



Sefer Bereishis - Parshas Bereishis

Is This The Real Life

When God created the universe, the life it contained was not equally instructed. The amphibians and birds were told:

– וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱתָם אֱלֹהִים, לֵאמֹר: פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ, וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הַיַּמִּים בַּיּוֹם, וְהָעוֹף, יִרְבַּ בְּאֶרֶץ –
 God blessed them saying, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the waters of the seas, and multiply the land”. (1:22)

In contrast, mankind was told:

– וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱתָם, אֱלֹהִים, וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ, וְכִבְשׁוּהָ –
 God blessed them; and God said to them to be fruitful and multiply; fill the land and conquer it... (1:28)

The Netziv points out that while both are blessed to be populous, man had a personal instruction – וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם – it was said to them directly, and not just about them, unlike the animals.

Rav Hirsch notes that nature serves God by its intrinsic existence. It cannot be otherwise because there is no deviation in how it relates to God. Mankind however, is spoken to, and must choose to listen. Free will is the צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים that distinguishes humanity from other creatures. Allowing instinct and nature to run wild is to surrender to the animal within, which is not the duty man is charged with; the charge is to subjugate natural instinct and listen to God’s instruction.

The Netziv explains that the animal instinct within us must be channeled a particular way, as evidenced by the origin of humanity:

– וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם, עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה, וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו, נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים; וַיְהִי הָאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה –
 God formed man from the dust of the earth, and breathed into him a living soul, and the man became alive (2:7)

Animals are simply called נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה – they are living things. But mankind is made of more – a balance of mundane matter, fused with soul. It is with this equilibrium that man becomes truly “alive”. The word חַיָּה means alive, but it also means happy. The happiness is found in the balance. This is the choice on offer – וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם.

This is reflected in their respective developments too; a newborn calf can stand not long

after birth, and while it will get bigger, it is born as it will always be; whereas humans are born helpless, defenseless, and pretty useless for a relatively large part of their lives. Clearly then, mankind are intended for greater aspirations than cattle.

The body is the container of the soul. The soul has to operate the system, or it withers away. Think about the nature of consumerism; endless consumption of media, entertainment and pleasure. Is that not already dead..?

We're meant for more. To truly live.

Shabbos, Rest, and Chasing Perfection

Before the first Shabbos, where Hashem stopped creating things, the concluding overview sums up how Hashem related to His handiwork, finally complete:

– וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד; וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר, יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי –
 And God saw all that He had done, and it was very good. With an evening and a morning, the sixth day. (1:31)

The Ramban teaches that everything in the universe, כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה including the less pleasant things in life, is brought together into what Hashem calls – טוֹב מְאֹד excellent. Ultimately – everything is for the best. With a greater perspective, everything turns out for the best.

The Netziv further adds that this was not just true of that moment – that unique point in existence where Hashem created things – from then on, all potential futures were dormant, awaiting their moment. Developing the Ramban's concept, all latent potential is positive.

Rabeinu Bachye notes how at the conclusion of every other day, the Torah describes it as כִּי – טוֹב it was "good". But on the final day, where all the different aspects of existence had been formed and came together, it became something else; – טוֹב מְאֹד "very" good. The creation itself was truly greater than sum of its parts; like a sophisticated machine, all the various levers, gears and cogs came together to become something utterly incredible.

The Kli Yakar points out the contrast between calling the first five days כִּי, and the conclusion of events is called וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד. The Kli Yakar explains that כִּי is a term of clarification – that there is a deliberation weighing towards טוֹב with the other days. But when everything comes together, it is – וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד it is clear and absolutely good.

The Sforno explains that the conclusion of creation achieved a balance, an equilibrium; existence was literally "at rest" – precisely the definition of Shabbos, which is itself the state of perfection. With the acceptance and absorption of the imperfections in the world, which the Torah calls – טוֹב מְאֹד then – וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר, יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי the sixth day – with the definite article, begins. Existence becomes whole, complete, and it is truly Shabbos. On

such a sixth day – הַשְּׁשִׁי “the” perfect sixth day, Shabbos commences.

Indeed, the Torah continues;

– וַיִּכְלֹ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, וְכָל-צְבָאָם –

And the heavens and earth were completed...

Truly, perfection is seeing that there are countless components to the sophisticated machine that is life, some of which are tough, but all of which, together, make it work.

How we have a Yetzer Hara

Before man ate from the tree, clothing did not exist. They were not ashamed because they did not know about modesty – they were literally “acting natural”. They could not distinguish between good and evil; and although a degree of knowledge was initially granted to man, enabling Adam to name all the animals for example, nonetheless they were not imbued with the evil inclination, until they ate of the tree, after which he knew the difference between good and evil:

– וַיְהִיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִים, הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יָתֵב שָׁשׁוּ –

They were both naked, the man and his wife, and they weren’t embarrassed. (2:25)

When challenged with explaining their actions, they hide, and when asked why they are hiding, they say because they are naked. God shows His knowledge of what they have done, and says, “Who told you that you are naked?”

But there is something to this story that does not add up.

The purpose of creation is to grow close to Hashem by overcoming challenges and resisting natural tendencies to evil or self indulgence, through developing ourselves in all ways. This being so critical to the fabric of existence, how could there be no inclination for evil?

R’ Chaim Volozhin explains it was not so; Adam had all faculties, particularly free will, instilled in him beforehand, to enable to him to do as he saw fit. What he didn’t have though, was an internal urge for evil. The snake/Satan figure, the personification and embodiment of evil, was external to Adam, and had to physically manifest itself as the snake to ensnare Adam and Eve – unlike today, where this battle is an internal struggle, choice, and decision, in the subconscious.

Rashi implies that the evil inclination only became an innate part of man when he consumed the fruit. That is to say, his act of evil literally became a part of him!

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