה', שבתחלה עלה

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במחשבה לבראתו במדת הדין, ראה שאין העולם מתקיים, הקדים מדת רחמים ושתפה למדת הדין, היינו דכתיב: (להלן ב ד) ביום עשות ה' אלקים ארץ ושמים: (רש"י בראשית א, א)

⁴ בגדול שמעתי את החילוק הזה בין בריאה ע"י הבדלה ליצור ע"י הצרפה מאת פרופסור שמעון קליין

⁵ ויאמר הנחש אל-האשה לא-מות תמתין: כי ידע אלקים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם והייתם כאלקים ידעי טוב ורע: (בראשית ג, ד-ה)

Chava and they succumbed to that desire to “be like God” and partook of the fruit from the Etz HaDa’at.

The only thing that stood between man and God in the Garden of Eden was God’s instruction to not partake of the fruits of this one particular tree. Man’s craving of that fruit was the product of the mere fact that it was restricted. Adam’s continuing adherence to abstaining from taking of the fruits was an endorsement of God’s sovereignty and demonstrated a subservience to the will of God. The longer he did the “work” of God, “to till it and keep it (לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשַׁמְרָהּ),”⁶ the more he fancied himself as a god. In addition, the more he thought of himself, the more his refusal to take of the restricted fruits tormented him and the more inviting the fruit became.⁷ Over time, that reticence diminishes and eating from the tree becomes more and more appealing because he convinces himself that it would result in his being his own god who would no longer have to acknowledge or bend to the demands of God. And, of course, he deserved it. In the end, defiance of God is a misplaced and misconstrued Godly act in which the challenger attempts to transform himself into God rather than continuing upon the path of simply emulating God. The antidote to that mistaken self-inflation is mortality.⁸ That is why God banishes Man from the Garden of Eden before he can consume from the Tree of Life, lest he become immortal.⁹

God sends Adam out of Gan Eden in order to work the land from which he was taken.¹⁰ Earlier, God had already indicated to Adam that the land would be cursed because of his partaking of the fruit from the Etz HaDa’at and its production would be curtailed and erratic.¹¹ Adam is now faced with the choice of trying to cultivate the land and make it productive in an attempt to overcome God’s curse or possibly taking up another profession that does not come into conflict with God’s dictate. Does Adam really have such a choice? From the subsequent story (Kayin and Hevel), it seems that he has the possibility of an alternative profession. Despite this, Adam chooses to farm the land and “fight” God. He attempts to harness his power and ingenuity to make the land more productive in

defiance of God’s declaration that the land would be sub-optimal in its yields and returns.

Kayin, following in the footsteps of his father, becomes a tiller of the soil (עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה).¹² He too seems to be fighting God’s curse of the land and its production by taking up farming. God’s displeasure with this choice is made evident when He accepts the animal sacrifices of Hevel while rejecting the “fruit of the soil” offering of Kayin. God placates Kayin and tries to assuage Kayin’s disappointment of being rejected by indicating to him that he has a choice to take control of his destiny. He can allow sin and defiance of God to dictate his approach to life or he can take control of the situation by doing that which is right.¹³ Hevel, as his name implies,¹⁴ was able to take a different approach that wins God’s approval because he successfully inculcated God’s message of mortality. By acknowledging God’s displeasure with farming and taking up a nomadic livelihood that was not contrary to God’s will was a clear acknowledgment of his diminution vis-à-vis God. That recognition allows him to temper his arrogance and vanity which produces a worshipper and emulator of God rather than an attempted usurper of God. On the other hand, Kayin is unable to tame his ego because his profession inherently involves defiance of God. He therefore chooses to exert control by acting as if he is God, rather than subjugating himself to God. This leads him to take the life of his brother, something that is the purview of God (מֶלֶךְ מִמִּית), instead of following his brother’s lead in taking a different approach to God.

Kayin’s being anchored to the land gave him a sense of permanence which empowered him to murder his brother Hevel. Therefore, his fratricide is punished with a demand that he become a nomad, “you are cursed from the ground...when you till the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a ceaseless wanderer on the land (וְגַע וְגַד תִּהְיֶה בְּאָרְץ).”¹⁵ His wandering should have brought with it a humility and insecurity that would have allowed to him once again see God instead of himself as the epicenter of his life. That would have been a rehabilitative process that might have resulted in Kayin engaging in introspection that would have

⁶ וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹקִים אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיְנַחֲהוּ בְּגַן-עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשַׁמְרָהּ: (בראשית ב, טו)

⁷ אתא ההוא סבא, תנא ליה: כל הגדול מחבירו יצרו גדול הימנו. (סוכה נב.)

⁸ בְּזַעַת אֵפֶיךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם עֵד שׁוֹבֵר אֶל-הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי-עֲפָר אֶתָּה וְאֶל-עֲפָר תִּשָּׁוּב: (בראשית ג, טז)

⁹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹקִים הֲוֵה הָאָדָם הֵיאָה כְּאֲדָם מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וְרָע וְעֲתָהוּ פָּן-יִשְׁלַח יְדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מִעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וַחַי לְעֹלָם: (בראשית ג, כב)

¹⁰ וַיְשַׁלְּחֵהוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִגֵּן-עֵדֶן לְעַבֵּד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִשָּׁם: (בראשית ג, כג)

¹¹ וְהָאָדָם אָמַר כִּי-שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ וְתֹאכַל מִן-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אֲרוּרָה הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבְוֹרְךָ בְּעִבְוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ: וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר תַּצְמִיחַ לָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ

אֶת-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה: בְּזַעַת אֵפֶיךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם עֵד שׁוֹבֵר אֶל-הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי-עֲפָר אֶתָּה וְאֶל-עֲפָר תִּשָּׁוּב: (בראשית ג, יז-ט)

¹² וְתִסָּפַר לְלִדְתָּ אֶת-אֲחִיו אֶת-הֶבֶל וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה: (בראשית ד, ב)

¹³ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְמַה תָּרָה לָךְ וְלִמָּה נִפְלוּ פְנֵיךָ: הֲלוֹא אִם-תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב לְפִתַח חַטָּאת רִבֵּץ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁקָתוּ וְאֵתָה תִּמְשַׁלְּבוּ: (בראשית ד, טז)

¹⁴ הֶבֶל הַבְּלִים אָמַר קִהְלַת הֶבֶל הַבְּלִים הֲכַל הַבֵּל: (קהלת א, ב)

¹⁵ וְעֲתָה אֲרוּרָה אֶתָּה מִן-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת-פִּיהָ לְקַחְתָּ אֶת-דַּמִּי אֲחִיךָ מִיָּדְךָ: כִּי תִעַבְדָּ אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה לֹא-תִסָּפַר תִּתְּכֶחָה לָךְ גַּע וְגַד תִּהְיֶה בְּאָרְץ: (בראשית ד, יא-יב)

yielded sincere remorse and a return to God. Once again here, we find him unable to free himself of the temptation to deify himself. In contravention to God's demand that he be a vagabond, the Torah relates that Kayin embarks on a project to build a city that he names Chanoch similar to his son. A city is a place of assembly, security and permanence. It is the antithesis of the itinerant lifestyle that God had prescribed for Kayin.

This deterioration continues through the end of the Parsha where we meet the Bnei HaElohim (בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים), not children of God, but those that fancy themselves as gods, taking whatever pleases them.¹⁶ As Rashi notes in the first line of his commentary to the Torah, only God has the right to exercise eminent domain because everything belongs to him.¹⁷ Individuals who coopt that divine right can no longer see God in the world because they believe everything is theirs and they therefore engage in wholesale Chamas (חֶמֶס), lawlessness, violence and theft to indulge their desires.¹⁸

In all these cases, man is utilizing his God given gift to be creative and build. Whether it is resourcefulness and ingenuity to make the land more productive, to build cities or to construct societies, all of these are endeavors that the Torah looks favorably upon in Sefer Devarim. Nevertheless, in Sefer Breishit, these Godly attributes found in man are utilized time and again in defiance of God. The technological advances are undertaken in order to free one of God's

"burdensome" tether and to allow immorality to flourish. This leads God to initiate a reset and favor the "regressive" nomadic lifestyle of the forefathers. The insecurity and the simplicity of this way of life are far more favorable conditions for fostering a proper approach to and worship of God by eliminating the egotistic side of man.

Nevertheless, the second chapter of Breishit indicates that God's charge and expectation of man is to emulate God in being creative and innovative; to build and be constructive and not to remain permanently stranded as wandering shepherds. Sefer Devarim envisions such a nation, land and society, but it will require hundreds of years, the context of the Torah and many safety precautions before such a utopian vision can come to fruition. Of course, the message to us is clear. We are living in times where the change and speed of technological advancement is at its fastest pace in history and only continues to accelerate. The question we must always ask is does this progress help bring us closer to God or does it facilitate our ability to free ourselves of God. That will determine whether the "improvement" is beneficial or detrimental and whether we are fulfilling our charge to be constructive creators. A lot of that is a function of our attitude and how the technology is utilized, but if we fail that test, God sends us through "regressive therapy"¹⁹ in order to properly reorient our interaction with creativity and innovation towards God.

Shabbat Shalom

¹⁶ וַיְהִי כִּי־הִחַל הָאָדָם לָרֵב עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה וּבָנֹת יְלָדוּ לָהֶם: וַיֵּרְאוּ בְנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם כִּי טֹבֹת הֵנָּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרוּ: (בראשית ו, א-ב)

¹⁷ בראשית - אמר רבי יצחק לא היה צריך להתחיל"א [את] התורה אלא (שמות יב ב) מהחודש הזה לכם, שהיא מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו"י [בה] ישראל, ומה טעם פתח' בבראשית, משום (תהלים קיא ו) כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים, שאם

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יאמרו אומות העולם לישראל לסטים אתם,¹⁷ שכבשתם ארצות שבעה גוים, הם אומרים להם כל הארץ של הקדוש ברוך הוא היא, הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו, ברצונו נתנה להם וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו: (רש"י בראשית א, א) ¹⁸ וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ הָאֱרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים וַתִּמְלֵא הָאֶרֶץ חֶמֶס: (בראשית ו, יא) ¹⁹ כדוגמא, נגיף הקורונה, ויירוס פשוט, שלח את העולם אחורה...