

These are the products of the heaven and the earth when they were created on the day that Hashem G-d made earth and heaven. (2:4)

The Torah now focuses on the events preceding the creation of man. In the second interpretation he offers in his commentary to this pasuk, Rashi explains the word b'hi'baram, "when they were created," to mean that Hashem created them with the letter "hay." This is supported by the pasuk in Yeshayah 26:4, "With 'kah' (G-d's Name is spelled with "yud" and "hay"), G-d created worlds." In other words, b'hay baram means that the two worlds – this temporary world and the Eternal world – were created with the letters that connote Hashem's Name, "yud" and "hay." The letter "hay" was used to create this world and the letter "yud" was used to create the Eternal world. What is Rashi teaching us?

Horav Aharon Soloveitchik, zl, explains that each of these letters has a separate function in the Hebrew alphabet. The letter "hay" represents the hay ha'yediah in Hebrew grammar. When the letter hay prefixes a word, it indicates something outstanding. For example, while shulchan means table, ha'shulchan is a reference to the table, a distinct, specific table. The letter hay, in this case, is used to denote a certain entity.

The function of the letter "yud" is primarily as a suffix. In Hebrew grammar, when a "yud" is added to the end of a word, it indicates possession. Hence, shulchani means my table.

The Torah teaches us that man is created b'tzalmo, in his image (Ibid.1:27). It also states that man is created b'tzelem Elokim, in G-d's image. How do we reconcile these two expressions? The Torah is teaching us that while man is created in the G-dly image, he is also created in his own image, with his own unique potential. Every single person has his own "yud." This may be the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, but it is his exclusively, and no one can take it from him. Man must, therefore, strive to achieve his own potential, to realize the unique Tzelem Elokim within him. When we say that the next world was created with the letter "yud," it means that one can attain a share in the World to Come only if he exercises and asserts his individual tzelem, his 'yud.'

We cannot, however, ignore man's "hay," the letter which denotes his desire to stand out in the crowd, to be recognized for his uniqueness, to be distinguished among men. This drive for individuality is what motivates men to excel, to be original, to be innovative. This drive also motivates selfishness among men, compelling them to live on a more materialistic level than their neighbor. After all, I cannot be like everybody else. Without the "hay," there would probably be little progress in this world. People would not be driven. Thus, the concept of this world being created with a "hay" means that advancement in worldly matters is, for the most part, achieved via the vehicle of man's selfish ambition expressing itself, whereas advancement to the World to Come is the product of asserting one's "yud," his uniqueness.

Let us go one step further. While constructive ambition, represented by the letter "hay," is commendable and, in fact, indispensable to world progress, destructive ambition is dangerous and can bring down the world. Constructive ambition takes on the forms of achievement in Torah study, amassing greater knowledge, performing chesed, acts of loving-kindness, and pursuing righteousness. Destructive ambition is the product of jealousy, and it is manifest when a person attempts to realize his goals to the detriment of others. The "hay" of progress can, in the wrong person, be transformed into the "hay" of destruction. It can corrupt and degenerate in the pursuit of the wrong goals.

How does one make sure that he does not fall prey to the "hay" of ruin? He can do so only by having the "hay" work in concert with the "yud." Thus, he channels his ambitions to act in consonance with his unique, inherent potential, his Tzelem Elokim. We should try to achieve distinctiveness by becoming the individuals that Hashem has designed us to be.