

In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth. (1:1)

The Torah is the charter of man's mission on this world. It is the "book of directions" which guides us how to live a life of commitment to Hashem. In the *Talmud Chagigah* 11b, *Chazal* teach that it is prohibited to expound upon *maaseh Bereishis* in a class of two students, which means the teacher and one other person. The *Talmud* presents many *Aggadic* teachings related to this topic. Literally, *maaseh Bereishis* means "account of Creation." *Ramban* interprets *maaseh Bereishis* as the wisdom of the natural world. The most widely accepted opinion is that *maaseh Bereishis* pertains to the wisdom of *Kabbalah*, mysticism. In any event, the issues pertaining to *maaseh Bereishis* go beyond the grasp of our natural minds. To delve into areas to which the brain is neither accustomed nor prepared sets a person up for failure to understand the profundity of the subject correctly.

When a person begins to think that he is capable of theorizing and understanding G-d's hidden ways and the manner in which He created the world, he is already on a serious collision course with the teachings of Judaism. He will end up rejecting the true beliefs of Torah and setting course on a journey to infamy. The result of this philosophical journey will invariably be heresy, compelled by beliefs which undermine the very underpinnings of our faith. Darwin's theory of evolution is based upon such erroneous conjecture. When a human being believes that he can understand G-d, he can fall to such a nadir as to believe that man, the *b'chir ha'yetzurim*, chosen one of all creations, has descended from a monkey, such that there is no difference between animal and human.

A Jew should believe one thing: Hashem created heaven and earth, and that He is behind everything which occurs in life. Once one accepts Hashem as Creator, he immediately understands that understanding Creation is beyond his ability. Every story, every issue, everything which has taken place and how Hashem has responded, are all part of *maaseh Bereishis*. The problem is that we cannot leave well-enough alone; thus, we feel compelled to postulate and interpret occurrences which are beyond our grasp, thereby making egregious mistakes.

Horav Yosef Segal, zl, relates that a *maggid* (preacher who often earned his living by traveling from city to city lecturing and inspiring the populace) once came before **Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl**, and narrated to him the contents of a recent *derashah*, lecture, that he had given in a large city. The man was very impressed with his ability to explain the *pasuk* homiletically to fit the objectives of his lecture. In the *piyut*, prayer, "Hashem, Hashem," which is recited during the *Neilah*, Closing service, of *Yom Kippur*, we lament the fact that, *B'reosi kol ir al tilah benuyah, v'ir haElokim mushpeles ad sheol tachtayah*, which is translated as, "When I see every city built on a hilltop, while the city of G-d is degraded to the nethermost depth." The *payton*, author of the prayer, bemoans the degradation of our Holy City. This is the simple interpretation of the prayer. This *maggid* suggested a new meaning. Rather than comparing Yerushalayim to other large

metropolis', he felt the author was lamenting the fact that people are always striving to satisfy their physical/material desires, but, when it comes to the requirements of the soul/spirituality, they are satisfied with as little as they can get. Thus, *kol ir*, "every city," is a reference to the physical material dimension of one's life, and *ir haElokim*, "city of G-d," refers to one's spiritual needs. While it is a nice *p'shat*, exposition, it is clearly not the *payton's* intended meaning.

Rav Chaim asked this *maggid*, "Tell me, have you ever been to a large metropolitan city, such as London or Paris?" "Yes," he answered. "My travels take me everywhere. I have been to many large cities. I have rarely seen such advanced development and esthetic beauty as is found in some of these large cities. It is truly impressive." "Perhaps you also have had occasion to visit the holy city of Yerushalayim?" "Yes," he replied, "I certainly did, and I must add that the contrast is glaring. The Holy City is bereft of its spiritual beauty, its supremacy as the holiest site on the earth."

"If, in fact, you see the contrast between Yerushalayim and Paris," *Rav Chaim* asked, "why is it that you feel compelled to deviate from the simple explanation of the prayer? Every city is built up beautifully, advanced technologically and esthetically appealing. Yerushalayim is a city that once was *yefei nof mesos kol ha'aretz*, 'Fairest of brides, joy of all the earth,' and now it is desolate of all its inherent beauty. Is this not something to lament? Why not adhere to the prayer's intended meaning?"

A similar idea applies to all of the would-be philosophers and self-proclaimed thinkers. With all of their hypotheses -- based upon meaningless conjecture-- that have yet to be ratified, they have succeeded in doing nothing but creating confusion in the minds of those who otherwise would believe in Hashem as G-d of Creation and G-d of history. They miss the most important verse in the Torah, the one verse that speaks directly to us, saying that the world of Creation is beyond us, because *Bereishis bara Elokim*. It was G-d Who created the world. Man is unable of comprehending G-d. He lacks the perception, because he is human – G-d is not. That is all one must know. Sadly, so many of us are not prepared to accept this concept. We think that we know more. The result of such erroneous speculation is that some believe that they have descended from monkeys. How very sad.

Two people can view the very same object and have two discrepant perspectives. One sees with clarity of vision, while the other has blurred vision which is either the result of shortsightedness, or self-imposed myopia. A well-known analogy demonstrates this idea. A brilliant artist was endowed with a special ability to create images that, to the naked eye, appear real. He painted a beautiful painting, depicting a man carrying a basket of fruit on his shoulder. He entered this painting in an outdoor art show, to be viewed by major art critics. The painting appeared so realistic that birds flying nearby saw the "grapes" on the man's shoulder, and they began to peck at them. A group of art critics saw this phenomenon and were amazed by the lifelike art which this master artist had created. The critics were standing around, staring in amazement as bird after bird swooped down to peck at the grapes.

One critic, who was obviously a perceptive individual, looked at his colleagues and said, "I do not believe that men of such intelligence could be so short-sighted as to err so foolishly!" They looked at him in astonishment. How dare he speak to them so! Anyone with a modicum of intelligence should be impressed by the graphic imagery captured by the artist. The critics, of course, dismissed their colleague's tirade. He spoke up again, "My friends, you base your assumption concerning the realistic nature of this artwork upon the fact that the birds are prepared to eat the grapes. The mere fact that the birds are prepared to risk eating the grapes indicates exactly the opposite. Have you ever seen a bird eat off the shoulder of a living human being? Indeed, the fact that the birds are attempting to eat the grapes demonstrates that the artist is not as skilled as you perceive him to be. Yes, he succeeded in creating lifelike grapes; the person, however, still looks like artwork. He did not fool the birds at all. The artist is good, but not that good."

Let us apply this analogy to our own misguided perspectives concerning the advanced development and refinement of mankind. On the one hand, we have made immense strides in science, medicine, and other disciplines. Man is capable of advances that even a decade ago had been considered impossible. One would conjecture that the human being has certainly progressed by leaps and bounds from his primitive roots. This is truly how modern society views itself and its achievements. They think that they are far removed from their crude beginnings. Let us now take a penetrating look at the base revulsions, the criminal activities of, not only the uneducated, but that of the highly cultivated and distinguished leadership of today's elite; the plunder and moral depravity of these select leaders, the carnage they create, or permit to ensue as a result of their egos and political affiliations. Indeed, they use the very scientific advancements that so demonstrates their refinement to wreak havoc on an unsuspecting and gullible world. So, is the artist that good?

It is all a question of perspective. Does one recognize that *Bereishis bara Elokim*? The only reality in this world is Hashem and, unless we remain focused on Him, nothing else is real. Whatever we see can be interpreted to suit our needs, but is that what we really want? When we begin a cycle of Torah study, we begin with one presumptive preamble. Hashem created the world. We must see the Almighty in everything. Otherwise, we see nothing.