

# Larchmont Temple—CHEVRAH TORAH, 5781/2020-21

## DISCOVERING OURSELVES...UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER

Through the human exchange, difference becomes a blessing...We must learn the art of conversation, from which truth emerges not, as in Socratic dialogues, by the refutation of falsehood, but from the process of letting our world be enlarged by the presence of others who interpret reality in ways radically different from our own...We will make peace only when we learn that God loves difference and so, at last, must we.

[The Dignity of Difference, Rabbi J. Sacks, pgs. 22-23]

## B'REISHIT...Genesis 1:26-31...6:5-7

### KEY KOSHI:

*HOW does humankind's creation & its failure frame the purpose of our being?  
WHAT does God's response teach us about why we are here?*

### P'SHAT...

26] God now said, "Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness; and let them hold sway over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over the beasts, over all the earth, over all that creeps upon the earth." 27] So God created the human beings in [the divine] image, creating [them] in the image of God, creating them male and female. 28] God then blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and tame it; hold sway over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the sky, and over every animal that creeps on the earth."  
29] And God said, "look, I have given you all the seed-bearing plants on the face of the earth, and every tree that has in it seed-bearing fruit—these are yours to eat. 30] And to every land animal, and to every bird of the sky, and to all that creeps on the earth in which is the breath of life, I [give] all green vegetation for food." –and so it was.  
31] God then surveyed all that [God] had made, and look—it was very good! And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם  
בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדּוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם  
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ  
וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ :  
27 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם  
בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלֵּם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר  
וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם : 28 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם  
אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ  
וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבִּשְׁהָ וּרְדּוּ  
בְּדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּה  
הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל־הָאָרֶץ : 29 וַיֹּאמֶר  
אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב  
| זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ  
וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ פְּרִיעֵץ זֶרַע  
זֶרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ : 30 וְלִכְלֹל־  
חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכְלֹעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכְלֹל־  
| רוֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה  
אֶת־כָּל־יֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי־כֵן :  
31 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה  
וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר  
| יוֹם הַשֵּׁשִׁי :

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי וְצִוֵּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

6:5] When the Eternal saw how great was the wickedness of human beings in the earth, that the direction of their thoughts was nothing but wicked all the time, 6] the Eternal regretted having made human beings on earth, and was heartsick. 7] So the Eternal thought: "I will wipe the humans whom I created from off the face of the earth—the humans [and with them] the beasts, the reptiles, the birds of the sky—for I rue the day I made them."

<sup>5</sup> וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם  
בָּאָרֶץ וְכָל־יֶזְעַר מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹת לְבָבוֹ רָק רָע  
כָּל־הַיּוֹם : <sup>6</sup> וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־  
הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לְבָבוֹ :  
<sup>7</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֲמַחֶה אֶת־הָאָדָם  
אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה  
מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף  
הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּי נַחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתֶם :

## REMEZ...

*1:26-27 And God said: Let us make Adam in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky...And God created Adam in The Image; in the Image God created them, male and female God created them*

ABRAVANEL...The word *Tselem* comes from the root “*tsel—shadow*.” Just as a shadow is intimately linked with matter, man’s intellect is linked with his body...This is what Torah meant when it stated “*Let us make man...after our image, in our likeness*” Man consists of both the spiritual and the earthly.

RASHI...In the mold that was made for him. For everything else was made through a statement of God, but Adam was created with God’s own Hands.

J.P.S...The continuation of v.26 establishes an evident connection between resemblance to God and sovereignty over the earth’s resources, though it is not made clear whether man has power over nature as a result of his being like God or whether that power constitutes the very essence of the similarity.

S’FORNO...”*B’Teselem Elohim*” refers to the power of man’s intellect. *Elohim* represents the rational faculty. Adam is only created “*In the Image*” because his potential to attain perfect reason can never be perfected. “*Adam*” is a physical being endowed with spiritual potential.

*1:31 And God saw all that He had made, and behold—it was very good.*

*And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

RASHBAM... God looked at all the actions performed in Creation and their result to see of anything was in need of repair. It turned out that everything was just fine.

RAMBAN... The Hebrew term “*m’od*” refers to abundance. The reason it is added this day is that the verse is speaking in general, about all of Creation. Even if some slight wrong could be found in it, it is “*tov m’od*”—mostly all good.

KIMCHI... “*all that He had made*” up to and including humankind, for Creation would not be complete without them. That is why God responds: “*it was very good.*”

ABRAVANEL...It was “*Adam*” whom God found “*very good,*” despite what God knew would happen.

*6:5-6 The Lord saw how great was man’s wickedness on the earth—the thoughts in his heart only evil all day.*

*And the Lord regretted that He had made man on this earth, and God’s heart was saddened.*

ABRAVANEL...Read not “*that he had made man on earth*” but rather “*of earth.*” They were nothing but evil all the time because of their earthly nature. It does not say God regretted having created man, but only that he was regretful of their earthly nature.

RASHI... “*God’s heart was saddened*” It literally says “*God grieved Himself at His heart,*” In other words, there arose in the heart of the Holy One—that is the mind—to cause grief to humankind.

KIMCHI... “*vaYit’atzev El Libo...God’s heart was saddened.*” Understand, this is metaphoric. There can be no change in God—no joy and no sadness. But human beings are glad when things go right and sad when things go wrong, and the narrative gives God the appropriate human feelings so human emotions of ours may be felt.

HERTZ... “*God’s heart was grieved*” A touching indication of God’s love for creation. God is grieved at the frustration of His purposes for humankind—the possibility of such frustration being the price of man’s freedom of will.

## DRASH...

**Rabbi MYCHAL SPRINGER...** [Chaplain, Weil-Cornell, Director Pastoral Education at JTS]

The opening words of *B'reishit* are exhilarating. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Each day, as God creates the world and everything in it, we are told that it is good. On the sixth day, when God creates people, we are told that *it is very good*. From the chaos comes order, goodness, and endless possibilities. But the parashah ends with the world on the verge of destruction: "The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised... was nothing but evil all the time. And God regretted all that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened" ([Gen. 6:5-6](#)).

How did we move so quickly from "very good" to "nothing but evil all the time"? How do we hold on to our sense of possibilities in the face of God's regret? How do we come to terms with the exile which we are sent into only hours after we are placed in the garden?

The rabbis give us some guidance on these key questions when they pair *B'reishit* with this week's haftarah, from the book of Isaiah. The haftarah begins:

(5) Thus said God the Lord,

*Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and what it brings forth,  
Who gave breath to the people upon it And life to those who walk thereon:*

(6) I the Lord, in My grace, have summoned you, And have grasped you by the hand.

*I created you, and appointed you A covenant people, a light of nations—*

(7) Opening eyes deprived of light, Rescuing prisoners from confinement,  
*From the dungeon those who sit in darkness.* ([Isaiah 42:5-7](#))

Verse five, which echoes the first verses of *B'reishit*, brings together the creation of the world and the creation of human beings, which comes into focus through the story of Adam and Eve. In a telling twist, Isaiah speaks of God giving breath to the people (*noten neshama la'am*) in contrast to the verse in Genesis which describes the creation of a single person, Adam. In Genesis we read: "He blew into his nostrils the breath of life." ([Gen. 2:7](#)). So we have to wonder at the meaning of focusing on the creation of a single being versus focusing on the creation of the people. In Genesis, we understand that all people come from this one person. We understand that, despite our many differences, we are all linked through this single creative act. The rabbis teach that since we can all trace ourselves to one common ancestor, we have to recognize our equality in God's eyes. The miracle of the creation of Adam is that God took some of the earth (*adama*) and turned it into a living being (*adam*).

What then do we understand from Isaiah's version of creation? God gave breath to a people. Instead of pausing over the miracle of the creation of human life, Isaiah moves us directly into the question of meaning. Isaiah focuses on the purpose of this creation:

*I created you, and appointed you A covenant people, a light of nations.*

And what is this covenant people supposed to do? To open the eyes of the blind and rescue prisoners from confinement, to make this world the place it should be. The creation story as it's told in Isaiah is a creation story that already knows what it is to live in a broken world. It is a story that is infused with a dark reality, steeped in the experience of a post-destruction, exiled community. The hope for that community involves seeing that the brokenness is not the end of the story. God wants them—wants us—to see that redemption is possible, that the brokenness can be transformed into wholeness and freedom.

But this role of "light of nations" becomes difficult to understand when, a few verses later, God promises to redeem God's people.

*All who are linked to My name, Whom I have created, Formed, and made for My glory—*

*Setting free that people, Blind though it has eyes And deaf though it has ears.* ([Isaiah 43:7-8](#))

These verses seem to say that God's people, Israel, are blind and deaf. That poses a problem for us. How can it be that this people, which is to be "*a light of nations*" is blind and deaf to God's truth? How can a people be both blind and entrusted with the task of bringing sight to others who are blind? ...How can a people be both blind and help others out of their blindness?

The paradox of that challenge captures an essential aspect of being human. God does not make the people of Israel "a light of nations" because we are fundamentally different than the nations. If we were different, then what kind of light would we be shining? The nations would write us off and say that our reality and theirs have nothing to say to one another. In order to be a light of nations we need to recognize our own captivity and find the strength to trust that God will set us free; we need to recognize our own blindness and make our way in the darkness until some light becomes available to us. It is not some essential difference between us and them that sets us apart, but our commitment to the covenant—a covenant that fosters hope when we are in darkest despair—that enables our drama to inspire others to a similarly redemptive trust. Ultimately, we come to understand that chaos and possibilities, exile and the yearning to be restored, are present in both *B'reishit* and Isaiah. While the creation in *B'reishit* starts with "very good" and moves towards God's regret, the creation in Isaiah starts with the broken world which makes God want to scream ([Isaiah 42:14](#)) and gives us the challenge of partnering with God to make it "very good."

**SOD...**

**Rabbi ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL...**

Man is "*a little lower than the angels*" [Ps 8:5] and a little higher than the beasts...

Because of his immense power, man is potentially the most wicked of beings...Yet, if man is not more than human, he is less than human...His state is one of constant wavering, of soaring and descending...In his reason, he may seem limited; in his will, he may seem wicked.—yet man stands in relation to God, which constitutes the essential meaning of life—his purpose in Creation. Man is the knot in which heaven and earth are interlaced...Man is not an innocent bystander in the cosmic drama. There is inside of us more of a kinship with the Divine than we are able to believe. The souls of men are candles of the Lord, lit on the cosmic way, rather than fireworks produced by the combustion of nature's compositions, and so every soul can be a light of the Lord. [[Man is Not Alone](#), pgs 211,215]