



MIDEI CHODESH B'CHODSHO

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And It Was Good

Just one week ago we moved in circle after circle. ...

The solitary Hakafa each day of Sukkot; the multiple Hakafot of Hoshana Rabba; the exuberant Hakafot of Simchat Torah...

The circles at our year's beginning remind us that, although we tend to view the passage of time in linear terms, much of life's movement is actually circular or cyclical in nature. As each day ends, the next begins – day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. We return to the same seasons, to the same festivals, to the same time periods, again and again.

The challenge? To avoid reacting as if “we’ve been here before.” In particular, as we again begin the cycle of kariat HaTorah, we should open the text anew. Each familiar word, each time-worn phrase, potentially carries lessons of unexpected power concerning our changing lives and changing world.

As a case in point, consider one phrase that appears repeatedly in the Torah’s creation narrative. If you are anything like me, you may well have accepted this phrase without much thought.

Over and over again, the Torah punctuates a creational step with the statement: “And God saw that it was good.”

But what does this phrase mean?

When you or I attempt to create something, we have no way of knowing what the finished product will be. We often step back, therefore, to determine whether what we are producing matches what we intended to produce. For an all-knowing God, however, this review is obviously unnecessary. God knows from the outset what will be built and how it will turn out. An all-perfect being cannot make mistakes. What does the Torah, therefore, mean to convey with the statement. “And God saw that it was good”?

The Ramban makes an overall observation that addresses this question. He notes that the Torah attributes two actions to Hashem throughout the creation narrative. We are told that God “spoke” (e.g. “and God said let there be light”) and that God “saw” (“and God saw that it was good”).

When Hashem “speaks” during the story of creation, says the Ramban, he brings something into being; he *creates*.

When God “sees”, on the other hand, he moves from the realm of creating to the realm of *sustaining*. This transition is marked by the phrase “and God saw that it was good”. The phrase appears when God has completed an element of creation and desires to maintain its existence.

The Ramban, however, goes much further. He emphasizes that Hashem continues to sustain each element of creation eternally. Were God to withdraw his involvement for even a moment

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all would revert to nothingness.

Far from a gratuitous phrase, the words: “and God saw that it was good” convey the concept of God’s continued involvement in the world. Through this eternal involvement, the process of creation continues until the end of days.

Millennia later, the Rabbis would reflect this idea in the blessings before the Shma, through the statement “you renew in your goodness, each day, constantly, the works of creation”

Centuries after that, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik would explain the difficult Biblical concept of *Hes-ter Panim* (the hiding of God’s face) in light of the creation narrative.

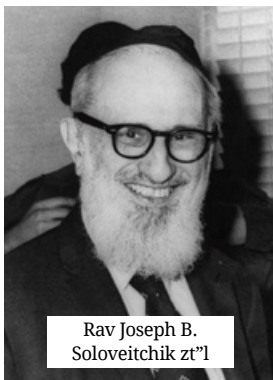
The Torah prophesizes that at particular moments of history, God, in response to sin, will take the radical step of “hiding his face from the world.” During these tragic moments, such as the Holocaust, suggests the Rav, God simply suspends his involvement and the pattern of creation is reversed. As G-d backs away, the world reverts to *Tohu Va-vohu*, the primordial state of chaos that existed before God began to create. *Tohu Va-vohu*, says the Rav, was not destroyed but continues to exist beneath the surface of the order imposed by God during the six days of creation. Only God’s continued involvement in maintaining that order – “and God saw that it was good” – saves us from destruction.

How clearly this analysis of one small phrase in the Torah speaks to us in our day.

The seemingly inexplicable wave of antisemitism sweeping across the globe has confounded experts and novices alike. Where is this hatred coming from? How can purported friends turn so quickly into enemies?

With horrific violence unfolding in so many global arenas, why has the small State of Israel

become the universal preoccupation of the international community? How have we managed to unite erstwhile adversaries, from the far right to the far left, behind one issue: animus towards Jews and towards the existence of the State of Israel?



Clearly, the hatred facing us today is not new. After the Shoah we lived for a time in a bubble, years during which it was unfashionable to be antisemitic. Now that the bubble has burst, reality rushes in.

To be sure, there were always signs of trouble. One had only to look at the UN’s persistent negative fixation on the State of Israel to recognize our perilous standing

in the international community. Never, however, could we have predicted the full extent of the virulent and open hostility confronting us today—a level of hostility that we now recognize was by no means confined to ages gone by.

Like the *tohu va’vohu* coursing beneath the fabric of creation, the hatred we face today was there all along.

And like the *tohu va’vohu* threatening the physical world at large, the hatred towards us will ultimately be held in place, not only through own efforts, but through Hashem’s continued protection. ■

Rabbi Goldin is the author of the OU Press volumes “Unlocking the Torah Text,” and “Unlocking the Haggada.”

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