The Secret of the Hebrew Identity

The Fundamentals of Belief Reflected in Hebrew Scripture

Chapter 3: On Freedom and Searching

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סוד העברי : יסודות האמונה לאור פסוקי התורה

פרק ג' – על חופש וחיפוש

Chapter 3: On Freedom and Searching

Man and the World

Man has now entered into the seventh day of creation, which is the 'Sabbath' of the creator. From this moment on, the created world is transformed into the natural world. The meaning of 'nature' in the Torah refers to a world in which the creator has vanished, or gone into hiding. This is a world deeply embedded in cyclical laws that appear to us to be indispensable, irreversible and deterministic.[1]

The main difference between the viewpoint of 'creation' and that of 'nature' is that the concept of nature does not lead to knowledge of the creator, while the concept of creation contains the creator within it. At the basis of the question: "Who has created these?" (Isaiah 40:26) lies the assumption that the world has a creator. "The creator" is one way of referring to God. And it is clear that anyone who asks this question is already aware that the world has a creator. Anyone who is not equipped with this prior awareness cannot perceive in the world anything but the deterministic, natural reality.

The morning of the seventh day arose after the process of creation came to an end. The world during the six days of creation was different from the world we know in many respects. This was a world without man, and as a result it was also without time, in the sense that we are familiar with it from human history. These six "days" of creation of the world constitute a process during which the world is in a constant state of flux and change, whose objective is to construct itself in a way that would be suitable for man to live in it.

Human recollection does not extend back to the sixth day of creation. If not for the experience of revelation through the Torah we would have been forever relegated to a worldview rooted in nature.[2] The Torah is aware of this, and therefore it tells us about the creation of a world, even though it is understood that man on his own can see only nature. It describes for us a creation that went through changes and reformations while being fully aware of the deep contradiction

[1] In Hebrew, the world for nature, *teva*, is of the same root as the word for ring, *taba'at*; This reflects the circularity of nature which has no beginning and no end, and everything is equal before it.

[2] Rav Ashkenazi explains that one way of characterizing the Torah is as follows: the creator's contemplation of his creations, and our adoption of his vantage point on the world instead of ours. This clarifies the essential difference between the historical point of view and the biblical point of view; see below on Cain and Abel.

between the two worldviews, of creation and of nature. This is why it tells us about the state of the world at the beginning of the process, before the creation of man, in order to assist us in understanding the world in which we currently live. This is done through the concept of the "Sabbath of the creator," which signifies the created world which has become the natural world.

However, recognizing the world as the Torah reveals it to be requires time and contemplation. This is because our experience of the world is different from that which the Torah describes. In reality, while the idea of creation is rooted in faith, our everyday experience is material, natural, and sensory. In order to return and re-experience what the Torah is describing an effort must be made to study, each according to his pace.

We live in the world of nature, but that does not mean the nature of the philosophers, but rather the creation that has become nature, that of the creator of the world who has "rested from all his work." It is in the world of the creator's Sabbath, his cessation of creative activity, when human history begins. In our reality, then, there are two separate entities:

One is the world, as an impersonal object, the other,[3] the "what."

The second is man, as a moral creature, the personality, the "who."

Hidden within man are two dimensions that are seemingly contradictory: the "what" – his material body, which is ruled by the deterministic laws of nature; and the "who" – his soul, his consciousness and intellect. The connection between the world and man is his food, "By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread" (Genesis 3:19). Food is material world which has become human. When someone stops eating, he first loses his "who" and eventually his "what," through death. The numeric value of the Hebrew letters for the word "man" (aleph, dalet, mem) is 45, which is also that of the world "what" and this alludes to the idea that the material world becomes conscious through man. One who ceases to eat first loses his aspect of "who," and eventually also the "what" (=numerical value of "man") disappears through death.

[3] Rav Ashkenazi differentiates between two types of "other," the inanimate other and the speaking other. The acknowledgement of the inanimate other is necessary as part of the divine kindness that grants unreciprocated gifts. It is forbidden to make this into an object of pagan worship, as is done in mythological religions. The speaking other is essentially different as we must accept him as a being created in God's image. God looks upon him and discovers his uniqueness. Rav Ashkenazi added a novel idea that the path to God must run through the 'other.' This pathway creates the "equation of brotherhood" which will be explained below.

What is the difference between man and the world? They are both entities, but while the world is an impersonal entity, man is the effort of that impersonal entity to become a conscious human identity, an identity with choice and morality. It can be said that man is of the very same essence as that of the world, which is searching for a way to manifest its potential. Man is the world as channeled through his human essence. Man is the soul of the world, that some*thing* which has become some*one*. The physical connection between the world and man is the food that man brings into himself from the world, in the sense of the verse "By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread. Finally you will return to the ground, for it was from [the ground] that you were taken. You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Food is world that has become man.[4] The moral problem would not even exist if there were only one person in the world. It is the existence of two or more people that produces the issue of morality, because they are in competition over the same body[5] – ie. the world. If I am the world, then you are superfluous.[6] If you are the world, then I am expendable.[7] It is easy to understand then, why the problem of the seventh day is the problem of morality.[8]

Abraham the Hebrew was the first to become conscious of man as a creation in nature; That is to say, to recognize the creator who created the world for a purpose. The character of this awareness is moral, not intellectual.[9] For the sake of comparison, Voltaire was a great philosopher, but there is an essential difference between him and Abraham: The god of Voltaire never spoke to him, while the god of Abraham spoke to Abraham. The rabbis tell us that Abraham was three years

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[4] This is the secret of the blessings on various things in our surroundings, both in natural phenomena and in food. The Jewish blessing is the returning of holiness to its source. The world is holy in its essence and we are asking permission from the creator to eat from his creation, and in doing so we reveal its sanctity and return that sanctity to its source.

[5] See below in Chapter on Cain and Abel.

[6] This view is represented by Cain.

[7] This is Abel's mistake.

[8] When God is hidden and not revealed explicitly, man stands alone opposite the other: opposite the world and opposite himself, and he must decide. His free will can lead him to hell or to heaven. It is precisely God's hiddenness and the constancy of the laws of nature that allow for choice and the capability of holiness that are manifest by someone who sanctifies his world. The reality of holiness is only when opposite the secular realm and in opposition to it. It is the invisibility of the creator that allows for the sanctification of time, place and man.

[9] In the next volume, Rav Ashkenazi discusses man's ability to discover the morality within him, and we did not elaborate here (see also Bereishit Raba, Vilna printing, 95:3).

old when he recognized his creator, when he discovered in himself his essence as a created being and in doing so revealed the morality within him.[10] This three year old boy understood his own essence as a person who has become separate from the world. The astonishment and excitement of this discovery were a reflection of the beginning of Abraham's awareness of himself as a created being.

It does not require an exorbitant effort on the part of Abraham to recognize that his existence is a gift from the creator, who created him and the natural world reflected in him. Healthy people begin to differentiate between the world and the self at the age of three, and at that moment we can choose to be like Abraham the Hebrew or like the natural man. What is the nature of this choice? This is a decision between two alternatives: The first is to acknowledge my nature as a created being, as someone who has received his essence as a gift from someone grander than he. The second alternative is to believe that I am my own creator[11], and that all my surroundings are nothing but a reflection and expansion of my own self.[12] The experience of the first option is that of Adam, primordial man, and the summit of his path is reached in the figure of Abraham the Hebrew, who is fully manifest in the nation of Israel. The experience of the second option is that of the primordial snake, of natural man, which will be discussed further later on.

That being said, it cannot be overemphasized that the experience of separation between the self and the world, is not merely an intellectual one. It is an experience of the moral soul: the recognition of one's essence as a created being, and the awakening of moral consciousness. We cannot continue the discussion without internalizing this message, because one who recognizes himself as a created being, as one who has received his essence from the creator, immediately becomes a moral person, who must then come to earn his essence - which has been initially granted as a gift by the creator - on the basis of his deeds and choices in this world.

The objective of morality is to lead one to earn one's life in this world, to earn all the abundance that one has received as a gift from one's creator. To the question, "who is the creator?" the Torah answers unequivocally: the creator is the One who has made room for creation. This is

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[10] See Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Nedarim, 32A

[11] See also Ezekiel 29:3: "Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of his rivers, who has said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself."

[12] As Immanuel Kant, the father of modern philosophy, claimed.

the archetypal moral act, because the basis of moral action is the granted of space for the 'other,' similar to the way that the creator has made space for his creation.[13] The Midrash describes how with Abraham, this desire to give is expressed by the form of his tent, which is called "Eshel,"[14] as his tent was open ["*mefulash*"] to each direction so that passersby would not have to search for the entrance when they come to benefit from his hospitality.[15] Abraham emulates his creator in his welcoming of guests into his home, in a similar way to how God welcomes guests, as he has welcomed us into his world, open to all directions, where he grants us all our needs.[16]

Our discussion is not philosophical. Abraham invites guests into his home, feeds them and shares with them all that he has received from the creator, and at the end of the meal, he invites his guests to thank the giver of the meal. The Midrash tells how the guests would begin to thank Abraham when he would interject and explain to them that they should not be thanking him but rather the creator. Through food, Abraham would teach his guests Torah, and import to them his belief in the creator of the world. The blessing after a meal is of such great importance in Judaism that it can be said that this blessing is the beginning of faith in the God of Abraham. It seems that at the basis of forbidden foods in Judaism lies this idea, as the food that one eats becomes an intrinsic part of oneself.

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[13] In the Kabbalah, this is referred to as "the secret of the *tzimtzum* [limitation or reduction]". See Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi, "The Use of Kabbalistic Terms in Rav Kook's Teachings" [in Hebrew], in Ish Shalom, B., & Rosenberg, S., *Yuval Orot.* Jerusalem, 1985, p.123-128.

[14] Midrash *Yelamdeinu,* (Mann version) *Yalkut Talmud Torah, Bereishit 103* (on Genesis 21:33): "And he planted an *Eshel,* Rabbi Nehemia said, Eshel – Sha'al (meaning: to ask): when someone would come over he would say: ask for whatever you like and I shall give it to you. And he made an inn at the crossroads and gave the passersby food, drink and lodge [acronym for *eshel*]."

[15] *Bereishit Raba* (vilna), 28:9.

[16] *Avot d'rabi Natan*, version *aleph*, Chapter 7: "God said to Job: Job, you have not yet reached half the stature of Abraham. You are sitting around at home and guests come to you. He who is used to wheat bread, you give wheat bread, he who is used to meat, you give him meat, he who is used to wine, wine. But Abraham did not act this way, rather he would graciously go out in the world, and when he would find guests he would bring them home. To those who were not used to wheat bread, he would give wheat bread, to those who were not used to meat, he would give meat, to those who were not used to wine, he would give wine. And not only that but he built a castle at the crossroads and placed there food and drink and anyone who came by would eat and drink and bless God, and so he was pleased. And anything you could ask for was to be found in Abraham's house, as it says: "and he planted an *eshel* at Be'er Sheba" (Genesis, 21:33). '*Eshel*' – Rav and Shmuel, one said an orchard to provide fruits for the guests, the other said an inn for lodging that had various fruits. The language 'planting' has been found regarding tents as it says (Daniel 11:45) "And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace". 'And he called there…' – by way of this *eshel* he called in the name of Hashem, God of the world. After they would eat and drink he would say to them: Bless he from whom you have eaten, you think you ate from my food? You have eaten from He who spoke and the world came into being."

A Hebrew child is a natural believer. He has two paths to the attainment of self-awareness. One is to see himself as a receiver of essence, and in doing so he attains morality. When the child grows he will inevitably encounter difficult dilemmas, as it is not easy to be moral. But he will already carry with him the basic recognition that human identity is a created entity. The second option is to see himself as the only entity that exists in the world. This perspective produces a lack of morality and a desire to annihilate the 'other.'

The Torah's proposes an incredible resolution to these problems (Genesis, 2:1-3):

> "Heaven and earth, and all their components, were [thus] completed. With the seventh day, God finished all the work that He had done. He [thus] ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had been doing."

The description of God as one who has "ceased" from all work is revolutionary. God is inactive? The creator has left the stage? What kind of game is the creator playing with his creations? This 'game' is necessary, logical and with purpose: in order to allow for man's free will, the creator must disappear, or become hidden behind the veil that is nature and the natural ways of the world. At the basis of this answer to the above question of God's inaction lies the assumption that man is free to choose between the two paths described above.

Let us now consider a different question: why did the created world need to become the natural world in order to allow man to be truly free? The answer is contained within the question: in order for man to be free, the world has to be constant.[17]

The Cosmological Approach and the Anthropocentric Approach

There are two contradictory approaches in human thought to the relationship between man and nature: The cosmological approach and the anthropocentric approach.[18]

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[17] To allow free will the world must be consistent, so that a person making a choice will know the consequences of his actions. In other words, man must know ahead of time what the consequences of his actions will be, actions that he takes through free will – for good or bad – and so the world must be constant and consistent.

[18] "Anthro" – man, "centrum" – center. According to this understanding, man is in the center.

The cosmological approach maintains that the universe as a whole is the focal point of all existence and that man is merely one creature among many creatures of equal worth in this universe. Accordingly, the cosmos is seen as a natural and deterministic system, with an unchanging and impersonal set of laws, and within this system of diverse natural elements there exists a creature of particularly high complexity called man. This approach underlies the materialist and sensory-based culture, understanding man as nothing more than a complex animal, called 'natural man.' A Hebrew that has not lost his identity cannot identify with this approach, as it is offensive to human dignity, necessarily reducing man to the level of animal.

The Torah, on the other hand, espouses the anthropocentric approach that places man at the focal point of existence.[19] The cosmological approach perceives this to be pretentious. However, the question that the Torah addresses is: What is the creator's goal in creating the world? To create a world which is itself primary, and to place man in it alongside the other creations, or to create man as the goal and purpose of creation, where the creation of the world is to this end?[20] While part of the western worldview sees the purpose of the existence as the cosmos itself, the Torah sees the cosmos as the dwelling place of man.

These two approaches are opposed and mutually contradictory, but not only in the theoretical or academic sense. They, in fact, have enormous implication for our lives and actions. The cosmological-mechanistic perspective ultimately leads to despair, because if we really do constitute merely statistical random occurrences, then our lives really do lack all meaning. This is why it is essential to fully comprehend both approaches, in order to internalize just how contrary they are. The cosmological approach produced materialism. On the other hand, the anthropocentric

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[19] Zohar Hadash on parshat Bereishit (9B): "… that Rabbi Yochanan said, come and see, why has God created man last out of all the creatures? To teach you that each day he did his work and created the world and all that is in it, and on the sixth day – which is the last of the days of work – he created man. He said to man: until now I have made the productive effort, from here on you must make the effort; and this is "In the beginning God created" – before man arrived in the world…" Compare with the incredible midrash in the Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 32B, according to which God created no less than 1,064,340,000,000,000,000 stars in space and that they were not created other than for the honor of Israel. See also: Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, *Ma'amarei Hara'aya*, p.110-111; and also in his work Orot Hakodesh B, p.433.

[20] Isaiah 42:5: "So says God, the Eternal, who created the heavens and stretched them out; who formed the earth and its produce, who gave a soul to the people upon it, and spirit to those who walk on it." the Radak says on this verse: "he gave priority to man, even though he was last because he is the focus of the creation, and so he said: 'and I formed land, and created man upon it' (Isaiah 42:12), he mentioned man alone because he is the focus of creation.

approach claims that God has created man in a personal sense,[21] by direct intervention, and has brought him into a natural and pre-existing world. Accordingly, this approach does not consider man to be a "descendent of apes."

The Hebraic intuition is capable of internalizing the idea that man represents the ultimate purpose of creation, and that the creator of man, also created a world for him.[22] When a guest is invited to a meal, the host prepares everything that is needed before he arrives, but the goal remains the guest, not the meal. In the cosmological approach there is no room for hope, as everything is up to fate or chance, and nothing is of ultimate purpose or meaning. The Torah's perspective is one of hope, the belief that behind the veil of the world there exists a creator who created it for a reason, and that human history is a delicate progression composed of many unique and wonderful individuals each of whom possess a unique purpose in the plan of creation; where all are advancing and bringing the entire creation toward a perfected state which is the ultimate purpose of its being created.

There is no contradiction between the determinism in nature and free will. This is manifest in the fact that the Hebrew who is familiar with the concept of "revelation" knows that behind the determinism in nature lies a creator, who is beyond the material realm. This knowledge is based on the fact that the content of the message of the Hebrew bible was revealed and given to him through prophecy.

The Torah speaks only to one who is capable of hearing it; to one who has reached the borders of natural and human thought. The term "revelation" connotes something that was previously hidden and has now come into the light. If man was capable of understanding it on his own, there would be no need for it to be revealed to him. The Torah reveals and gives over to us only that which we are not capable of understanding and knowing on our own. We cannot fully grasp the idea of the creator, who created man for a purpose and endowed him with free will to choose whether or not to fulfill this purpose. Thus, the question, "Am I free?" becomes secondary. The question that should then be the focus of the discussion is: "How shall I manifest my

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[21] See R. Kook, *Olat Hara'aya*, volume 1, p.1, his commentary on the word "I".

[22] Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 38A: "The Rabbis taught: man was created on the day before the Sabbath. Why so? …for if he were to become arrogant, it can be said to him: a mosquito was created before you… Another point: so that his food would be readily available."

freedom?" Despite this there are those, even amongst believers, who are incapable of releasing themselves of the question "Am I free?" and they are left perpetually unavailable to actually use their freedom.

The first chapters of the Book of Genesis raise fundamental questions such as: Who is the creator and the created? What is the essence of free will? At what point did it enter the world and who was free to choose? Do the environmental influences acting on the chooser result in a change of his decision? At what phase of the days of creation did the change occur and why?

The Torah chose to begin with precisely these questions because the attribute that characterizes man exclusively in the world is his free will. Or in the language of the Torah: the moral capability of man to distinguish between good and bad and to choose good, as it is said in the verse in Deuteronomy (30:15-19): "See! Today I have set before you [a free choice] between life and good [on one side], and death and evil [on the other]… Before you I have placed life and death, the blessing and the curse. You must choose life…"

Man has been endowed with the ability to know what is good and what is evil, and to choose good. Indeed, the materialist viewpoint demonstrates a strong resistance against acknowledging that free will is a fundamental element of man's essence. Free will places man in a unique position in the world,[23] but the deterministic world would not let man escape its rules. In any case, it seems that if everything is mechanistically pre-destined and beholden to unchanging laws, then this should apply to man as well, who is himself an inherent part of the natural world; and if man has been endowed with free will, then this should apply to all of nature as well. There is no solution to this conundrum, to this paradox; and so, the materialist viewpoint finds itself at a tragic dead-end. A philosopher who espouses his belief in free will is not doing so in his capacity as a philosopher. It is the believing part of him that espouses this, for if this were not so, all philosophers would have acknowledged free will. Quite the contrary is the case: the truly philosophical thinking rejects the idea of free will, as this does not align with the essence of philosophical thought itself. But at precisely the same time, deep in his existential experience, the thinking person finds the experience of freedom within his soul, and this obligates him to believe

[23] From the end of the sixth day of creation, man was left unique with this capacity for moral choice. What is said above, that the land had also been given the capacity to choose, is correct only from the third day of creation until the time of the flood: "…and God said to Himself, 'Never again will I curse the soil because of man, for the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis, 8:21).

in the experience from an entirely different part of his essence. So, for ‘natural man,’ a gap is opened between the intellect and the experience.

A philosopher, or thinking person, who remains entirely within the realm of his natural thought, sophisticated as it may be, will always remain an atheist or materialist, who denies the idea of free will. But if he does not remain entirely in this realm, and is open to listening to his heart and inner experience, his life will be wrought with an internal contradiction whose lack of solution will bring intolerable frustration.

The intention of the first chapter of Genesis is to describe the state of the world before the creation of man, and the change it undergoes after his creation. Man does not have the capacity to fully comprehend the description of the six of days of creation, but the Torah does not leave them out, in order to present the concept of the Sabbath: Know how the world began, the same world within which your history as a human plays out. It is not the world you are familiar with in the present, in history. The prehistoric world was a creation (or a “healthy organism”) with free will that was transformed into nature, and became set at the moment of the creation of man. Only then did was the created world transformed into a world with the appearance of impersonal functionality, that functions according to rules which prevent naturally thinking man from reaching the idea that the world has a creator. Why then, did the creator “take the risk” that all the philosophers will turn to atheism because of the Sabbath?...