

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BERESHIT

27 TISHREI 5773 | 13 OCTOBER 2012

DEDICATIONS: By Dr. Ruth Katz in memory of her husband, Dr Alex Katz A'H,

And by Lloyd Schoenberg in memory of his father Avraham ben Moshe Gershon

I'll be traveling in Israel next week and we're not set up to send the newsletter remotely. So B'H we'll be sending our next newsletter in two weeks for Lech Lecha

THE SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

Friday Night: Candles: 6:00 PM - Minha/Arbith: 6:00 PM

**NEW! Shabbat Mornings 8:30AM Laws of Shabbat for Sephardim with Rabbi Yosef Colish
Shabbat Shaharit at 9AM – Please say Shemah before 9:12**

11:00 - 12:00 Shabbat Morning Kids Program for girls ages 4-8 - Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more . . . Simultaneous Babysitting downstairs with Leah Colish ages 2-4.

No Kiddush dedication. Please speak with Ida this week about dedicating a Kiddush and thanks to all who stepped up to donate on Simhat Torah

Shabbat Afternoon Kids Program 4:30PM until Havdala Ice Cream Party, Tanach Stories, Basketball Lineup, Children's Devar Torah, Hoolahoop, Parsha Quiz, 613 Mitzva Memory Contest, Shabbat Charades, Supervised Play and our weekly Raffles! with Rabbi Colish and Riki Waldman

5:00 PM Pirkey Avot with Rav Aharon

Minha: 5:30 PM followed by Seudah Shelishi and a Class 6:00 – with David

Evening Service (Arbith): 6:55 PM - Shabbat Ends:7:00PM

Weekday Tefilla Schedule –

6:30AM Laws of Berahot with Rabbi Yosef Colish

Followed by Shaharit at 7AM

We need help with the minyan. People are into new post holiday schedules. Many are traveling. We need commitments. Please speak with Rabbi Colish to commit to one or two or more days each week.

Sunday Shaharit at 8AM

Weekday Torah Class Schedule

Monday Night Class with Rabbi Yanai – 7PM Monday night , followed by Arvit

Beginning November we will have additional classes as in the past

Halacha Class in Depth Halachot Pesah on Tuesday nights with Rabbis Michael and David at 8:30PM

And Registration is underway for the continuation of our Kosher Kitchen Class series with Rabbi Yosef. Classes will resume in November. Details to follow . . .

Baruch Abittan will be joining us next Shabbat

please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

Take a peek into Kosher Culinary Arts School in Jerusalem with my daughter Mikhayla who is going through a rigorous 6 month program. bitemebymik.blogspot.com

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100. Sam, Michael and Hymie Cohen ... we'll need you next week.

EDITORS NOTES

In the beginning “The status of creation and evolution in public education has been the subject of substantial debate and conflict in legal, political, and religious circles. Globally there is a wide variety of views on the topic; in some countries legislation forbids teachers to discuss either the evidence for evolution or the modern evolutionary synthesis, the explanatory scientific theory of evolution. In other countries legislation mandates that only evolutionary biology is to be taught in the appropriate scientific syllabuses....In the United States, creationists and proponents of evolution are engaged in a long-standing battle over the legal status of creation and evolution in the public school science classroom. According to npr.com, there are several states that do not teach evolution, like Minnesota. There are states that teach the criticisms of evolution, such as Kansas and Ohio. And others who teach Creationism along with evolution, including Kentucky. Colorado and New York are two states that do teach evolution, but it is up to the schools, teachers, and counties on how this subject is taught and portrayed to the students.”
 Wikipedia

I often wonder how anyone can take a simple literal reading of a translation (which came from a prior translation) of the Torah and call that science. On the other hand, those who teach that everything is random and an accident and leave unexplained how it all started, leave much to be desired.

As we begin the Torah anew this week, we find that the first statement of G-d we are privy to is, “Let there be light”. And Light was created. But from the wording it seems that something called Shamayim and something called Aretz (translated as Heaven and Earth) were created beforehand. In addition the spirit of Elokim seems to be resting on the surface of the Mayim (water). The difficulty with all of this is that the planets including the sun don't seem to be created til what we call the fourth day. So whatever heaven, earth, water and light we are mentioned, must be beyond the level of human comprehension.

We have some insight into the light which prior to the sun seems to have been a spiritual light of sorts. This light was said to be hidden after Adam sinned, to be revealed again in the future. Where is it hidden exactly? It is suggested that is sheathed within the Shabbat candles, within the Hanukah candles, and within the 36 hidden righteous individuals. I think it's hidden and at the same time revealed within the Torah itself. And we all have access to it and the blessings it brings.

We know we have a soul. The lowest level of this soul is the life force which animates us. And that life force or Nefesh is hidden within our bodies, but at the same time that it is hidden, it also is revealed through the body. When we see a person alive, we perceive the soul within. The

naked body is not revealed in public. We cover the body with clothes and although the clothes hide the body, they also allow us to perceive it. We often perceive something through that which covers it.

This spiritual light of creation is hidden within the Torah. And the Torah is covered with layers, with words, with letters, with stories and with laws. All hide, yet allow us to perceive the light and benefit from it.

Moses my son reminds me that onions have layers. And ogres are like onions with layers. (You need to read those lines with Shrek's voice). In reality the universe is created with layers. The Torah too is created in layers. There is the Torah that we learned as four year olds in nursery. This is just the extreme outer layer. Yet too many of us stop there. We often stay in the Torah storybook world refusing to venture beyond. But the point is to peel away the layers of Torah and to get closer to the light.

The Torah of a nine year old can't be limited to the outer layer experienced by the four year old. And the teen must delve even deeper. And as adults we must penetrate into the hidden worlds. We return year after year to the same portions, not simply to review the stories the morah (teacher) told us as we sat around coloring a sun and a moon. We are meant to peel away another layer each year. Every question we ask brings an answer which peels away a layer, but reveals a hundred more questions, each to be explored and delved into. This is the beauty of Torah. This is the beauty of a Jew who never ceases to ask why. And this is why we are the people of the book.

As we start the year anew, we need to make a commitment that this year, we won't simply float above the surface. This year we need to dig deeper than we did before. The more we dig, the more light we expose. And the world needs light!

Shabbat Shalom,

PS As to creationism vs evolution, we have to admit there are difficult questions.

Fifteen billion years against 5773 years; how does one reconcile the two? Must one reconcile the two? What about dinosaurs and prehistoric man? Some rabbis who tell us that the exhibits in the Museum of Natural History are fabricated to lead us astray bewilder me. I have yet to understand how someone can tell others from a pulpit that dinosaurs never roamed the earth. At the same time, saying that this is all some accident that was achieved against odds that are so far beyond reality is just as strange as saying there were never any dinosaurs.

Although he does not answer every question I have and although he has his critics, **Gerald Schroeder** has helped me tremendously to understand where creationism and evolution meet. He takes on skeptics from both sides of the cosmological / theological debate, arguing that science and the Bible are not at odds concerning the origin of the universe and of life. They are two views of one reality from two vastly different perspectives.

As his website notes: The culmination of a physicist's thirty-five-year journey from MIT to Jerusalem, Genesis and the Big Bang presents a compelling argument that the events of the billions of years that cosmologists say followed the Big Bang and those of the first six days

described in Genesis are, in fact, one in the same - identical realities described in vastly different terms. In engaging, accessible language, Dr. Schroeder reconciles the observable facts of science with the very essence of Western Religion: the biblical account of Creation.

Carefully reviewing and interpreting accepted scientific principles, analogous passages of Scripture, and biblical scholarship, Dr. Schroeder arrives at a conclusion so lucid that one wonders why it has taken this long in coming. The result for the reader - whether believer or skeptic, Jewish or Christian - is a totally fresh understanding of the key events in the life of the universe.

If you don't have time for the book, go to a website "Simple to Remember" and listen to one of his tapes. It's free and it will open your eyes and reveal another layer in your life long journey

PSS and since I won't be here next week, let me add one more piece with a personal note below ...

What's in a name

Rabbi Meir Y. Soloveichik is Director of the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University and Associate Rabbi at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in New York. He gave the benediction at the 2012 Republican National Convention, and the story enclosed pertained to his arrival at the convention. He is the grandson of Rabbi Aharon Soloveichik OB"M of Chicago and grandnephew of Rabbi Joseph Soloveichik OB"M of Boston:

Rabbi Meir Soloveichik opened his Shabbos Shuva drasha as follows: I flew to Tampa, Florida

a few weeks ago for the Republican National Convention. When I arrived, I was escorted into a large room where all the Convention speakers of the day gathered along with Congressmen, Senators, Governors and other politicians.

A woman approached me, stared at me, and then asked "Who are you??"

I responded politely, "I am Meir Soloveichik."

"Are you from Florida," she asked.

"No," I said, "I am from NY".

She looked puzzled and confused, which I found confusing, since I figured most people knew there were a lot of Jews who lived in NY. Anyway, she smiled and walked away. She then approached me again just a few moments later with her husband.

She said to me, "Meir Soloveichik -- I'd like to introduce you to my husband, Congressman Walker." The Congressman and I shook hands.

Then the woman asked, "Can you please tell me what city in NY you are the Mayor (Meir) of??"

After the KJ Congregation roared with laughter, Rabbi Soloveichik continued as follows:

"...And that, Ladies and Gentleman, was the first time in my life that a person was more impressed with my first name than my last name!!!"

Here's another Granted not as good, but

We spent the Shabbat before Sukkot in Manhattan, enjoying dinner by Jonah and Lauren and as always Shabbat at the Safra Synagogue, hosted by Rabbi Elie Abadie who always makes everyone welcome. We knew the Prime Minister Netanyahu was in New York for Shabbat and we figured he might show up at the

Synagogue. Walking past his hotel early Shabbat morning and seeing the streets all blocked, I mentioned to one of the Israeli security guards that we start at 7:30 and they should send someone up to wake the Prime Minister. The security guy smiled.

But he never showed up.

We figured he might show for Mincha and Seudat Shelishi. And we weren't the only ones. Many of the guys thought the same and told their wives. Again we were disappointed, but after I gave the devar Torah one of the guys announced to the others. "Now we can tell our wives that Bibi (meaning me but alluding to the PM) did in fact show up and not only that... he gave the class".

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Bereishit in a Nutshell

G-d creates the world in six days. On the first day He makes darkness and light. On the second day He forms the heavens, dividing the "upper waters" from the "lower waters." On the third day He sets the boundaries of land and sea, and calls forth trees and greenery from the earth. On the fourth day He fixes the position of the sun, moon and stars as timekeepers and illuminators of the earth. Fish, birds and reptiles are created on the fifth day; land animals, and then the human being, on the sixth. G-d ceases work on the seventh day, and sanctifies it as a day of rest.

G-d forms the human body from the dust of the earth, and blows into his nostrils a "living soul." Originally Man is a single person, but deciding that "it is not good that man be alone," G-d takes a

"side" from the man, forms it into a woman, and marries them to each other.

Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden, and commanded not to eat from the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." The serpent persuades Eve to violate the command, and she shares the forbidden fruit with her husband. Because of their sin, it is decreed that man will experience death, returning to the soil from which he was formed, and that all gain will come only through struggle and hardship. Man is banished from the Garden.

Eve gives birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain quarrels with Abel and murders him, and becomes a rootless wanderer. A third son, Seth, is born to Adam; Seth's eighth-generation descendant, Noah, is the only righteous man in a corrupt world

Table Talk by Rabbi Mordechai Becher

The serpent told Eve that if she ate from the Tree of Knowledge, she would not die. Seeing that it was desirable, she ate some fruit and gave some to Adam. G-d punished Eve with the difficulty of raising children and the pain of childbearing. (Genesis 3:4-16, Rashi).

1. Eve's curse is twofold: the difficulty of raising children and the pain of childbearing. Since pregnancy precedes raising children, why would the Torah reverse the order of these curses?

2. The serpent convinced Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge by convincing her that doing so would not cause her death. However, immediately after she ate from the forbidden fruit, she gave some to Adam, so that if she died, he wouldn't survive her and replace her with another mate

(Rashi). If Eve was convinced that the fruit would not cause her death, why would she then act out of a fear of dying?

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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There is No World Without Torah
 The first Pasuk of the Torah tells us that God created the heavens and earth "Bereshit," which is commonly understood to mean "in the beginning." Rashi, however, comments that the letter "Bet" can sometimes mean "because of" or "for the sake of." The word "Bereshit," then, may be read to mean, "because of Reshit." The term "Reshit," Rashi proceeds to explain, can refer either to Am Yisrael, or to the Torah. And thus right at the very beginning, we are told that the world was created for the sake of the study of Torah. The earth exists to facilitate the study of God's wisdom, and thus theoretically, if Torah study would cease to occur throughout the world, the world would cease to exist. And it thus follows that through our study of Torah, we help sustain the world and ensure its ongoing survival.

Rashi returns to this theme later in the Parasha, toward the end of the creation story. After describing the events of the first day of creation, the Torah concludes the section by saying, "It was evening and it was morning of the first day." After the events of the second day, the Torah concludes, "It was evening and it was morning of the second day," and then again after each of the subsequent days of creation. Rashi notes that after the sixth and final day of creation, rather than concluding with the phrase, "Yom Shishi" ("the sixth day"), the Torah instead writes, "Yom Ha'shishi," adding the seemingly

superfluous letter “Heh,” which means “the.” The word “Ha’shishi,” Rashi explains, should be understood as referring to the “the sixth day,” the sixth day of Sivan, when we received the Torah at Sinai. The Torah is alluding to us that although it appears that the process of creation ended after the sixth day of creation, this is not the case. Creation was completed only some 2,500 years later, when Beneh Yisrael stood at Mount Sinai and received the Torah. Even after the natural world was in place, it wasn’t until the Torah was given that the purpose of creation was realized and thus the world could be said to have reached completion.

This also explains the Talmud’s famous remark that when Beneh Yisrael stood at Mount Sinai, God lifted the mountain over their heads and said that if they would not accept the Torah, “Your grave shall be there.” If Beneh Yisrael had not accepted the Torah, quite simply, the world would not have continued to exist. Since the entire purpose of creation was for us to observe the Torah, there would be no purpose for the world if Beneh Yisrael had chosen not to accept it.

The question, however, arises, why did God wait nearly 2,500 years before giving the Torah? If Torah is the purpose of creation, why did He not give mankind the Torah immediately at the time of creation?

As we all know, Torah observance is not easy. Even nowadays, when many of the Torah’s commands do not apply due to the absence of the Bet Hamikdash, properly fulfilling the Torah’s obligations is an immense responsibility. It’s a responsibility we are happy to accept, but there is no denying that it is a formidable challenge. Given the

difficulty entailed in observing the Torah, a foundation had to be laid before the Torah could be given. The lives of our righteous ancestors, of the patriarchs and matriarchs and Yaakov’s twelve sons, provided the “infrastructure” that we need to properly observe the Torah. Abraham Abinu, for example, embedded within our nation a natural sensitivity to Hesed and to selfless, unquestioning devotion to God. Yishak implanted within us the notion of sacrifice. Rahel and Leah, who remained righteous despite being raised in the house of Laban, bequeathed to us the ability to remain firmly committed even in the face of negative influences. These great figures built the backbone that we need to observe the Torah and live lives of genuine religious commitment.

Indeed, although there have been periods in our history when our nation failed to live up to its obligations, and its commitment to God was shaky, the spark kindled by our righteous forebears remained. The solid foundation they built for us has always remained and will always remain firmly intact. We see this phenomenon even in our times. Many of our parents or grandparents, who were raised in the early years of the Orthodox Jewish community in America, were forced to attend public school. Outwardly, it seemed that Jewish tradition would not survive on these shores, that the Jewish schoolchildren of that time would grow up to be indistinguishable from their gentile neighbors. And yet, lo and behold, their grandchildren and great-grandchildren now attend outstanding yeshivot and are receiving a thorough, comprehensive Torah education. This survival of Torah commitment against all odds is a function of, and testament to, the

foundation built by our righteous ancestors. God waited before giving us the Torah to ensure that this foundation would be in place, thereby ensuring the survival of Torah even amid the upheavals and turmoil that we would endure throughout the centuries.

Building upon that foundation, our job is to continue sustaining the world through our unwavering commitment to Torah education and Torah study. Without it, there is no Jewish people, and there is no world. This is our duty, the responsibility that is charged upon us right at the very beginning of the Torah, which teaches “Bereshit” – that the very purpose of the world’s creation is for us to involve ourselves in Torah study.

Rabbi Wein

The Torah completed its annual cycle of weekly readings this past week with the parsha of V’Zot Habracha. It begins our new yearly reading of the Torah this Shabbat with the reading of parshat Bereshith.

Rashi points out to us that when Moshe came to bless the tribes of Israel before departing this world he purposely connected his blessings to the past blessings of Yaakov to his children hundreds of years earlier. And Yaakov also did likewise connecting his blessings to those that he received from his father Yitzchak. And Yitzchak built his blessings upon the foundation of the blessings that he received from his father Avraham. Hence the connecting letter vav at the beginning of V’Zot Habracha.

So it can easily be said that the Torah favors the continued use of old blessings. The Jewish people cherish the use of old blessing and their effectiveness. It is part of Jewish traditional life to cherish

the past and not allow it to be discarded or forgotten. And truth be said, there is really very little to add to the blessings given us by previous generations.

Those blessings of family, tranquility, prosperity and health are really all a person can ask for in this life of ours in this world. In fact one can be bold enough to state that not only is there no necessity for new blessings – there really are no new blessings that can be administered. The old blessings are apparently eternal in nature, valid in all generations and under all circumstances.

However, the parsha of Bereshith tells us of new beginnings, of a world waiting to be developed by human work and ingenuity. The parsha tells us that the Lord has created a paradise that humankind is bidden to develop and preserve. And we see throughout the history of human civilization the insatiable drive of human society to invent, create, discover and exploit the hidden treasures of our planet.

It is within the innate nature of humans to pursue new beginnings in every sphere of human activity. I recall from my years in the yeshiva how my revered and sainted teachers were never satisfied by my repeating back to them their interpretations and reasonings of the Talmudic subject under discussion but rather challenged me to come up with my own original thoughts on the matter.

The only way to grow physically, economically and spiritually is by forging new beginnings and connecting them to the old blessings that preceded them. Without new beginnings, society stagnates and regresses.

The Dark Ages of Europe before the Renaissance, the printing

press and the renewed drive for discovery and development that characterized the late Middle Ages and the dawn of the Modern Era, is stark testimony as to what happens to civilization in the absence of new beginnings. Remaining static, not adjusting to new situations and opportunities, attempting to freeze time and place, and allowing for no new beginnings eventually dooms a society to irrelevance and even to its own demise.

We are witness to a fractured Jewish society that has somehow lost the essential connection between old blessings and new beginnings; that no longer combines V'Zot Habracha and Bereshith. On Simchat Torah we immediately combine Bereshith – the new beginnings – with the conclusion of V'Zot Habracha, but much of the Jewish world is ignorant and unaware of our old blessings. It only pursues new beginnings and flails about wildly in attempting to create a new Judaism that somehow will retain value and a sense of eternity.

Without the old blessings, without Torah knowledge and ritual observances, without taking one's Jewishness seriously, no new beginning will ever provide lasting benefit and needed succor to Israel. And yet Jews who only possess old blessings but shy away from, indeed condemn, any new beginning doom themselves as well to eventual societal dysfunction, poverty and marginalization.

Smashing cell phones solves no societal problems, and becoming doctrinally anti-technology only serves to perpetuate past errors of judgment and behavior. The parameters of Halacha are unchanging but practical policies, programs and societies are constantly in need of adjustment and rethinking in the light of ever

changing human conditions and challenges.

Old blessings do help us make the correct choices regarding our new beginnings but they never were meant to prevent new beginnings from taking place. No new Jewish beginning, no matter how expertly financed and media spun, can be successful without the basis and reference to old blessings. V'Zot Habracha and Bereshith always should march joined together in the Jewish world.

**Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United
Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth
A Living Book**

It is the most famous, majestic and influential opening of any book in literature: "In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth." What is surpassingly strange is the way Rashi – most beloved of all Jewish commentators – begins his commentary:

Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah should have begun with the verse (Ex. 12: 1): "This month shall be to you the first of the months", which was the first commandment given to Israel.

Can we really take this at face value? Did Rabbi Isaac, or for that matter Rashi, seriously suggest that the Book of books might have begun in the middle – a third of the way into Exodus? That it might have passed by in silence the creation of the universe – which is, after all, one of the fundamentals of Jewish faith?

Could we understand the history of Israel without its prehistory, the stories of Abraham and Sarah and their children?

Could we have understood those narratives without knowing what preceded them: G-d's repeated disappointment with Adam and Eve, Cain, the generation of the Flood and the builders of the Tower of Babel?

The fifty chapters of Genesis together with the opening of Exodus are the source- book of biblical faith. They are as near as we get to an exposition of the philosophy of Judaism. What then did Rabbi Isaac mean?

He meant something profound, which we often forget. To understand a book, we need to know to what genre it belongs. Is it history or legend, chronicle or myth? To what question is it an answer? A history book answers the question: what happened? A book of cosmology – be it science or myth – answers the question: how did it happen?

What Rabbi Isaac is telling us is that if we seek to understand the Torah, we must read it as Torah, which is to say: law, instruction, teaching, guidance. Torah is an answer to the question: how shall we live? That is why he raises the question as to why it does not begin with the first command given to Israel.

Torah is not a book of history, even though it includes history. It is not a book of science, even though the first chapter of Genesis – as the 19th-century sociologist Max Weber pointed out – is the necessary prelude to science, because it represents the first time people saw the universe as the product of a single creative will, and therefore as intelligible rather than capricious and mysterious. It is, first and last, a book about how to live. Everything it contains – not only commandments but also narratives, including the narrative of creation itself – is there solely

for the sake of ethical and spiritual instruction.

It moves from the minutest details to the most majestic visions of the universe and our place within it. But it never deviates from its intense focus on the questions: What shall I do? How shall I live? What kind of person should I strive to become? It begins, in Genesis 1, with the most fundamental question of all. As the Psalm (8: 4) puts it: "What is man that You are mindful of him?"

Pico della Mirandola's 15th century Oration on Man was one of the turning points of Western civilization, the "manifesto" of the Italian Renaissance. In it he attributed the following declaration to G-d, addressing the first man:

"We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your

own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine."

Homo sapiens, that unique synthesis of "dust of the earth" and breath of G-d, is unique among created beings in having no fixed essence: in being free to be what he or she chooses. Mirandola's Oration was a break with the two dominant traditions of the Middle Ages: the Christian doctrine that human beings are irretrievably corrupt, tainted by original sin, and the Platonic idea that humanity is bounded by fixed forms.

It is also a strikingly Jewish account – almost identical with the one given by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in Halakic Man: "The most fundamental principle of all is that man must create himself. It is this idea that Judaism introduced into the world." It is therefore with a frisson of recognition that we discover that Mirandola had a Jewish teacher, Rabbi Elijah ben Moses Delmedigo (1460-1497).

Born in Crete, Delmedigo was a Talmudic prodigy, appointed at a young age to be head of the yeshivah in Padua. At the same time, he studied philosophy, in particular the work of Aristotle, Maimonides and Averroes. At the age of 23 he was appointed professor of philosophy at the University of Padua. It was through this that he came to know Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who became both his student and his patron. Eventually, however, Delmedigo's philosophical writings – especially his work *Bechinat ha-Dat* – became controversial. He was accused, by other rabbis, of heresy. He had to leave Italy and return to Crete. He was much admired by Jews and Christians alike, and when he died young,

many Christians as well as Jews attended his funeral.

This emphasis on choice, freedom and responsibility is one of the most distinctive features of Jewish thought. It is proclaimed in the first chapter of Genesis in the most subtle way. We are all familiar with its statement that G-d created man "in His image, after His likeness". Seldom do we pause to reflect on the paradox. If there is one thing emphasized time and again in the Torah, it is that G-d has no image. "I will be what I will be", He says to Moses when he asks Him His name.

Since G-d transcends nature – the fundamental point of Genesis 1 – then He is free, unbounded by nature's laws. By creating human beings in His image, He gave us a similar freedom, thus creating the one being capable itself of being creative. The unprecedented account of G-d in the Torah's opening chapter leads to an equally unprecedented view of the human person and our capacity for self-transformation.

The Renaissance, one of the high points of European civilization, eventually collapsed. A series of corrupt rulers and Popes led to the Reformation, and to the quite different views of Luther and Calvin. It is fascinating to speculate what might have happened had it continued along the lines signalled by Mirandola. His late 15th century humanism was not secular but deeply religious.

As it is, the great truth of Genesis 1 remains. As the rabbis put it (Bereishith Rabbah 8: 1; Sanhedrin 38a): "Why was man created last? In order to say, if he is worthy, all creation was made for you; but if he is unworthy, he is told, even a gnat preceded you." The Torah remains G-d's

supreme call to humankind to freedom and creativity on the one hand, and on the other, to responsibility and restraint – becoming G-d's partner in the work of creation.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And G-d saw all that He had made and behold it was very good" (1:31)

This is written to teach Man that he should emulate his Creator and he too should always view all of Creation and he too should always perceive its goodness and should always declare that everything in Creation is "very good". This world is full of joys, and men are required to be aware of these joys and to thank the Creator for them.

In accordance with the great principle that the Creation is intended to teach Man about the Creator, this verse is actually saying "And behold the Creator is very good." "Good" includes "wise" and "kindly". And "very" means "endlessly wise" and "endlessly kindly". Abraham utilized this principle to spend his entire life in the study of the endless wisdom and endless kindness of the Creator.

"He who gives a gift to his fellowman must let him know" (Shabbat 10B). The purpose is 1) to cause him to love the giver, 2) and to cause him to enjoy the gift (by informing him of the value and usefulness of the gift). Therefore: 1) the Creator informs us that He is the giver of the Creation to us, so that we love Him more because of His benevolence. 2) And also He informs us that this gift is very good, in order that we enjoy it more. Thus we are expected to study the endless benefits of Creation, and as a result we shall

love the Giver more and more as our understanding of His gift increases.

But, as a result of this information, when men apply their minds to this subject and spend their lives in the study of this goodness of Hashem (as Abraham did), then the world becomes for them "very good". Not only will they live happily and will sing to the Creator all their days, but they will be rewarded for this that they will sing in the World to Come forever. This is the true and ultimate meaning of "Behold, it was very good". This very good world is merely a vestibule or a lobby before the Very Great Good which awaits those that prepare themselves in the vestibule to enter the great Banquet Hall (Olam Haba).

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