

Bereishis

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By now, if you have been reading what I have written over the years, you know that the Creation story that we begin with is the middle of the movie. It's called *Tikun Ma'aseh Bereishis*, which means the "Rectification of the Act of Creation." You can't rectify something that wasn't broken.

Here's what happened in brief. First there was *Ohr Ain Sof*, infinite Divine light everywhere. But it was too spiritually intense for anything to exist, so God constricted some of it, a stage of creating called *Tzimtzum*—Constriction. This resulted in a spherical spiritual void in the "middle" of *Ohr Ain Sof* called the *Challal*—Void, within which the future home of all of Creation was going to eventually exist. It was the spiritual version of the massive excavation hole they dig for the foundation of large buildings, just infinitely huger.

God then allowed a measured amount of *Ohr Ain Sof*, called *Kav Ohr Ain Sof*—Line of *Ohr Ain Sof*—back into the *Challal*, to start building *sefiros*. The *sefiros* are spiritual entities that continue the constriction process of *Ohr Ain Sof* as necessary to make the rest of Creation possible. *Sefiros* are to Divine light what electrical transformers are to electricity.

After the first level of Creation, called *Adam Kadmon*—First Man—was created with its ten *sefiros*, spiritually pure and completely good, God caused it to give birth to its own ten *sefiros*. These would later be the basis of the four levels of existence destined to be created below *Adam Kadmon*. But after they came out of *Adam Kadmon* on their way to their respective levels below, the bottom seven *sefiros* broke.

This was because every *sefirah*, like a person, is a combination of a vessel and a light, a body and soul. The light of the bottom seven *sefiros* was more than their bodies, called *keilim*—vessels—could handle, so they broke. This caused their main lights to ascend back to their roots and broken pieces of *sefiros* and sparks of Divine light—the building materials for the levels of worlds to come—to fall below further into the

Challal. When the Torah mentions *tobu*—chaos—in the second verse of the Creation story, it is talking about this stage of Creation (which is why the *Zobar* says this verse comes first, not second).

But the goal was *sefiros* that could receive their lights *without* breaking. Therefore, when God went about making *our* stage of Creation, He rebuilt the *sefiros* in such a way that they could and would survive, and they have ever since. They're responsible for reality as we know it, and the continuous flow of Divine light that lets us live and accomplish every single moment of history.

But the *Arizal* asks:

If you ask, why didn't the Upper Emanator (God) make these five *partzufim* from the beginning instead of the *Nekudos* that broke? Is it not revealed and known before Him that the *Nekudos* would not be able to handle the light? The answer is that the Upper Emanator intended for man to have choice and will, and [therefore] that good and evil exist. The root of exile was the broken *keilim*, while the good comes from the great light. Had this not been the case, then only good would exist and there could be no reward in the world. Now that there is good and evil, there is reward and punishment, reward for the righteous and punishment for the evil. The righteous are rewarded because, as a result of their good deeds, holy sparks that descended are elevated from within the *Klipos* (realm of spiritual impurity). The evil are punished because through their actions they cause some of the great light to descend into the *Klipos*. The *Klipos* themselves are the punishing belt of the evil. (*Aitz Chaim, Sha'ar HaKlallim*, Ch. 2)

It never ceases to amaze me how something so “hard” to make can be taken so for granted by so many people. But then again, how many people even understand what was involved in making free will possible? About as many people as there are who take our ability of free will for granted.

By the way, the “free” part of free will does not mean it costs us nothing. Quite the opposite, it costs us *everything*. Good moral choices result in reward. Bad ones lead to punishment and, in certain cases, the loss of one's portion in Eternity. We may act like our ability to choose is free of charge, but that's only until the bill later comes on our day of judgment.

Then, what is our will supposed to be *free* of? That is what God told Kayin:

If you do not improve however, sin is lying at the entrance and its longing is to you, but you can rule over it. (Bereishis 4:9)

In other words, God asked Kayin, “Who's in charge here, you or your *yetzer hara*? If you make a choice *free* of your *yetzer hara*, you will do the right thing, because that

is what *you* want to do. But if you let your *yetzer bara* influence your decision, then your will can be hijacked by it, and no longer will it be *free* will, but *subjugated* will.

This means that the only way to actually have free will is to know about the *yetzer bara* and separate yourself from it, like the following story portrays:

Once, in his later years, the *Chofetz Chaim* got up early as usual but heard his *yetzer bara* say, “Old man, surely at your age you can sleep in!” So he answered it, “If you’re up this early in the morning, shouldn’t I be as well?”

I doubt he actually articulated all of this. Rather, it shows how the righteous *Chofetz Chaim* recognized both parts of his decision-making process, the one that came from his soul, and the part impacted by his *yetzer bara*. This separation gave him the power to what he *wanted* to do, not what he *felt* like doing.

Parashas Bereishis comes and goes very quickly. But how we use and appreciate our free will last a lifetime. We need to get it right as soon as possible.