

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Bereishit

A more complex and impenetrable entity than the human mind has yet to be discovered. From quark to quasar, from amoeba to orangutan, nothing compares. Man is truly the pinnacle of Creation and the crown jewel of the universe.

How did this fascinating creature come into being? How did G-d create Man?

G-d created the world with words. G-d spoke and, out of the nothingness, a vast fabric of space-time appeared. G-d continued to speak, and that void began to fill with all the wonders of Creation. With His words G-d brought each new creation into existence.

These creating words contain the core definitions of each creation. G-d created by describing and defining. So, to fully appreciate the true essence of a created thing, to understand its inner reality, it is necessary to look back and study the words that formed it.

What words did G-d use to create Man? G-d used words in the creation of man that He did not use for the creation of any other thing. G-d spoke quite strangely. G-d began the creation of man with the words: "Let us make man" (Bereishit 1:26).

This statement is very disturbing. Let us make man?! Who is G-d talking to? Does G-d need help?

There are many explanations of this verse, but Rashi quotes the following:

"G-d consulted with the angels... Even though the angels did not assist G-d in the creation of man, and [by speaking this way] G-d allows heretics to make their claims [that there is more than one G-d], nevertheless, the Torah did not refrain from teaching us proper behavior and humility. [G-d's behavior teaches us] that the greater one should consult with and receive permission from the lesser one" (Sanhedrin 38b).

Let's try to understand what's happening here. The stage is set, it is the final day of creation, and G-d is ready for His greatest act. He is ready to create man. And G-d says, "Let us create man." Why "us"? Not because some insecure angels want to feel needed, but because man needs to learn humility.

Very nice.

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We should appreciate the supreme self-sacrifice here on G-d's part. There is no principle closer to G-d's Heart than His unity. G-d's unity is the Torah's central theme, it is the first of the Ten Commandments, and the most fundamental statement of Judaism is: "Here O Israel, G-d is our Lord, G-d is One". If there is one thing that G-d wants us to know, it is that He is One. But G-d is ready to compromise His own agenda. Apparently, in the process of teaching us humility, G-d models for us a true expression of humility. Unbelievable!

But isn't G-d kind of busy right now? Isn't He in the middle of creating man? Is this the time to start teaching us lessons? Before we are even created? Obviously, there is something much deeper going on here.

In the act of creating man, G-d controls and even surrenders His desire for the recognition of His unity. He sacrifices His own need on the altar of a higher cause. Through the use of the words "Let us make man" G-d twists this act of creation into an act of selflessness. This has tremendous implications.

In this creative act, G-d is imbuing the Divine quality of self-control into the created being. G-d is creating a creature with the power to overcome natural instinct and personal agenda. G-d is creating a being capable of selflessness. G-d is creating Man.

Selflessness is a Divine quality, for it breaks natural law. It is perfectly natural for man to pursue his desires, but it is supernatural for him to rise above them. The unique ability of homo-sapiens to control their behavior makes them fundamentally different from every other form of life.

Now we can appreciate the remaining words in the creation of man: "Let us make man in our image and likeness" (ibid). Man, like G-d, can choose. Man can choose to speak constructively, with words that create, build, and uplift. Man can choose to be a model of exemplary behavior and humility. And man can choose to overcome personal agendas to do what's right. In short, man can be G-d-like.

We call this ability "Free Will". This is what makes the human mind so mysterious, for it is inexplicable according to natural law. It is the law of the soul. Free will elevates man above animal, and ultimately, it is what makes man responsible and accountable for his actions.

Exercising free will is part of the very definition of what it means to be human. Man was created a deeply conflicted being, with both physical and spiritual drives, and G-d expects us to struggle with that. But there is no greater fulfillment for man other than overcoming self-centeredness and satisfying the needs of the soul. This Divine potential was imbued within all of us from the very beginning.

Shabbat Shalom!

