

Background:
Closeup of the
dragonfly's wing



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Jewish Times

*Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

Volume VII, No. 9...Dec. 21, 2007

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Los Angeles	4:29	Sydney	7:45
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Miami	5:16	Toronto	4:25
Montreal	3:54	Washington DC	4:30

Weekly Parsha

Vayeche

RABBI BERNIE FOX

“And I give you an additional portion, beyond your brothers, that I captured from the Amorite with my sword and bow.” (Bereshit 48:22)

(continued on next page)

Creation

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Observations

Take a look at that leaf. Do you see a design...a unique arrangement of any kind?

(continued on page 4)

Credits: Last week's article "Choosing Your Religion" was based on Rabbi Israel Chait's lecture, "Torah From Sinai". In it, he formulated the arguments I used to respond to Lee to prove Revelation at Sinai. I also thank my dear friend Naomi for pointing out that the image used in that article should not have been used, as it contained images of stars, which should not be reproduced even in two-dimensions. This is based on idolatrous prohibitions.

(Vayeche cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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In this passage, Yaakov reiterates that Yosef's descendants will receive a double portion of the land of Israel. Yaakov describes this portion as the land that he captured from the Amorite with his sword and bow.

This phrase is difficult to explain. Yaakov seems to say that he is giving to Yosef a portion of land that he had seized from the Amorite in battle. However, there is no account in the Torah of Yaakov battling the Amorite. To what land and battle does Yaakov refer?

Rashi offers a number of explanations for this phrase. One is that Yaakov did wage a war with the Amorite nations. This was an outcome of Shimon and Leyve's slaughter of the people of Shechem. The surrounding nations regarded this attack as an atrocity. They banded together to destroy Yaakov and his children. Yaakov was forced to defend himself and his family. He defeated the Amorite nations and possessed their lands.[1]

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers an alternative explanation of the phrase. He explains that this phrase refers to the future. Yaakov tells Yosef that his children will receive a double portion of the land that will be captured from the Amorite nations in the future. Bnai Yisrael will leave Egypt. They will reenter the land of Israel. They will dispossess the Amorite nations. Yaakov tells Yosef that, at that time, his descendants will receive an extra portion of the land of Israel.

There is an obvious difficulty with Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the passage. According to Ibn Ezra, the pasuk refers to land that will be captured in the future. However, the phrase in the pasuk is written in the past tense. Translated literally, the phrase describes the land as already captured.

Ibn Ezra offers an important response to this problem. He explains that Yaakov knew through prophecy that his descendants would capture the land of Israel. His certainty in the validity of this prophecy was absolute. He expresses this conviction in the accuracy of the prophecy through employing the past

tense. He is saying that the prophesized possession is so certain that it can be regarded as already accomplished.[2]

Ibn Ezra's comments deserve closer attention. According to Ibn Ezra, Yaakov was communicating a message regarding his certainty in his prophecy. On a basic level, this message taught a lesson regarding prophecy. The prophet is absolutely certain in the veracity of his prophecy. He does not doubt the source of the revelation. He knows that the prophecy is a message from the Almighty. According to Maimonides, this is one of the lessons derived from Avraham's binding of Yitzchak. No father would be willing to



sacrifice his son without absolute certainty that Hashem required this. Avraham bound Yitzchak and placed him upon the altar. He was willing to take his son's life. There can be no doubt that Avraham was certain that his prophetic knowledge of Hashem's will was accurate.[3]

However, there is another lesson communicated by Yaakov. We regard the past and present as more real than the future. The past is known through experience. The present we perceive with our senses. The future is only glimpsed through the mind. The future is less concrete than the past and present. Therefore, we do not regard the future to be

as real as the past and present.

Our evaluation of the future is not completely accurate. In fact, the future can be as certain as the past and present. All events are a result of the Creator's will. The past and present are an expression of His will. The future also evolves as a result of His will. In other words, all events – past, present and future – derive their reality from the will of the Almighty. Therefore, our evaluation of the relative reality of these events is not accurate. Prophecy reveals the Eternal's will regarding the future. With this revelation, we know the future with the same certainty that we associate with past and present experiences. Yaakov communicated this lesson. The future was as real to him as the past. Both are merely expressions of the Divine will.

(continued on next page)

“And he sees that rest is good and that the land is pleasant. And he bends his back to carry the burden, working like a servant.”
(Beresheit 49:15)

Before his death, Yaakov blesses his children. This pasuk is part of the blessing of Yissachar. Our Sages understood this blessing as a reference to the special responsibility accepted by the Shevet – tribe – of Yissachar. This Shevet devoted itself to the study of Torah. The burden carried by Yissachar was the responsibility of complete devotion to the Torah. The servitude mentioned in the pasuk was the duty to provide religious leadership to Bnai Yisrael. Rashi comments that the Shevet of Yissachar provided a disproportionate number of judges and teachers to the nation.[4]

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam provides an interesting explanation of the beginning of the pasuk. Yaakov explains that Yissachar values rest. What is the meaning of this statement? Yaakov is explaining that Yissachar is not driven by a desire for conquest or domination. Yissachar enjoys the more quiet pleasures.[5] Is there a relationship between this personality trait and the Shevet's devotion to learning and spiritual pursuits?

There is an obvious relationship. Learning is, itself, a quiet pleasure. One who seeks the more intense forms of stimulation will have difficulty finding meaning in intellectual or spiritual pursuits. However, there is another role played by these characteristics.

During the period of the composition of the Talmud there were two separate communities of scholars. One set lived in Israel. The other was situated in Bavel – Babylonia. The Talmud, in Tractate Sanhedrin, compares the methodology of these two different groups. The scholars in Israel preferred to develop their ideas cooperatively. Each scholar attempted to build upon and refine the theories of his fellow. The scholars in Bavel used a different method. This method was more confrontational. Scholars questioned each other intensely. Through the questions of his peers, each scholar was challenged to perfect his ideas. Both methods were fruitful and produced invaluable insights into the Torah. But is one method preferable?

Yad Ramah, a commentary on the Talmud, comments that there are two opinions on this issue. The first opinion maintains that the method of Bavel had an advantage. The rigor resulted in greater insight and deeper understanding. The second opinion argues that the method of Israel was advantageous. The

group effort produced clear conclusions. In contrast, the Bavel method, although insightful, often failed to lead to a definite conclusion.[6]

This disagreement seems to imply two views of the purpose of Talmudic discourse. If we assume that the purpose is simply to uncover truth, then the method of Bavel is superior. It produced the greater insights and depth of understanding. However, Torah observance requires that we fulfill all of the requirements of the mitzvot. If the objective of Talmudic discourse is to provide definitive answers to questions of halacha, then it seems the method of Israel was more successful. The two opinions in Yad Ramah apparently represent these two possible understandings of the purpose of Talmudic discourse.

The character trait of the tribe of Yissachar has a special value in Torah study. These same qualities were found, many generations later, in the scholars of Israel. These characteristics were fundamental to the development of the cooperative approach successfully applied by these scholars.

“And Yosef had Bnai Yisrael swear saying, “G-d will remember you and you will take up my bones from here”.
(Beresheit 50:25)

Yosef approaches his brothers. He tells them that he will die in Egypt. He does not want to be buried in Egypt. They will be redeemed by Hashem and brought to the land of Israel. At the time of their redemption, they should remove his body from Egypt and bury him in the land of Israel. The brothers agree to Yosef's request. They swear that they will fulfill his wishes.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt”l asks an interesting question. Why did Yosef turn to his brothers for assistance? Yosef had his own children. He knew that his own descendants would be rescued from Egypt. Why did Yosef not ask his own children to accept responsibility for fulfilling his wishes?

In order to understand Rav Soloveitchik's answer to this question, we must review an earlier episode in the parasha. Immediately prior to this incident, the Chumash discusses Yaakov's death and the brothers' reaction. The Torah tells us that the brothers were troubled by their relationship with Yosef. They were afraid that Yosef still harbored ill feelings towards them. They suspected that Yosef had deferred acting on these feelings during

Yaakov's lifetime because of his love for his father. Now that Yaakov had died, perhaps Yosef would seek to punish them. Yosef assured his brothers that did not resent them and would continue to support care for them.

Yosef realized that his brothers did not completely accept him. Their suspicion was based on distrust. He was troubled by this relationship. He knew that Bnai Yisrael must be a single unified nation. His descendants must live in peace with the children of his brothers. How could he bring about a more total reconciliation?

Rav Soloveitchik explains that Yosef identified the underlying cause of the friction between himself and his brothers. The tension was caused by his superior status. The brothers were dependent upon him. They had been forced to bow to Yosef. They had reluctantly accepted Yosef as their leader. This stratification was a source of resentment and distrust. Based on this evaluation, Yosef devised a plan to place his brothers at ease.

The essence of Yosef's plan was to demonstrate that they were all mutually dependant upon one another. The brothers needed him. But he also needed the brothers. In order to create this mutual dependence he asked his brothers to accept responsibility for his interment in the land of Israel. He placed his fate in their hands. In this manner he demonstrated his trust in his brothers and created mutual dependency.[7] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 28:22.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 28:22.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 24.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 49:15.

[5] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 49:15.

[6] Rabbaynu Meir Abulafia, Yad Ramah Commentary on Mesechet Sanhedrin 24a.

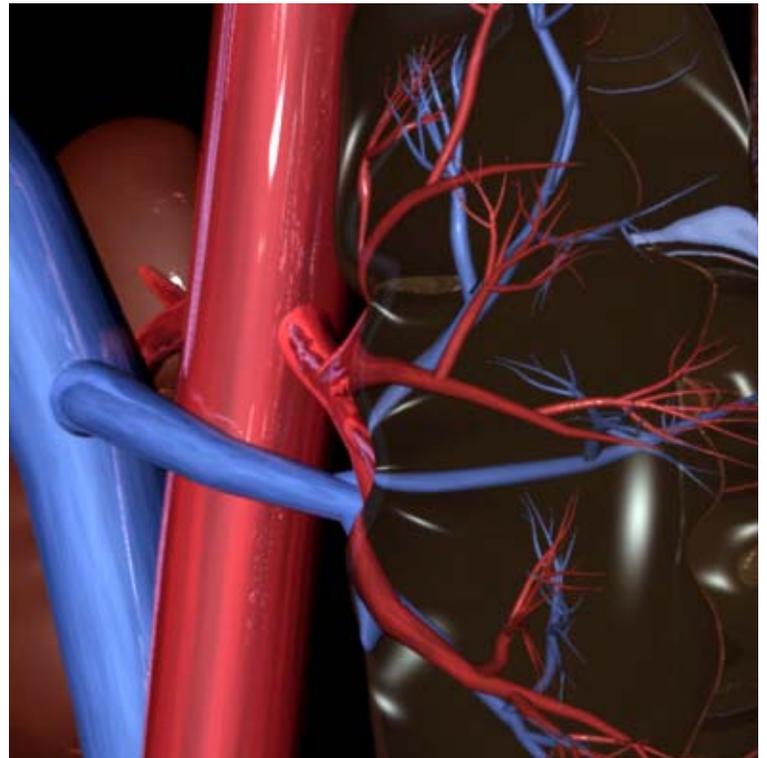
[7] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Yemai Zicaron (Jerusalem, 1986), p 19.

Take a look at that image at your right...is that the leaf again? No. It is an aerial view of rivers from space.

What's this a picture of below the rivers?
These are the artery and vein structures of all animals.

And what about that tree below?
Seeing a pattern yet?

(continued on next page)

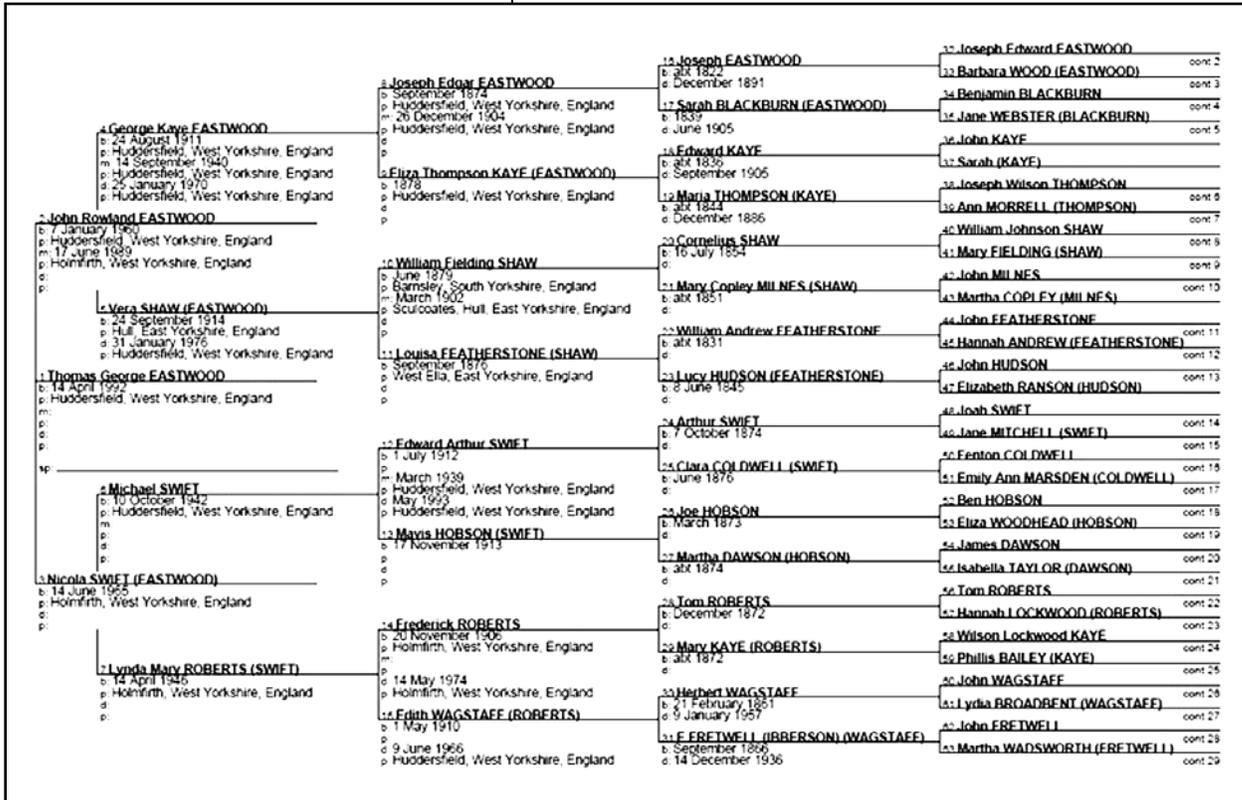




You know what this is.

In all of these creations, we witness a duplication of a design. But we must ask: a) why duplication exists, and, b) why “this” unique pattern is duplicated. And there must be good reason if it occurs so often. Can you define what exactly the lesson is in duplication, and in this unique pattern? Think about it. Now turn the page to see if this pattern continues outside physical design.

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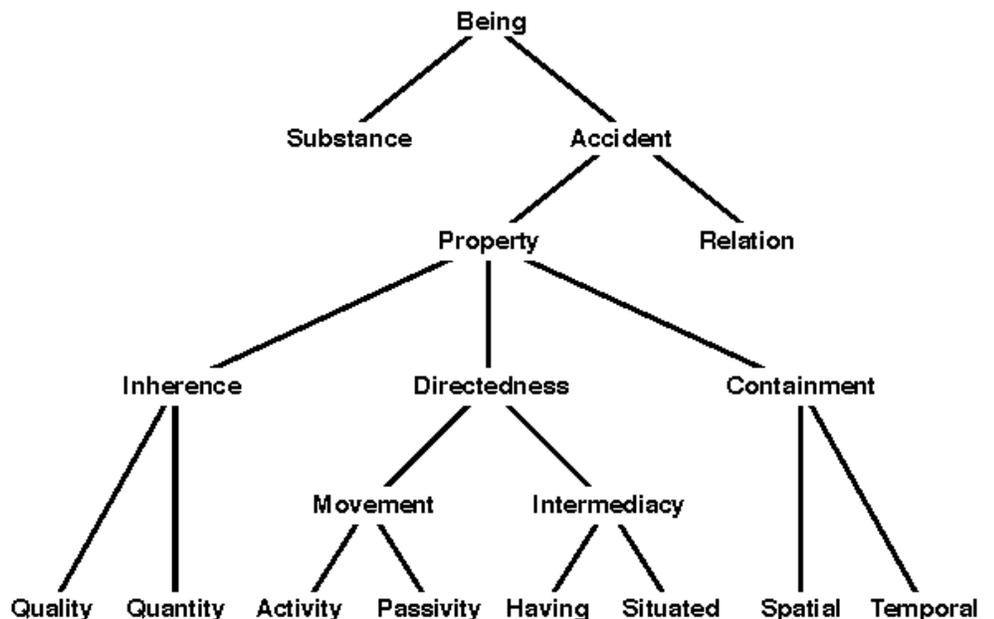


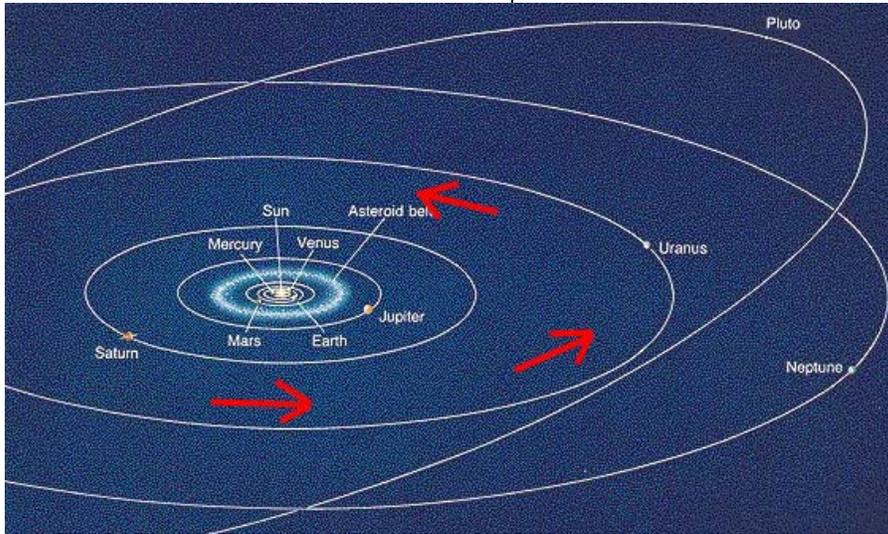
Above is a chart of causes, or events. In this case, we view the cause for generations: each generation being caused by the previous.

At right is the tree structure of categories. All logical definitions seek to place any object or phenomenon into its own, unique category, in order to accurately define what it is. And as the tree structure of all preceding creations viewed, this topic – human knowledge – also follows the tree structure. Each category is generated by the higher category. Isn't that interesting?

Whether we view physical entities, events or causes, or the structure of human knowledge, we witness the same, identical pattern. By itself, it is quite intriguing. But why must this be? Why did God permeate so much of His creation with "this" design? The next page displays a second design, and message.

(continued on next page)





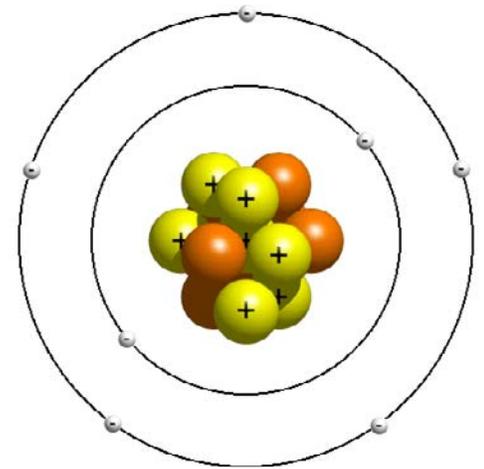
The left image is the solar system. The right image is the planetary orbits of electrons revolving around the nucleus of an atom. In both cases, there is a primary object, and other objects that rely on it. Planets would fly into space without the sun, and all Earthly life would perish. And without the nature of electrons and nuclei, matter could not exist. The heart of man is the same...all limbs rely on it for blood.

Taking this notion of “dependency” to another level, man needs food, water, air and sunlight. Plants and animals – man’s sustenance – require the same. What man needs to live, are themselves also in need. Why must man be dependent? Why must man’s needs themselves, be dependent?

Rabbi Bachya ibn Paquda (“Duties of the Hearts” author) among others refers to the design witnessed in creation. He states that we need not see the author (referring to God) to know His existence:

“...it is enough to see the manuscript; the inferences drawn about the author from his work, from his handwriting style, serve us instead of our actually meeting him. We may conclude with certainty – based on the consistent style and uniformity of the manuscript – that there existed one writer...a work written by two different authors would be marked by diversity, a lack of uniformity, inconsistency of style, and would fluctuate in quality and character.”

Reading this, and reflecting on the images above, we understand his metaphor of the author, truly referring to God. We understand what he means by “uniformity of style” as seen throughout creation. But I wonder: is there more to this design, than mere duplication to point to an “Author”? Is there a message in addition to there being one Designer, which we might derive from this specific branch and planetary patterns? What might be the most fundamental lessons, which God wished to impart through repeating, natural patterns? Do the patterns have a hint?



Maimonides organized the fundamentals of Judaism, located in his Yesodei HaTorah 1:1-3. He commences with the two most primary fundamentals:

I. The foundations of foundations, and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there exists a First Cause (existence). And He caused all existences. And all that is found from the heavens and Earth and what is between them do not exist, except due to the truth of that First Cause.

II. And if you might entertain the notion that He would not exist, nothing else would be able to exist.

III. And if you might entertain the notion that nothing else would exist, except for Him, He alone would exist. And He would not be eliminated through the elimination of all other existences. For all existences need Him, and He, Blessed be He, does not need them...and not one of them. Therefore, His truth is not as the truth of anything else.

(continued on next page)

The Lessons

Lesson 1: A First Cause

In all our observations, we witness a root, or singular starting point that branches out, or from which veins emanate. This is intended – in my opinion – to replicate Creation, and point to a Creator. That is, from One God (the root) did all creations emanate (branches). This is Maimonides' first fundamental. From one tree root, from one leaf's stem, from one initial lightning bolt...branch out numerous offshoots. That is creation: one Cause that generated all other existences.

We are taught by design in nature, those most fundamental ideas God wishes to be inescapable. Foremost in God's plan for man, God desires that mankind recognize the most primary lessons, starting with the truth of a First Cause, from which all emanated. This lesson is successfully taught through its repetition all around us: from creations, how events work, and even how knowledge is structured, we are reminded of this fundamental. "Fear of God is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7) Therefore, as God desires man to obtain knowledge, He placed His "footprints" in the sands and creations of Earth. He publicizes His presence and identity as Creator of all...the source and root. But there is another lesson.

In all cases, the root is a 'source', which delivers blood, water, or energy through all its branches...this is the second fundamental...

Lesson 2: Dependency

The second thing we can say about this design is that a life source (rivers; a leaf's veins; a tree's nutritive branches; blood-carrying veins) delivers its nutritive properties through a path that exponentially divides. Even lightning is delivering necessary energy: starting at one point, and branching out as it approaches Earth's surface. We see this concept in atoms, and in our solar system as well. A central force – a source – is what all else depends on for "continued existence".

This is Maimonides second fundamental. Nothing can exist without God. Not only is God the First Cause, but also He is the sustainer of all existence, just as the veins and branches deliver sustenance. We must not be deceived that once a creation came into existence, that it might continue independent of God. No. The very

truth that everything required creation – a transition from nonexistence into existence – proves that by nature, nothing should exist! It is only by God's will that all came into being, and that all continues. Nature once again displays a fundamental. Nature embodies this abstract concept that all creations rely on God, through the very real observation that all existences are dependent existences: be it on food, sun, water, or air.

God created man as a dependent existence, to constantly remind us of our dependence on Him. Through our daily dependence on water, and food, and our constant dependence on air, we are to arrive at the higher lesson that we are dependent on God for our lives.

God permeated our world with these two reminders: 1) all existences require a cause, or root; 2) all existences require His maintenance.

If we take these messages to heart, we become truly indebted to God. We realize our place in the universe. And this indebtedness should fuel our dedication to His will, that we follow Torah. That is the final objective of all these lessons. It is not for Him that we dedicate ourselves to Him, but for us. For God needs nothing, as Maimonides said, "For all existences need Him, and He, Blessed be He, does not need them...and not one of them." God gave us hints all around that our life's goal is to recognize His exclusive role as Creator, and Maintainer.

1) A First Cause, and 2) the dependency of all existences on that Cause, are precisely Maimonides' two most primary fundamentals. And it is these two fundamentals that we witness in creation. If these two ideas are so fundamental, it is plausible that God permeated these lessons into creation. For it is creation's purpose to give evidence of the Creator. God created the world to testify to His existence. "The heavens speak the honor of God," said King David. Of course the heavens cannot speak, but this means they "convey" God's wisdom, His honor. Now, what is His honor? As Maimonides said, it is that He is the First Cause, and that upon Him do all existences rely. We learn that creation is to point man towards a knowledge of the Creator, and that upon Him do all existences rely for their continued life. Thus, we might safely assume that God embedded these lessons in all matter.

It is quite amazing that the two lessons Maimonides deemed most primary, parallel exactly two prominent designs in creation. ■



*It is quite amazing
that the 2 lessons
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in creation.*



Two weeks ago we discussed the Talmudic section in Sabbath 119b which depicted a specific human conflict: each Friday, we can either prepare for the Sabbath, or we can reject that preparation due to the uncomfortable constraints Sabbath places on us for 25 hours. It all depends on our values. The instincts and the emotions were depicted as two "ministering angels": the former finds Sabbath rest from everyday 'freedom' very stifling; the latter rejoices in the break from work, where we can indulge in the world of wisdom.

The section that precedes this one states that if man recites the Friday evening prayers and also the verse, "And God completed the heavens and the Earth on seventh day...", then it is "as if" this man becomes a partner with God in creation. But how can that be? Creation is long over! However, the Talmud does not mean this man is a partner in the "act" of creation, but rather, in the "purpose" of creation. God created the world so an intelligent being – man – could perceive His wisdom, and draw close to Him. God's creation of he world, and man, were pure acts of kindness to man...God does not need the universe: it is for man. So with our testimony that "God completed the heavens and the Earth on seventh day...", we fulfill God's plan of creation, by recognizing and testifying that it is God who caused the universe to exist. It is as if we are partners with God, as we give purpose to the Creation of the Earth. God does not need us to give His creations purpose...for God said all was "good". Meaning, even if man sinned to the point of destruction, as with Noah's generation, it was a good that God created the situation for man's possible perfection.

The Talmud continues, discussing the two ministering angels that accompany man...the same two angels we discussed previously. It states

that if a person recites the Friday evening prayer, including the verse "And God completed the heavens and the Earth on seventh day...", then these two angels place their hands on this man's head and recite, "And your sins will be removed, and you will be atoned for your sins".

What is significant about this verse in particular? Why not recite "In the beginning, God created heaven and Earth", or some other verse?

Why are sins erased due to this recital?

And how do we understand the joint action of "both" angels placing their hands on this man's head? I understand that the one angel – the instincts – are affected by this man's commitment to God. For it is the instincts that are changed when man admits of truths, and rejects his instincts. So the instincts "alone" should place their hands on man's head, metaphorically blessing this man, as all blessings are done with hands on the recipient's head. But why must the other angel – man's intelligence – act at all? It is already functioning in line with a desire for God! We should see no change in the intelligent part of man. Let's first understand the instincts.

When man attests to Creation, he thereby attests to "his own" creation. What effect does recognizing our "created" status have on us? It should make us quite humble, and reduce our egotism. Pirkei Avos 3:1 states, "If one ponders three matters, he will not sin: from where he came – a putrid drop; to where he ultimately goes – a place of dust, worms and maggots (the grave); and before Whom he must give an account of his life." Chapter 2:1 also says, "If one ponders three matters he will not sin: know what is above you; a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and that all is written in a book."

In the first quote, man's ego is diminished when he realizes his very beginnings were inanimate drops of lowly semen. With this thought, man reduces his ego emotion that stems from his identity. However, man may still delude himself as to his "great worth" when he considers his successes. Therefore, he is also told "remember to where you go...the grave". This helps to restrain another facet of the ego: the accomplishment emotion. Finally, he must accept that he answers to God.

Avos 2:1 accentuates this sentiment by elaborating on our accountability: all is seen and heard by God. But what is common to both statements, is that when man's ego is diminished, so is his sinning. This is what the testimony of God as Creator does, and why the instincts "place their hands on our head" and say we are forgiven.

When we recite the verse, "God completed the heavens and the Earth on seventh day...", we agree that we too are created, and this humbles us. Just

as Pirkei Avos teaches that ego is the cause of sin; so too when we attest to our very beings as 'created' entities, we diminish our egos, and have no strength to violate God who made us and asks our obedience. All sinning requires us to deny God, through the overestimation of the self – ego. This explains why the one "angel" (the instincts) "bless" us, or rather...give in to reality, saying we are forgiven. With this recital, we actually make a weekly changeover of our personalities, where we shake loose of our egos, and deserve no further punishment due to sins caused by it. We are quite literally, not the same person who sinned, so there is no need for God to punish us. Punishment is to correct us, but have corrected ourselves.

There is no angel actually blessing us, but the instincts are personified as if they "bless us," or act properly. When our instincts fall in line with God's will...this is a type of blessing. But why does the other angel – our intellects – need to bless us as well?

This means that although we have released the grip of the ego, we are still in need of one other step. For if the ego emotions are not followed by our redirection of our energies, our energies will soon flow right back into their old paths: we will once again seek to satisfy our egos. Therefore, once we attest to God as our Creator, we have only made one step: we broke the hold our egos have on us. But then we must redirect those energies towards wisdom and Torah, expressed by the other angel – the intellect – also blessing us with its hands. This means that we need to immediately redirect our energies released from egotistical areas, towards God. If we don't, then we will soon be back to stage one.

This Talmudic portion thereby teaches us that each Friday when we recite "God completed the heavens and the Earth on seventh day...", we have a chance to take our energies released from our egos, and redirect them. If we do, then both, our instincts and our intellect will praise us, or rather, will aid us. I thank my friend Howard for this explanation.

One last question: we asked why not recite "In the beginning, God created heaven and Earth"? Why do we recite "God completed the heavens and the Earth on seventh day..."? The reason is that the former verse merely attests to God's creation of heaven and Earth...and nothing more. But to refer to God as the "exclusive" Creator, which we must do to be accurate...we recite the verse referring to the final moment when "all" of Creation was completed. In this manner, we don't only say that God created the heavens and Earth, but that ALL existences are due solely to God. Thereby, we add the essential component that God is the "exclusive" cause of all that exists. ■

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salamon.brothers@verizon.net

Kidney Needed *(Reprinted from an email list)*

I am writing to appeal to all of you to help me with the following two items. My dad is in desperate need of a kidney transplant and I need everyone's help. One please keep Ephraim be Esther in your tfillot and if you say thillim please keep him in mind. The next item is harder and I am asking your help to post in shul or community email message boards. He needs a kidney donor with type A or O blood for a transplant. If you know of anyone who wants to donate a kidney or have any information at all that could help please contact me asap. The recipient will pay all expenses and lost wages associated with the donation. Please distribute this information as word of mouth is the best networking. I can be reached 24 hours a day by email or at any of the numbers below. Tizku lmitsvos.

–Marc Hoschander

t-646-366-1772 f-646-366-1776 c-917-612-2300
mhoschander@approvedfunding.com