



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
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PARSHAT BEREISHIT

The story of Creation is very short. The Torah is less interested in cosmology than in mankind.

And while the stories in Parshat Bereishit are rich in symbolism and meaning and there is much to say about each of them, I would like to offer a unifying theme; the unfolding of the Image of G-d.

Man is created on day 6. But his creation is radically different from all other beings. Man is created in the image of G-d. Wow. What in the world could that possibly mean? What does it mean to be like G-d? In what way? It certainly means that man is special, holy, spiritual, elevated.

What Divine qualities does man share? While we see He is a Creator, gives names, Commands, Communicates, Giver of life, takes life but which of those do we share?

I would like to present that Parshat Breishit is the calibration, the adjusting, the defining of how man is to be like Him; not to fall short and not to overstep that mandate to be like Him.



1ST ALIYA (GENESIS 1:1-2:3)

In the beginning was chaos; the spirit of G-d hovered over the waters. Day 1, light was created. Day 2, the waters were split up and down, with heavens emerging between. Day 3, the water below was split, with dry land emerging, with vegetation. Day 4, the heavens above were filled with the sun, moon and stars. Day 5, the seas

were filled with fish, the skies with birds, blessed to be fruitful. Day 6, animals were created on the land. And finally, man is created in the image of G-d. Man is blessed to be fruitful and multiply, to subdue the world and to rule over the animals. The world was completed; with no creation on the 7th day, it was endowed with blessing and holiness.

The Creation of the world builds from less sophisticated to the most sophisticated, man. It is a crescendo to the pinnacle, the creation of man in His Image. The Creation begins with inanimate earth, water, heavens. Following the inanimate comes living beings. First non-ambulatory vegetation, then the dynamic fish and birds and land animals. And finally, man.

But it is not the creation of man that is the pinnacle, but the radical statement that the Creator Creates a being in His Own Image. That is a radical philosophy of man. Actually, a shocking depiction of man. As if to say, G-d is Creating a partner, a shadow of Himself. Man is not a fancy ape, a well-developed baboon. While man shares characteristics with animals, a chasm divides; that chasm is the image of G-d.

The rest of this parsha is the development of this unique and radical relationship; G-d and His shadow creation, man. How much is man like G-d? In what ways? And more crucially, in what ways not?



2ND ALIYA (2:4-20)

A more detailed account of the Creation of Man: G-d creates man from dust of the earth and breathes into his

nostrils the breath of life. He is placed in the Garden of Eden, full of beautiful trees, to work it, surrounded by rivers. G-d commands man to not eat of the tree of knowledge. And declares that it is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a partner.

The language of chapter 2 is in striking contrast to chapter 1. Chapter 1 placed man as the pinnacle of created beings. Chapter 2 reads more like a story. Man has personality, morality, humility, emotion. Chapter 1 is the creation of mankind; chapter 2 is the story of a person.

Man gets the name Adam as he is created from the adama, the earth, a rather humble beginning. That is an interesting contrast to Chapter 1, created in the image of G-d.

Yet the description of his activities are all echoes of G-d the Creator.

Man is to rule the world, as G-d Rules. He is to name the animals, as G-d named the day, night, heavens and seas. As He is a Creator, man is to be a creator – a creator of life through children, a creator of vegetation through the garden.

On the other hand, it is not good that man is alone – for there is only One who is Alone. Man is to be G-d like, to be creative, to name things as G-d named things in the Creation, to take his place as the guardian of the world.

Man needs to be G-d like but at the same time to realize his limitations. There is a danger that man thinks: I am not just G-d like but perhaps G-d Himself.

Distinctions need to be made to avoid that terrible overstep.



3RD ALIYA (2:20-3:21)

Woman is created. The serpent convinces Eve that was she to eat of the forbidden fruit, she would be as G-d, knowing good and evil. She and Adam eat of

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the fruit and their eyes are opened and they cover themselves with fig leaves. They hide from G-d, Who challenges their disobedience. All are punished – the serpent will slither, the woman will birth children with pain, and man's cultivation of the earth will be with sweat.

A richer story of symbolism in Tanach is hard to find. A speaking serpent, the enticement of beauty, hubris, failure, hiding from G-d, blame, consequences. Many and varied are the lessons to be culled from this story.

But let us continue the development of Man created in the image of G-d.

Man being alone may mislead him into thinking he is the One and Only. He needs a partner. Hence, it is not good that man be alone, a partner is created for him.

The command to not eat of the fruit continues the distinctions, not similarities of man

and His Creator. The command man as subservient, the commanded not the commander.

The serpent convinced Eve, and then she Adam, that man need not keep the command. You are in His Image. The serpent convinced them: as G-d cedes to man leadership in this world, He likewise cedes to man the role as legislator of good and evil. If you don't like His rule to not eat, make up your own rule.

In that they err. While G-d like, you must defer in the ways I Require. You just overstepped. I Need to impress upon you that while G-d like, some things you must cede to me.

The punishments to Eve and to Adam are specifically in their most creative activities; creating children and creating food.

As if to say: while you are creators, I remain *the* Creator. Eve, when you create and bear children, the quintessential creative moment of humanity, it will be with labor, a reminder of your earthly origins. And man, when you create from the earth, it will be with sweat.

There is only One who Creates with the uttering of a word, with ease. He is *the* Creator; you, *a* creator. He Creates with ease, you with pain and sweat. Because you got it wrong with the command. I Command. You are the commanded.



4TH ALIYA (3:22 – 4:18)

Man is exiled from the Garden of Eden. Cain and Abel are born. They bring offerings to G-d – Abel's accepted, Cain's not. Cain kills Abel. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain is consigned to wander the earth.

Cain kills his brother. And in so doing, oversteps another aspect of the Divine Image. While man will be a *creator* of life, he will not be a *taker* of life. That he must cede to the Creator.

Sin is met with exile. Adam's sin brings

exile from the Garden of Eden. Cain's sin brings wandering, homelessness. The Torah explains the meaning of exile: Cain left from being before G-d.

This introduces a pillar concept of man and G-d. Divine disfavor with man results in distance. Adam was sent away from the Garden. Cain, sent away from being before G-d. Later, the tower of Babel will bring dispersion.

Only Avraham will reverse this and journey not away but toward a specific place, to be again in the proximity of the Divine.



5TH ALIYA (4:19 – 4:22)

Lemech and his wives Ada and Tzila bear children. One is the initiator of animal husbandry, one of the music of strings and wind instruments, and one of the fashioning of copper and iron.

A curiously short aliya. Mankind advances marvelously in creatively mastering the world: the mastery of animals, creative artistic expression of music and advanced productivity of copper and iron. Man was commanded in creation to master the world. He is doing a good job.



6TH ALIYA (4:23 – 5:24)

The generations from Adam through Noah.

Enosh is described as beginning to profane the name of G-d. The beginning of idolatry.

We like to call Avraham the first monotheist. That is wrong. G-d spoke to Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel brought offerings. He spoke to Cain and Noah.

Rather, man began close and through his failure moved away from G-d, became distant. Avraham is not the first monotheist; he is the first to be embraced and to be pulled closer by G-d.

The project of creating man in the image of G-d is hiccupping. Man has overstepped; he

failed to listen to the command, he murdered, and now he is falling to idol worship.

Early mankind is moving away; Avraham will be the tikkun, the repair. He will be brought nearer.



7TH ALIYA (5:25 – 6:8)

Noah is introduced. G-d is disappointed in man; his lifespan is reduced to 120 years. G-d plans to destroy man, animals, birds. Noah finds favor in His eyes.

Another attribute of G-d is His eternity. Man's longevity produces a feeling of eternal life, blurring again the crucial differences between man and G-d.

In calibrating the correct balance for the man/G-d relationship, longevity is counter-productive. Mortality is better. Man will not live forever – only One lives eternally.

A shorter lifespan is in fact a gift from G-d,

an act of love and generosity. Reducing man's lifespan helps man to more clearly see that while man is created in G-d's Image, he is not G-d Himself. Only One is eternal.

And so, the pillars of man in His Image are presented. Man, like Him, is a creator of life, creates in agriculture, gives names to animals and rules over them.

But. Only He is One; man has a mate. Only He Commands; man obeys. Only He Takes life; while man creates life, he does not take it. Only He is Eternal, man but 120 years. ■

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