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"THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF": Rabbinic Views of Cosmology and Conduct As Reflected in Beresheit Rabbah On Parsheot Beresheit and Noah

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

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DIGEST

This thesis explores the interrelationship between cosmology and norms of behavior as reflected in the midrash Beresheit Rabbah on parsheot Beresheit and Noah. Many of the midrashim on these parsheot illustrate rabbinic ideas about how biblical cosmology reveals certain norms of behavior. This is because these parsheot give accounts of the creation of the natural world, the nature of the human being, and the human being's place in the universe. Furthermore, they refer to humanity in its broadest sense, i.e., before the Bible turns specifically to the history of the people of Israel.

After a brief introduction, the thesis is broken down into three chapters. The first chapter is a short discussion of the cultural function of midrash as interpretation of authoritative myth. This section includes some general comments about cultural anthropology and anthropology of religion as well. The second chapter is the textual analysis. Here the material about cosmology and conduct is arranged thematically, illustrating six major themes into which the material can be divided. The third chapter focuses on the various ways one can work with the material in the present. It includes some research about education and curriculum development, as well as a plan for teaching a course on rabbinic views of cosmology and conduct to a class of Reform Jewish American high school students.

Finally, the conclusion addresses the methodology and presentation of the thesis itself, as well as my ideas about how to further study and reflect on this material.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although my journey through rabbinic school has been anything but normal, I must say that it has been most enlightening and most fulfilling. It has been enlightening because I have had the chance to study with some of the great professors of Judaic thought in the country. It has been fulfilling in that I have been able to aspire to both my personal and professional dreams.

I would like to give special recognition to my teacher and friend Dr. Richard Sarason. He has given me the freedom to develop my ideas about Judaism and Jewish education while sharing his knowledge and years of experience with midrash. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to learn with him.

In addition, I must mention the love and support shown to me by my friends and family. Their comfort and encouragement were a source of strength when the project got to be a bit overwhelming. All of them have been a vital part of my life and of my growth as a rabbi.

Last but not least, I dedicate this work to my dear husband Sidney. His patience and calming nature has helped me to work in both a productive and steady manner. I look forward to sharing many more projects with him, both personally and professionally.

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INTRODUCTION

> Rabbi Hiyya son of Abba said: 'I was once invited by a man in Laodicea; they brought before us a table borne on sixteen staves, and on it was of everything created in the first six days; a child sat in the middle and recited, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Psalms 24:1). Why? So that the owner should not grow conceited. Said I to him, 'My son, whence did you merit all this wealth?' 'I was a butcher,' replied he, 'and whenever I saw a well-favored animal, I set it aside for the Sabbath.'[1]

At the center of Rabbi Hiyya son of Abba's story stands a cosmological teaching, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psalms 24:1). This biblical phrase paints a picture of a world that is owned and governed by something other than human beings. That is, at the root of all existence is God. Human beings, on the other hand, serve as agents of divine will. Therefore, they are obliged to follow God's words and God's ways, as exemplified in Torah and the workings of the natural world. All human activity should be performed, ultimately, in order to please

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[1] Beresheit Rabbah, Chapter 11, paragraph 4; translation by Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, Genesis, in Midrash Rabbah (New York: Soncino Press, 1983), p. 83.

God. In short, Rabbi Hiyya son of Abba suggests both a specific cosmology and a value system.

Kees W. Bolle explains that the term "cosmology" can bear two different meanings. It can refer to the "study of cosmic views, in general," or more particularly, it can be used to describe "the specific view or collection of images concerning the universe held in a religion or cultural tradition."[2] For our purposes, the term "cosmology" will be defined in the latter sense.

In keeping with the idea that religions or cultures have specific cosmologies, it also appears that these views are reflected in various norms of behavior. Bolle notes that "the behavior required of man is often described and always implied in the account of the world's structure."[3] In general, one's cosmology directly addresses basic questions of existence, such as: "How does the creation of the world relate to the creation of human beings?", "Is there a certain way that human beings are supposed to conduct themselves vis à vis the world around them?", and "How does human behavior affect the natural order of the world?" These questions seem to be of interest to all peoples in every generation.

From the previous example, one can see that this was surely the case with the cosmology expounded by Rabbi Hiyya

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[2]Kees W. Bolle, "Cosmology," Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), vol. 4, p. 100.

[3]Ibid.

son of Abba. The above story, however, is but one of many that have been transmitted in Jewish tradition. It is taken from a compilation of midrashim known as Beresheit Rabbah. The work is full of explanations, stories and parables about cosmology, among other things, which have survived from the Rabbinic period.

Beresheit Rabbah is a compilation of aggadic midrashim, of Palestinian origin. Although it is probable that the date of compilation is the first half of the fifth century, some of the traditions collected in the document may be much older. Unlike many other rabbinic midrashic compilations, the style of Beresheit Rabbah is both exegetical and homiletical. It is exegetical in that it contains a running commentary, verse by verse, on almost the entire book of Genesis. However, characteristic of homiletical midrashim, most chapters begin with petihtot. That is, a verse from elsewhere in the Bible, usually Psalms or Proverbs, is expounded upon, and then connected to the base verse from Genesis.

The compilers of this midrash seemed to have had their own agenda when putting it together. They followed a rabbinic practice of using the Bible as a foundation upon which they could ground their contemporary thoughts and beliefs. Regarding this point, Gary Porton notes that "some of its passages are highly philosophical, and much of it is designed to counter the popular philosophical theories of

the period of its composition."[4] Because of this agenda, the redactors often repeat, as well as add, passages which only loosely relate to the base verse. In fact, the additional material is sometimes only related to the preceding exegetical comments, and not to the verse itself.

The rabbinic preoccupation with interpreting contemporary values in light of Jewish tradition is particularly striking in that it can be compared to contemporary Jewish life in America. This is because the Rabbis of Palestine lived, and the Jews of America live, in a multicultural society. By definition, a multicultural society implies a variety of belief systems and cultural practices. Therefore, questions about one's own culture and belief system are sometimes raised and contemplated. In order to address these questions, it becomes necessary to return to the sources. As the ancient Rabbis have shown the value and relevance of the Bible in speaking about their contemporary situation, Jewish Americans can be shown the value and relevance of midrash in serving as a model for speaking about their contemporary situation.

Since the process of interpretation was such an integral part of the Rabbis' everyday lives, the perspectives embodied in the midrashim took on a self-evident quality. Max Kadushin suggests that "Rabbinic value concepts are inseparable from normal, everyday, moment-to-

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[4]Gary Porton, Understanding Rabbinic Midrash: Texts and Commentary (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1985), p. 161.

moment experience. They are mental habits that become second nature, more correctly, in view of their organismic character, part of nature."[5] Judaism was part and parcel of their lives. Even common things were seen in a religious context.

Today, in America, however, this type of activity is rarely practiced. It is only the minority of Jews who sit in the yeshivot and dialogue with the texts on any regular basis. What was once such an active way of teaching Judaism has now fallen by the wayside. Texts are studied as they are, but rarely are midrashim created anew. Perhaps the times are different, or the process was forgotten. Perhaps a subtle reminder of the beauty of this literature is all that is necessary. It is this writer's hope that by contemplating the midrashic compilation known as Beresheit Rabbah, the method and the meaning will once again resume their significance in the modern day.

With this in mind, I have chosen to write this thesis from the viewpoint of one who is both a student of theology and a Reform Jewish American. By wearing each of these hats simultaneously, I wish to take the Rabbinic midrashim, some of the most noteworthy Judaic biblical commentary in the area of theology, and look at them as a modern Reform Jewish American. Therefore, I will be exploring the interrelationship between cosmology and norms of behavior in

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[5]Max Kadushin, The Rabbinic Mind (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1972), p. 14.

the context of rabbinic Judaism through examining the materials in one document, Beresheit Rabbah. In particular, I will look at the midrashim from parsheot Beresheit and Noah, i.e., those about the creation of the world and the early history of humankind (the pre-history of Israel). It is this material which deals with cosmology, the nature of the human being, and the human being's place in the world in its broadest sense. I see the act of interpreting the text as twofold. I not only want to find out what it is that the Rabbis had to say, but I also am interested in the methodology which the Rabbis used in their analyses. In understanding these questions, perhaps we can come up with our own criteria for contemporary Reform Jewish interpretation. Although not all of the material which I report about will be relevant to the modern day, it is still possible to learn from the process and methodology behind what was said.

In general, my methodology is similar to that expounded by Jacob Neusner in his book, Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism. Our tasks are slightly different, however, since his book focuses on the modern study of "halakhic" texts whereas this thesis looks at "aggadic" material. Yet, Neusner's approach for studying ancient texts still seems to be appropriate here. This is because he, too, is offering a way to view the material through the eyes of the contemporary theologian.

Neusner explains that a theologian's study of the ancient material is different from that of the scholar or historian in that "...we must grant to theologians what we do not want for scholars, the freedom as constructive religious thinkers to propose fresh perspectives on, and even alterations in the world-view and ethos of, the law."[6] In transferring his words to this particular study, the word "law" can be taken to mean "Torah." Furthermore, his statement implies that a theologian considers both what the Rabbis are saying in their own context and the vision that they paint of what Judaism has been in the past and what it can be in the future. It is a process of entering into dialogue with the text.

According to Neusner, the correct interpretation of ancient materials begins by addressing a number of questions. These have to do with the "inner issues" addressed by the text itself, the "human meaning of those issues, when interpreted," the "particular times and settings" of which these texts are a product, and the "continuing and enduring social and historical realities of the Jewish people."[7] These questions become important when considering that Judaism is still a viable part of today's world.

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[6]Jacob Neusner, Method and Meaning In Ancient Judaism (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), p. 197.

[7]Ibid, p. 196.

In order to clarify the methodology just noted, it might be helpful to begin with a discussion of the way that cultures and religions are both grounded in, and themselves structure, human experience of the world. Therefore, the first chapter focuses on these issues as well as how they are played out in Judaism. The textual analysis will follow from here. Next will be a chapter which addresses the implications and pedagogical application of the textual analysis. Finally, the conclusion will address the methodology and presentation of the thesis itself, as well as my ideas about how to further study and reflect on this material.

FROM CULTURE TO CANON TO MIDRASH

Since the basic task of this thesis is to provide an understanding of various rabbinic views of creation--as these adumbrate the rabbinic understanding of the world, how it works, what our place is in it, and how we must behave accordingly--and how these views might apply in the contemporary world, it is appropriate first to comment on certain aspects of what can be termed "rabbinic culture." In order to do so, it is helpful to look at some of the scholarly literature in the fields of cultural anthropology and anthropology of religion. This literature is useful in providing the tools necessary to facilitate theoretical and analytical study of the larger issues that seemed to have been facing the Rabbis. Clifford Geertz writes, "cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions of the better guesses, not discovering the continent of meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape."[8] It is to this end that I draw certain conclusions about the world presented in

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[8]Geertz, Clifford, the Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 20.

the first portion of the Rabbinic text known as Beresheit Rabbah.

In a sense, talking about rabbinic culture is no different than talking about any other culture. It is unique because of its particularities, that is, who the Rabbis were in their own time as much as the Judaic heritage to which they were heirs and which they claimed to interpret. Yet, the basic structure of a culture is universal.

Anthropologists note that all cultures are developed in response to the human need for building worlds of meaning. Peter Berger writes, "Every society is engaged in the never completed enterprise of building a humanly meaningful world."[9] Unlike animals, who are born with the tools necessary to live a stable life, humans must construct this world. They must establish cultural patterns which will order and systematize their world within the framework of their everyday lives.

These patterns are conceived of in terms of a people's perception of the world. Their perceptions consist of a combination of their particular morals and aesthetics with a conception of a general order which they see in the world, that is, an order of nature, society, and themselves. In other words, a particular culture has a certain ethos and a

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[9]Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of Sociological Theory of Religion (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1967), p. 27.

certain worldview. Together, these two concepts give rise to a value system.

Although value systems can be developed from a variety of different perspectives, Berger maintains that "viewed historically, most of man's worlds have been sacred worlds."[10] It is through the medium of religion that people are most able to develop a lifestyle which, if followed, will imbue their lives with meaning. In this way, humanly constructed worlds are harmonized with the actual world.

Religion serves as a means whereby a culture's value system is transformed into a concrete, objective system of behavior. According to Geertz, "the demonstration of a meaningful relation between the values a people holds and the general order of existence within which it finds itself is an essential element in all religions, however those values or that order be conceived."[11] It embodies ways that one's life can fit into a larger order.

Through the use of various symbols, rituals, and teachings, religion presents a microcosm of the way that the world should be. Geertz emphasizes this point in claiming that "religion tunes human action to an envisaged cosmic order and projects images of cosmic order onto the plain of human experience."[12] It is a belief and dispositional system which is set up to model the ways in which

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Geertz, p. 127.

[12] Geertz, p. 90.

individuals should live their lives. It articulates for people the various behavioral patterns necessary to maintain order and ensure harmony in the world.

Rabbinic Judaism can be seen as one example of how a religion articulates a certain value, belief, and dispositional system. This value system has its grounding in the study of Torah conceived as the revealed word of God, and as the divinely ordained pattern of the universe. In its most basic form, Torah refers to the five books of Moses. This definition can be expanded to include the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, the term, Torah, when used more broadly, can refer to the entirety of Jewish texts. Educator Barry Holtz remarks, "Torah is revelation, the entire revelation and the entire activity of Jewish study throughout the generations."[13]

Typically, Torah has been divided into two categories, one known as written Torah, תורה שבכתב, the other, oral Torah, תורה שבעל פה, i.e., rabbinic tradition. The first type refers to the entirety of the Hebrew Bible, while the second denotes all of the Rabbinic texts and commentaries that have emerged in later generations. The descriptive terms "oral" and "written" can, however, be deceiving. Today, what differentiates these two types of Torah is not whether or not a text has been written down. Rather, the division is made on the basis of authority. Written Torah is seen as

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[13]Barry Holtz, Back To The Sources (New York: Summit Books, 1984), p. 12.

more authoritative than oral Torah. All further Torah study has its base in it.

Written Torah was not always fixed and rigid as it is today. It evolved and took shape over a period of time. Originally, Jewish tradition was an oral tradition, passed on from one generation to the next through the medium of storytelling.

Traditionally, the story has been one of the most effective means of transmitting the ideas and ideals of the Jewish people. Through illustration, the story is a means of teaching both values and lessons of proper conduct. It has helped to shape Jewish identity in individuals as well as the community, and it has served as a basis of continuity among the generations. The value of this type of transmission is emphasized by James Sanders when he writes, "It is, to the exclusion of all other religious 'vessels,' indestructible, commonly available to scattered communities, highly adaptable and portable in the extreme."[14] In a constantly changing world, the sacred story with its accompanying rules and prescriptions provided both guidance and stability. It served as a method whereby Jewish worlds could be constructed.

Yet, as a result of experiences of disorder, such as exile, assimilation, and changing ideas about the world, it became necessary for the Jewish people to fix the content

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[14]James A. Sanders, From Sacred Story to Sacred Text (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 19.

and corpus of the sacred story. This was achieved by creating a canon. Jonathan Z. Smith suggests that "the only formal element that is lacking to transform a catalog into a 'canon' is the element of closure: that the list be held to be complete."[15] In this case, certain of the sacred stories and codes of rules were gathered together under the umbrella of what came to be known as the Hebrew Bible, or "Tanakh." In providing closure to the corpus of the Hebrew Bible, the canon separated authoritative texts from other, non-authoritative texts.

Once this occurred, the Bible took on a sacred character. It came to represent widely agreed upon ideas of the history of the world and the Jewish people, and, because it was fixed, it could be repeated without the risk of being "altered." The making of a Biblical canon not only ensured the continuity and the survivability of the Bible over time, it also fostered the survival of the Jewish people. James Sanders notes, "It not only has survival qualities for itself; it shares those life-giving qualities with the community that finds identity in it."[16] Canonization allowed the Hebrew Bible to be transmitted, in its entirety, to people all over the world.

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[15]Jonathan Z. Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 40.

[16]Ibid

Although the act of establishing a canon may seem to limit creativity and adaptability for a community (such as the Jewish people), in actuality, it enhances such processes. Jonathan Z. Smith explains that "...canon is best seen as one form of a basic cultural process of limitation and of overcoming that limitation through ingenuity."[17] Precisely by limiting the corpus of Biblical material could it become the tool for fostering the survival of Jewish identity over time.

The key to this survival lies in interpretation. In this vein, Smith remarks, "where there is canon, it is possible to predict the necessary occurrence of a hermeneute, of an interpreter whose task it is continually to extend the domain of the closed canon over everything that is known or everything that exists without altering the canon in the process."[18] It is here that the process of oral Torah begins.

It is through oral Torah that the Rabbis were able to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the Hebrew Bible. For the Rabbis, it became more important, at least in theory, to interact with the Hebrew text than to create independent new source material. In fact, through interacting with the Bible, they created such new source material (i.e., the

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[17]Jonathan Z. Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon To Jonestown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 52.

[18]Ibid, p. 48.

Mishna, Talmud, and to some extent midrashim). Although the Bible was binding, it could be read and responded to in such a way that it could continue to maintain its relevance over time. Barry Holtz suggests that reading "held the challenge of uncovering secret meanings, unheard of explanations, matters of great weight and significance."[19] By carefully analyzing various nuances of the text, both in terms of its syntax and its semantics, the biblical material could be interpreted in such a way as to meet the needs and preoccupations of later generations.

Rabbinic interpretations may not always reveal the literal meaning of the biblical text. Rather, the Rabbis often took liberty to embellish the text in such a way that they could talk about their own preoccupations--they saw this as a deepening of the text's meaning. That is, the process of eisegesis, reading into the text, was practiced as often as exegesis, reading out of the text. Both forms of interpretation were equally valid, always simultaneous, and unavoidable in the world of the Rabbis.

The essential ingredient was, however, that the biblical text serve as a stimulus for interpretation. The Bible became the foundation upon which all other Jewish worlds were based. It provided the foundation upon which the Rabbis could ground their contemporary thoughts and beliefs. Indeed, it provided the mirror through which they saw their own issues and concerns revealed.

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[19]Holtz, p. 16.

It is noteworthy that Rabbinic Judaism never settled on one single interpretation of a given biblical text. Rather, the Rabbis were constantly offering different interpretations of the same verses. They spent their days sitting in the academies, actively discussing these views. They argued over interpretations and saw reflected in the biblical text other well-known ideas derived from their specific worldview. Peter Berger stresses the importance of this variety by stating that "where religion continues to be meaningful as an interpretation of existence, its definitions of reality must somehow be able to account for the fact that there are different spheres of reality in the ongoing experience of everyone."[20] It was through the Rabbis' unique process of discussion and interpretation that views were listened to, discussed, and eventually compiled into various collections of texts.

The discipline of Rabbinic interpretation has come to be known as "midrash." This term has two different meanings. It can refer to the process of interpretation, in general, or, more particularly, to the various collections of these interpretations. Furthermore, midrash can take the form of halakha or of aggadah, depending on whether the content is legal interpretation or simply discursive (worldview-related).

The goal of midrash seems to be explanation of biblical texts. Yet, in reading these explanations, it becomes clear

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[20]Berger, p. 43.

that Rabbinic midrashim explain biblical literature in such a way as to present ideas which convey the Rabbis' own particular values. According to Max Kadushin, "Rabbinic midrashic literature seeks to impart ideas: it is a literature which deals with concepts, its statements having to do with such concepts as charity, Torah, Malkut Shamayim, Derek Erez, and scores of other value concepts."[21] By filtering their world through the lens of an accepted, authoritative body of literature, the Bible, the Rabbis' ideas became endowed with a certain degree of authority. At the same time, in their own minds, they genuinely saw their own values and beliefs reflected in the biblical texts. It is with this authority that the Rabbis imparted their ideas to their disciples.

As noted in the introduction, there are a variety of value concepts that can be explored when studying rabbinic views of cosmology. The biblical book of Genesis depicts the creation and evolution of the world in general, and Israel in particular. The midrash Beresheit Rabbah, like Genesis, sees these processes as interrelated. From the Biblical account of the creation of the world emerged ideas and ideals for daily living. The Rabbis, through the medium of interpretation, show how the book of Genesis comments on the such issues as: the nature and value of Torah as a blueprint for creation, the status of God as Supreme

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[21]Kadushin, p. 14.

(Employer) in relation to humans as subservient (employees), and the fact that human actions have consequences at the cosmic level.

A word of caution, however. In looking at the midrash, it is important to note that it does not necessarily give an accurate account of the total picture of the rabbinic world. Rather, it gives an idea of the types of issues which they confronted. The value in studying the midrash is in being able to look at the method utilized by the Rabbis, midrashic commentary together with hermeneutical principles, and the articulation and ramification of values that have survived over time.

Jonathan Z. Smith sums up the study of religion as follows:

> What we study when we study religion is one mode of constructing worlds of meaning, worlds within which men find themselves and in which they choose to dwell. What we study is the passion and drama of man discovering the truth of what it is to be human.[22]

It is in this way that the first sections of Beresheit Rabbah, a particular document of rabbinic Judaism, will be analyzed. By becoming immersed in the text, and involved in the worldview of the Rabbis, one can rediscover the beauty and value of Torah, even in the present day. It is by listening to and learning from our ancestors that we can truly begin to gain greater understanding of our lives today.

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[22]Jonathan Z. Smith, Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), pp. 290-291.

ANALYZING THE TEXT

According to the annual cycle of liturgical Torah readings, the scope of the first two parsheot, Beresheit and Noah, is the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis. These chapters depict the origins of both the natural and the social order of the world. They are universalistic in nature. Yet, in a sense, they set the stage for the particularistic account of the history of Israel that is to follow.

One can divide this material into five basic units: the creation of the world, Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, Cain and Abel, Noah, and the Tower of Babel. Each of these units reveals a number of themes that seem to have been important to the people who compiled the book of Genesis. From the beginning, one can find important ideas and lessons about humanity and the world.

The creation narrative teaches about the One God who is both Creator and Supreme Being and whose word is truth. Through divine speech, God creates by imposing order and form onto chaotic matter. In addition, the account shows the dichotomy between God and nature, the latter being

subservient to the former, as well as the place of human beings in the natural scheme of things. The world is arranged hierarchically, with humans at the pinnacle. Furthermore, this narrative portrays a world that has been created in a thoughtful and orderly way and which is considered to be essentially good.

The story of Adam and Eve and their sojourn in the Garden of Eden begins to exemplify the ways in which human beings are charged with carrying out the divine purpose of creation. It tells of how free will can lead to temptation and how human beings are responsible for bringing evil into the world. It also teaches lessons about God's mercy and about reward and punishment.

The narrative of Cain and Abel further expounds on the origins of the social world. This story, like the story of the Garden of Eden, reveals ideas about the consequences of free will and the notion that humans are responsible for evil in the world. Likewise, it continues to comment on the relationship between God, who is both merciful and just, and the mortal human being, who is prone to certain fallible dispositions. One also finds issues of sibling rivalry and of culpability.

The story of Noah is important in that it comments on the theme of the righteous versus the wicked. That is, the righteous man was spared, while the wicked generations were destroyed. In reading this account, one learns how, by disturbing the social and moral order of the world, the

physical order, too, is destroyed. At the same time, one learns about regeneration as a new covenant is established between God and Noah following the flood. All the nations of the world are said to have descended from Noah.

Finally, the account of the Tower of Babel comments on the dispersion of humanity into various ethnic, geographic, and cultural groups. This is a direct result of God's having confounded their speech after their attempt to usurp divine power and mastery. It is important to note that this story explains how the people of Israel could become one sub-group of humanity as a whole.

From these eleven chapters of Genesis, the redactors of Beresheit Rabbah generated thirty-eight chapters of midrashim. Although some of the themes implicit in the Bible are also found in the midrash, others are distinctively rabbinic. Furthermore, it is quite common that an idea is repeated within the context of more than one midrash.

Since this thesis focuses on a specific topic, the midrashim will be arranged thematically. This is not to say that the text itself is arranged accordingly. It, rather, follows the order of the biblical text. However, I chose to deviate from this order so that I could most clearly illustrate how the Sages derived various norms of behavior from their views on cosmology. In addition, it seems that various aspects of rabbinic culture become more visible when the text is laid out this way.

When analyzing the midrashim that pertain to the relevant topic, the following themes are most prominent:

1. Torah as Intermediary Between God and Humanity
2. The Unique Position of Human Beings in the World
3. Purposes of the Natural World
4. Divine Providence, Free Will, and the Problem of Evil
5. God and the Natural World as Exemplars for Human Conduct
6. Shabbat

In the pages that follow, each of these themes will be explored. There is, of course, some overlap among topics. However, this is in the nature of the material.

When necessary, an entire midrash will be explained in detail. However, on occasion, it is sufficient to summarize the main idea. The exact location of a specific midrash in the Theodor-Albeck critical edition will be indicated in the footnotes.

Torah As Intermediary Between God and Humanity

The idea of Torah as intermediary between God and humanity is readily apparent in the text. After all, in the Rabbinic world, the fact that Torah was divinely revealed to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai is taken for granted. It is thought of as the blueprint of creation. The structure of the world is adumbrated in the structure of

Torah. Since the rules that govern and order the world are laid out in Torah, life's mysteries can be decoded through Torah study. By carefully studying every letter, word, jot and tittle, one can systematically uncover the world's inner workings. The following section will illustrate how this process works, as well as how it can reveal various insights into the interrelationship between cosmology and conduct.

One major hermeneutical means of "decoding" the text is intertextual reading. That is, the Rabbis juxtapose various verses with each other in order to draw analogies. The philosophy behind this approach is that the text interprets itself if one is able to read it properly.

The petihta is one kind of intertextual reading technique. In this case, the meaning of a verse from the Torah is construed through textual juxtaposition with another verse, usually from the Prophets or Writings. This is done on the basis of shared words or themes in the juxtaposed verses. The Rabbis offer various interpretations of the juxtaposed verse, the last one leading directly to the base verse.

The petihta illustrates the rabbinic belief that the whole of Scripture is important, not just those books which make up the Pentateuch. That is, the Prophets and Writings form a kind of commentary on the Torah, and the Torah also comments on itself. In this way, Scripture is seen as a kind of self-interpreting oracle. Any verse--in whatever part of Scripture--can be used (and is used) to interpret

another verse on the basis of some perceived analogical connection (implicit or explicit) between them. It is in knowing how to interpret the Torah in light of other verses that one can begin to uncover all of its mysteries.

This ideology is present already in the opening midrash. It begins with a juxtaposition of the opening words of the Torah, בראשית ברא אלהים, with Proverbs 8:30, "Then I was with Him as a confidant, a source of delight every day, rejoicing before Him at all times...."[23] In context, the speaker in the verse is Wisdom. Since the Rabbis identify Wisdom in Scripture with Torah, the verse is expounded accordingly.

Rabbi Oshaya explains the significance of the word, אמון, here being translated as "confidant." This word could be interpreted as meaning "tutor," "covered," "hidden," or "great" on the basis of its perceived field of meaning in other biblical verses. That is, Torah was with God as with a tutor, and Torah was covered up and hidden until it was time for it to be revealed.

A further interpretation takes the word to refer to "craftsmanship"--the Torah was God's blueprint in the creation of the world. The role of Torah is illustrated through the case of a king who consults an architect when building a palace. The architect does not merely construct

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[23]Unless otherwise stated, all translations are taken from Tanakh: A New Translation of The Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

off the top of his head. Rather, he uses plans, diagrams, and blueprints to guide him in the job. Similarly, God took counsel with Torah, using it as a plan for construction of the world.

This theory of the Torah's significance is "discovered" in Genesis 1:1 through analogical reasoning, gezerah shava. That is, because the word ראשית is taken metonymically to refer to Torah on the basis of Proverbs 8:22, "The Lord created me at the beginning (ראשית) of His course...," this meaning can be read back into the use of בראשית found in Genesis 1:1. It is as if to say, with Torah, God created the world.[24]

This reading of Genesis 1:1 indicates the placement of God, Torah, and humanity within the cosmic order. God authors the creation and development of the world. Yet, from the very outset, God establishes a partnership with Torah. Torah, personified as Divine Wisdom, serves God on high, both as a confidant and as a blueprint to be used in the conception of the structure and content of the world. Yet, Torah also finds a place in the temporal world. Humanity, existing solely in the temporal world, stands below both God and Torah in a hierarchical structure; but because God has revealed Torah to humanity, it becomes the vehicle through which humans can fathom God's wisdom and the world's order.

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[24]Chapter 1, paragraph 1.

Several values can be derived from this midrash. First, it offers a worldview in which the word of Torah is the primary vehicle of intermediation between human beings and God. This implies that by studying Torah, one is drawing closer to God. Furthermore, the midrash shows how God's actions model human behavior. Just as God consulted with Torah in creating the world, so human beings should consult Torah for guidance in their lives. Torah is more than a list of commandments; it is a prescription for how to live life within the cosmic order that it adumbrates. It is the source of both social and cosmic norms.

The notion that Torah study can reveal the world's secrets, i.e. the "structure of things," is made more explicit in other midrashim. One in particular is a comment on Daniel 2:22, "He reveals deep and hidden things, knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him." From this verse, Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simon reasons that although God revealed the deep and hidden things at the very beginning of the Torah, one must be versed in the entirety of the Bible in order to decode all of these mysteries. If people want to understand the "hows" of creation, they must familiarize themselves with the rest of the Bible, and they must know how meaningfully to construe individual verses through other verses.

Thus, Genesis 1:1 is interpreted in the light of Isaiah 40:22. The former states, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth...." Yet, it does not specify how

God created these things. In order to obtain this information, one must look at the latter verse, "It is He who is enthroned above the vault of the earth, who spread out the skies like gauze, stretched them out like a tent to dwell in." Now the Genesis verse can be more clearly understood.

Similarly, Genesis 1:3 becomes more intelligible after considering it in light of Psalms 104:2. The former verse, "God said, 'Let there be light,'" gives no indication of how light was actually created on earth. The Psalms verse, "...wrapped in a robe of light, You spread the heavens like a tent cloth," reveals this information. Hence, God created light by "spreading it to heaven like a tent cloth."[25]

A second hermeneutical technique used to uncover secrets about creation is letter exegesis. At times, the Rabbis assume that the form of the Torah itself has extra-literary significance. Once decoded, the very letters of Torah reveal something about cosmic processes.

For instance, there are several explanations as to why the Torah begins specifically with the Hebrew letter bet. One asserts that there is numerical significance in this fact. Since bet is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and has the numerical value of two, this implies that there are two worlds, namely the present one and the world to come. This is a reflection of the rabbinic belief

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[25]Chapter 1, paragraph 6.

that God will see to it that the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished in the world to come.

Two other explanations are directed against Gnostic dualism. That is, the Rabbis were countering the philosophy that there is more than one god. According to the Gnostics, our world was created by a lower evil deity and his heavenly retinue. Since the Rabbis, and Judaism as a whole, hold that the world was created by a single good God, they often attempted to demonstrate that Scripture refutes Gnostic cosmology.

They note, for example, that the bet was used at the beginning of the Torah because it is the first letter in the Hebrew word for blessing, ברכה, whereas an aleph would connote that the world was created for curse, ארורה. They remark, too, on the projecting points of the bet. The upward projectile indicates that creation was performed by God above. The back point indicates that Adonai, the name beginning with the preceding letter, aleph, is the name of the creator.[26] The Rabbis use this type of reasoning to show the Gnostics that the world was created by a single, just and benevolent deity. In both of these cases, the linguistic structure of the Torah (i.e., that it begins with a "ב" instead of an "א") indicates something significant about the corresponding structure of the world which was created using the Torah as a blueprint.

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[26]Chapter 1, paragraph 10.

These midrashim illustrate how letter exegesis reveals a bit about the nature of the world imprinted upon it at creation, as well as moral prospects for life everlasting. The Rabbis take a seemingly innocent letter and divine in it a great revelation. There is an additional commentary that indicates how the letters in the Torah bear substantive significance. In this case, the letters prove both the reliability and the truthfulness of Torah and of the God who wrote and revealed it. The mnemonic for those Hebrew letters in the Torah which are written with both medial and final forms, "manzapak" (מנצפכ), is interpreted to mean that the Torah was transmitted by God to Moses from utterance to utterance (i.e., from the word of God to the word of Moses) (מאמר), from faithful (God) to faithful (servant Moses) (נאמן), from righteous (God) to righteous (Moses) (צדיק), from mouth (of God) to mouth (of Moses) (פה), and from hand (of God) to hand (of Moses) (יד). In response to the Gnostic claim that the Torah is falsehood and servitude, authored by the evil creator god of this world, this homily indicates both the truthfulness and the reliability of Torah.[27]

A comment about the word תולדות further illustrates how there was divine forethought when choosing which letters would be used to form a given word in Scripture. According to the Rabbis, there are only two instances where this word is fully spelled out with two vavs (the rest are spelled

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[27]Chapter 1, paragraph 11.

תלדות). The first is Genesis 2:4, "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth...," and the second is Ruth 4:18, "These are the generations of Peretz...."[28] According to a statement made by Rabbi Berekiah in the name of Rabbi Samuel son of Nahman, this indicates that the world will not return to its perfect state until the time of the descendent of Peretz, the Messiah, is born.[29]

In other words, this variation in spelling suggests a cycle from creation to alienation to restoration. The generations are not living in a state of fullness and perfection because of Adam's sin. Yet, the fact that the vav once again returns is a sign that the world is not destined to remain alienated forever. Rather, there will be a time of restoration.

Furthermore, Rabbi Judan suggests in the name of Rabbi Abun that by attending to the numerical value of the letter vav, we learn that there are six things which were taken away or diminished because of Adam's sin. These are: his luster, his immortality, his height, the fruit of the earth, the fruit of the trees, and the luminaries. During the Messianic Age, however, each of these shall be restored. Thus, the very way the Torah is written, its peculiarities of spelling, contain messages about the nature of reality and the fate of the world.[30]

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[28]These are literal translations of the verses cited.

[29]Chapter 12, paragraph 6.

[30]Ibid.

Another method that the Rabbis used to show how the words of Torah reveal things about the nature of the world, beyond their surface meaning, is the hermeneutical principle known as notarikon, i.e., seeing words as anagrams and abbreviations. An example of this method is the text which enumerates six things that preceded the creation of the world. The number six was "discovered" by breaking the word בראשית in half (ברא + שית), meaning "six were created." According to the Rabbis, only two of these things were actually created: Torah and the throne of God's glory. However, an additional four were conceived: the patriarchs, Israel, the Temple, and the Messiah. Each of these assertions is supported by prooftexts. In addition, Rabbi Ahabah ben Rabbi Ze'ira adds to this list a further item, repentance, according to Psalms 90:2-3 which says, "Before the mountains came into being, before You brought forth the earth and the world, from eternity to eternity You are God. You return man to dust. You decreed 'Return you mortals!'"[31]

This midrash has a number of implications. First, the list reveals the unique, supremely valued cosmic status of the people Israel. It seems to indicate that the world was created for the sake of God's chosen people and their sacrificial service. Furthermore, it illustrates how redemption is guaranteed at the very outset. That is, the

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[31]Chapter 1, paragraph 4.

end of the historical process, both chronological and teleological, is foreseen at the beginning.

The addition made by Rabbi Ahabah son of Rabbi Ze'ira is noteworthy because if, indeed, repentance is one of the things which preceded the world, than the act of repenting is one of the greatest that a human being can perform. Therefore, repentance is an essential component of living in this world. It allows people the opportunity to improve and change, rather than being condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past. Repentance teaches the ethical value, humility.

Another example of notarikon can be seen in the way that some Rabbis interpreted the word בהבראם in Genesis 2:4, "These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth when they were created (בהבראם)."[32] This word can be subdivided, revealing the words בה א ברא ם, meaning "with heh He created them." Rabbi Abbahu, in the name of Rabbi Johanan, as well as Rabbi Berekiah, in the name of Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simon, say that just as a heh can be articulated without effort (i.e., it is simply a breath sound), so did God create the world without effort. This is because God created the world with a word, both speedily and without deliberation. We know that this is the case because Psalms 33:6 tells us, "By the word of the Lord...," and already, "the heavens were made."

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[32]This is a literal translation of the verse.

After using notarikon to reveal that the world was created with a heh, Rabbi Abbahu in Rabbi Johanan's name further comments on the significance of the letter heh with letter exegesis by divining significance in the shape of the letter (ה). The fact that the heh is closed on the sides and open at the bottom reveals that the dead will go down to Sheol. The upper hook tells us that they will then ascend, and the opening at the side is a hint that human beings are free to leave this way and repent, thereby returning themselves to God. Thus, the Torah reveals, in the shape of the letters used by God to create the world, that there is divine retribution for humans. However, the same process also reveals a hope of reconciliation with God. The moral "shape" of the world, imprinted at creation, can be discerned from the shape of a letter in the Torah.

Another homily shows how Isaiah 26:4, "Trust in the Lord for ever and ever, for in Yah the Lord you have an everlasting Rock (צור עולמים)," tells us that God created the world by the letters yod and heh. The Rabbis arrive at this conclusion by reading the second half of the verse as, "through Yah (יה, i.e., the letters yod and heh which form one of God's names), God formed (two) worlds (ציר עולמים)." They are unsure, however, which world was formed with a heh, and which with a yod. Abbahu's reading of בהבראם is then cited (again) to indicate that this world was created with the heh, so the world to come must have been created with a yod.

In this case, as well, the shape of the letter is seen as being significant (י). The curved back of the yod is indicative of the crookedness of evil people. However, the straight side reveals that they will be bent back, and their faces will darken with shame in the Messianic future, as it is written, "Then man's haughtiness shall be humbled and the pride of man brought low. None but the Lord shall be exalted in that day; as for idols, they shall vanish completely" (Isaiah 2:17-18).[33]

Although there are several examples of letter and word exegesis, the Rabbis do not always condone this type of scrutiny. In fact, some suggest that there are certain secrets of creation about which human beings should not inquire. In particular, they condemn those who try to reveal that which came before creation. This is because the truth which would be revealed is too potent for human beings to bear.

Thus, the shape of the letter bet (ב) reveals that one should not pursue the quest of uncovering deep and hidden secrets about creation. The three closed sides of the letter remind one not to inquire about what is above, what is below, or what was before the creation of the world. Rather one should only proceed towards the opening, that which is straight ahead. The idea is that there are some secrets having to do with the primal mechanisms of creation about which human beings should not inquire.

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[33]Chapter 12, paragraph 10.

The strength of this conviction can be seen in the repetition of this theme. In one petihta, Psalms 31:19, "Let the lying lips be stilled that speak haughtily against the righteous with arrogance and contempt" is understood to mean that one should not slander God by revealing those intimate secrets of creation which God has withheld from earthly creatures. The point is that there are some things which should remain hidden, and should not be talked about (at least not in public), so that no person could boast and speak with contempt, saying that he or she knows all of the secrets of creation. Rabbi Jose, the son of Rabbi Hanina, adds that if a person who exalts himself at the cost of others has no share in the world to come, how much more so would this be the case concerning one who exalts himself at the cost of the glory of God.[34]

A similar argument can be found in the materials about the creation of human beings. The verse Job 20:4, "Do you not know this from time immemorial, since man was set on earth...." is explained through the example of a country which receives its supplies from donkey drivers. Each day, one driver would ask his predecessor what the market price was for that day. Those who gave out supplies on the sixth day would ask those who had done so on the fifth day, and so forth. The question was, however, "Who would the drivers on the first day ask?" They would ask the people who handled the public affairs of the community. So it was that the

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[34]Chapter 1, paragraph 5.

works of creation would ask each other, "Which of you did God create today?" Those created on each day would ask the one before it. The sixth would ask the fifth. The fifth would ask the fourth, and so on. Who did those created on the first day ask? They asked the Torah, since the Torah preceded creation by two thousand years, as we know from the Rabbinic reading of Psalms 8:30, "Then I was by Him as a confidant, and I was His delight day after day." That is, the Torah was at God's side. In addition, we know that two thousand years is indicated here because Psalms 90:4 reveals: "For a thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday when it is past." Juxtaposing the two Psalms verses, each mention of the word day equals one thousand years. Together, they make up two thousand.

This, claims Rabbi Hama son of Rabbi Hanina, is the meaning of the Job verse. The Torah knows that which came before the creation of the world, but human beings have no business to inquire about it. They must only ask about that which took place from the time that they were created onward. Rabbi Leazar adds, quoting Ben Sira (i.e., the Book of Ecclesiasticus), "Do not inquire about that which is too great for you, nor investigate about what is too hard for you to comprehend. Do not ask about what is too wonderful for you, nor inquire about that which is hidden from you. Study what you are allowed to study, for you have no business investigating hidden things."[35]

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[35]Chapter 8, paragraph 2.

In addition to investigating the significance of the letters which make up a given word, the Rabbis also address the fact that there are instances where several words have the same meaning. Although this may seem to be superfluous, the Rabbis explain how there is a reason for every word choice. This is exemplified by the five different names used in the Torah for clouds: עב, אד, עבן, נשיא, and חזיז.

According to the Rabbis, each of these names elicits certain significant aspects of the clouds as they relate to human beings. The first, meaning "thick," as found in II Samuel 22:12, "He made pavilions of darkness about Him, dripping clouds, huge thunderheads," is used because the clouds thicken (עבי) the sky in such a way that it becomes dark down below. The second, used in Genesis 2:6, "but a cloud went up from the earth," is equated with אד, meaning "calamity." Interpreted as such, this word indicates that clouds thwart the efforts of speculators to increase the prices of certain crops. The third word, used in Daniel 7:13, "As I looked on, in the night vision, one like a human being came with the clouds of heaven...," indicates that clouds make people meek (ענוים) (i.e., acknowledging their lack of power). The fourth, found in Psalms 135:7, "He makes clouds rise from the end of the earth...," is used because clouds make people behave like princes (נשיאים) towards one another. This happens because the presence of clouds can either block sunlight or cause rain. That is, when there is less sunlight, fewer crops are produced, and

when there is a lot of rain, a surplus of crops are harvested. In the first case, when there are less crops, people are humbled. In the second, the surplus, in effect, pushes the unit price down and allows everyone to buy their fill, making them feel like princes. The last word used for clouds, as in Job 28:26, "when He made a decree for the rain, and a way for the storm (here taken to mean cloud) of the thunder," indicates that clouds, through their many colors, produce awe-inspiring patterns in the sky, thereby allowing the Holy Spirit to hover over people. This is indicated by gezerah shava with Isaiah 1:1, "the prophesies (חזון) of Isaiah...."

Similarly, Rabbi Simeon son of Gamliel comments on how there are four words used to refer to the earth. These are: ארץ, תבל, אדמה, and ארקא. The variety of names is significant because each is equated somehow with the way nature or the seasonal forces affects the land. Thus, the use of synonyms--each with a different nuance--indicates different nuances about the relation of nature to human life. The different nuances illustrate the workings of divine providence in accord with poetic justice.

Additionally, the midrash illustrates the centrality of Torah by citing three reasons why the world and the fullness of the earth came into being. First, Rabbi Banayah uses Proverbs 3:19, "The Lord founded the earth by wisdom; He established the heavens by understanding," to prove that it was for the sake of Torah. Rabbi Berekiah, however, uses

Deuteronomy 33:21, "He chose for himself the best, for there is the portion of the revered chieftain, He executed the Lord's judgments and His decisions for Israel," to claim that the world was made for the sake of the eventual birth of Moses. Contrary to the other two, Rabbi Huna, in Rabbi Mattenah's name, uses the principle of notarikon to assert that the world was created for the sake of hallah, tithes, and first-fruits, i.e., the offerings brought by the Israelites to the priests. By interpreting the meaning of the ב in the word בראשית as "for the sake of," one learns that the world was created for the sake of ראשית. Now, since the word ראשית appears in connection with hallah, tithes, and first fruits, they must be the reason why the world was created.[36]

Although there are three different responses, essentially all of them serve to further illustrate the importance of Torah for human beings. By advocating that the world was created for the sake of Torah, Rabbi Banayah is essentially saying that the Torah should be both studied and observed to the best of one's ability. In addition, Rabbi Berekiah's response, that the world was created for the sake of Moses, also supports the primacy of Torah. This is because it is Moses who reveals the Torah to Israel. The third explanation reveals the importance of Torah because such a response can only be derived from Torah exegesis.

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[36]Chapter 13, paragraph 12.

One additional example of how the words of Torah suggest larger truths is illustrated when the Rabbis question why the word שיח is used to refer to the trees in Genesis 2:5.[37] This, they reasoned, is to show that the trees engaged in conversation (משיחין) with one another. This suggestion is derived from the root, שיח, meaning "to converse." In other words, the noise made when the wind blows through their branches sounds as if the trees are conversing with people.[38]

The midrash continues by expressing the notion that all human conversations are about the earth: "Did the earth yield produce or not?" Similarly, all prayers--another form of שיח--prayed by human beings concern the earth: "Lord, may the earth produce. Lord, may the earth be successful." Yet, all of the prayers prayed by the people of Israel are for the Temple: "Lord, may the Temple be built. When will You build the Temple?"[39]

The name for trees, שיח, suggests something of the relationship of men to the physical world. The Rabbis distinguish, however, between the whole of humankind and the people of Israel. The former take the word שיח to refer to

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[37]The JPS translation renders this word as "shrub," but it is here explained as "tree."

[38]Theodor and Albeck, as well as Freedman, suggest that this text might be corrupt. Although this text suggests the significance of the word choice, there are other Rabbis who suggest that trees are actually hurtful to humans as explained in the rest of the midrash.

[39]Chapter 13, paragraph 2.

conversation with the earth, while the later take it to mean prayer for the Temple. A note by Theodor, in the critical edition of Beresheit Rabbah, explains that the ultimate form of conversation is prayer, and that the field refers to the Temple.[40] This midrash explains the importance of the trees and the produce of the earth to humans, in general. They are so important that people constantly talk about them and pray for their ability to produce. In addition to praying for the earth, however, the people of Israel have a special concern in that they also pray constantly for the rebuilding of the Temple.

While the Rabbis often draw conclusions based on isolated biblical letters, words and phrases, they also indicate how the details of some of the narratives suggest contemporary values. That is, by paying attention to details of narrative structure one can draw certain lessons. It might be a lesson in proper etiquette or simply an observation about human nature.

A lesson of social etiquette is drawn out of the story of Adam and Eve. Rabbi Levi comments that this story teaches that we should "spend as we are able for food, less than what we are able for clothing, and more than we are able for a dwelling place." The first notion is derived from Genesis 2:16, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat." The second is from Genesis 3:21, "and the Lord God make garments of skin...." The proof that people

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[40]Theodor and Albeck, p. 114-115.

should spend more than their means on housing is that Adam and Eve were only two people, yet they had the whole world in which to dwell.[41]

A second lesson is drawn from a commandment that God gave Noah and his sons after the flood, "be fertile, then, and increase, abound (שִׁרְצוּ) the earth and increase on it" (Genesis 9:7). By reading שֶׁרְצוּ, "that they want," Resh Lakish draws the conclusion that God caused people to have an affinity for the place where they reside, despite the climate. He illustrates his point by telling of two women who emerged from a forest in Tiberias when he was studying there. One woman said to the other, "Blessed is God who brought us out from that treacherous weather." Resh Lakish inquired as to where they resided. They replied that they were from Mazga. Surprised, he responded, "That place has no more than two houses! Praised be God who allows them to find favor in their dwelling place."

Furthermore, Rabbi Issi makes the same point. One of his students could not understand what the Rabbi was teaching him. When the Rabbi asked why, the student replied, "It is because I am an exile from my city." "Where do you live?" asked the Rabbi. The student told Rabbi Issi, who subsequently asked about its climate. Even though it is not the most pleasant place, the student loved it. Thus, in the time to come, "I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh (לב בשר)" (Ezekiel

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[41]Chapter 20, paragraph 12.

36:26). This indicates, according to the Rabbis, a heart which does not desire (בושר) the portion of one's neighbor.[42]

The moral is that God created people with the faculty for appreciating what they have. They are made to love their place of origin and the things that surround them. In this way, their desire will be stronger for what they have than that which their neighbors might have acquired.

Through midrashim such as these, the Rabbis continue to point out how there are no letters or words in the Torah that are bereft of meaning. Rather, each part reveals a significant aspect of our world. The examples which were given show how a close reading of the wording of Torah reveals to the Rabbis important truths about the nature of the world, its governance by God's providence, and the relationship that human beings have to God and the world. This was illustrated with regard to letter choice, word choice (including notarikon), and choice of narrative details. Yet, despite the fact that these secrets are there for the finding, the Rabbis warn that there are some things that human beings do best not to uncover. This is for their own protection. It is as though they encourage study and the pursuit of knowledge, but only up to a certain point. Human beings are only supposed to know about their world, and not that which came before it.

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[42]Chapter 34, paragraph 15.

The Unique Position of Human Beings in the World

This section concentrates on the creation of human beings, as well as how human beings are situated in the world. According to the Bible, human beings were the last in God's chain of creation. They were given the power to rule the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, the cattle--the whole earth. Furthermore, they were created in the image of God. The Rabbis commented extensively on the unique natures of both man and woman. Both the biblical account and the midrash indicate that human beings do, in fact, evolve and mature over time.

God is deemed to have created human beings with the intention that they would carry out the divine plan on earth. Therefore, they were created with certain faculties and with certain privileges. The following midrashim illustrate some of these distinctive features that were given only to humankind.

In explaining the character of Adam (and subsequently all human beings), both Rabbi Joshua son of Nehemiah in the name of Rabbi Hanina and the Rabbis in the name of Rabbi Leazar said that God created him with four attributes of the angels and four of the beasts. Like the former, Adam stands upright, speaks, understands, and sees. (It, of course, is the case that animals, too, can see. Yet, only human beings have peripheral vision.) Adam is like the beasts in the way that he eats and drinks, the way he procreates, that he

excretes, and that he dies. Rabbi Tifdai in Rabbi Aha's name raises a difficulty. If man were to be created only like the angels, he would not be able to propagate. This would mean that only the man and the woman created by God would exist, not the human species. He claims that the angels, who were created in the image and likeness of God do not procreate. Yet, the beasts, who were not created in God's image and likeness, can do so. The Holy One said that human beings will be created as a combination of the upper and lower worlds. Therefore, they may be in the image and likeness of God, yet procreate.

Similarly, Rabbi Tifdai declares, in Rabbi Aha's name, that the Holy One deliberated: "If I create him from the elements of the upper world, he will live forever and not die. If he is created from elements in the lower world, he will die and not live." Therefore, he was created with elements of both worlds. If he sins, he will die. If not, he will live. The implication of this statement is that sin, i.e., human moral conduct, is the determining factor in deciding who has a place in the world to come.[43]

Here is an expression of the intermediate status that human beings have in the world. That is, they are higher than the beasts, yet lower than the angels. The midrash points, as well, to humanity's morally ambiguous status. Only a clear resolution in favor of obedience to God's will

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[43]Chapter 8, paragraph 11; see also chapter 14, paragraph 3.

guarantees that people will merit everlasting life, like the angels. In other words, the way that human beings are situated physically (between two worlds) can be understood as a metaphor for their social (moral) situation.

The same issue recurs in Rabbi Hanina's analysis of Genesis 1:28, "and have dominion (ורדו) over the fish of the sea." In his opinion, only those who by their behavior merit it "shall have dominion" (ורדו), while those who do not merit it shall "descend" (ירדו). Rabbi Hanan asserts that those who in their moral behavior are "in our image and after our likeness" ורדו, while those who are not, ירדו.[44]

Both of these explanations suggest human behavior patterns. In the first case, Rabbi Hanina claims that those who are deserving can rule the earth. However, those who are not deserving should be ruled by others. The second explanation suggests that human beings are given the privilege of dominion when their actions reflect divine characteristics. As soon as people begin to act like beasts, they begin to fall even lower than beasts.

The issue of how human beings were created was so important to the Rabbis that it is brought up again within the context of a discussion about how some creations were said to be "offspring of the heaven" or "offspring of the earth." The Rabbis derive this notion by interpreting the word "תולדות," as "offspring," in Genesis 2:4, "These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth when they were

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[44]Chapter 8, paragraph 12.

created...." This verse is juxtaposed with Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." On the basis of this juxtaposition, the Rabbis tell us that we can derive (by implication) the origin of other things. That which was created on the second day came from the heavens, for in regard to this day, the Bible tells us: "God said, 'Let there be an expanse...'" (Genesis 1:6). On the third day, God created from that which was on earth, as it is written: "Let the earth sprout vegetation..." (Genesis 1:11). The fourth day was created from above, as we read: "God said, 'Let there be light'" (Genesis 1:14). The fifth day, once again was created from the earth. The evidence for this claim is Genesis 1:20, "Let the waters bring forth swarms...."

However, when it came time to create human beings, God did not know what to do. Previously, there were two days on which God created things from the upper worlds, and two days on which God created things from the lower worlds. If God chose to create humans solely from either one of the two worlds, there would be no peace between the upper and lower worlds, heaven and earth. So, what did God do? God created human beings from both worlds. In this way, both could be satisfied, and peace could be maintained. This is why Scripture states: "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). In regard to God's decision to make humans from both worlds, Resh Lakish

adds a verse from the book of Job, "Dominion and dread are His, He imposes peace in His thoughts" (25:2).[45]

This midrash shows how there is a balance to all that God created. Half of what was created came from the heavens, and that which is above. The other half derived from the elements of that which existed on earth. Human beings, however, have a special place within the cosmos. They do not derive solely from one place or another. Rather, they are a combination of all elements. In this way, a certain harmony is maintained in the world, and a certain duality is maintained in human nature.

There are several other midrashim which comment on the duality of human nature by interpreting the fact that the word "ויצר" is written with two yods in Genesis 2:7, "And God created the man (ויצר את האדם)." The reason is that God, in actuality, formed two things. (This, of course, is another example of textual peculiarities teaching moral and cosmological lessons.) One midrash asserts that this indicates that God formed both Adam and Eve, i.e., both male and female.[46] A second explains that human beings have characteristics of the angels, as well as the animals (as noted above).[47] A third proposes that God created in human beings the ability to know the difference between good and

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[45]Chapter 12, paragraph 8.

[46]Chapter 14, paragraph 2.

[47]Chapter 14, paragraph 3, also see chapter 8, paragraph 2.

evil. Unlike animals who, if they possessed this knowledge, would die of fright if a person held a knife to slaughter them, human beings can survive with this knowledge.[48] A fourth midrash explains that the two formations signify that man's life is lived on two planes, the one in this world and the one in the world to come.[49]

In each of these cases, the complexity of the formation of the human being is exhibited. There was not one formation, but two. Not only the male, Adam, was created, but also his female partner Eve. Not only were people formed with characteristics of that which was on earth, but also of that which was above. Not only did Adam receive the capacity to understand good, but he also understood evil. Not only was the human being to be formed in this world, but also in the world to come. Humans, according to these midrashim, were created as more sophisticated beings. They have been endowed with the ability to use these qualities in creating a life on earth.

It is the ability to think and reason that separates humans from beasts. One way that we learn this is by explaining how a seemingly superfluous phrase is actually important. The Rabbis ask why, if Genesis 1:24 tells us, "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature...," is it necessary that Genesis 2:24 include the phrase, "And the Lord God formed...?" Rabbi

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[48]Chapter 14, paragraph 4.

[49]Chapter 14, paragraph 5.

Johanan ben Zakkai distinguishes between the two verses by saying that the first one refers to the creation and formation of all creatures. The second one, however, is said in reference to God's bringing all creatures together so that they could be named by Adam.

Rabbi Aha relays a story concerning the human ability to name. When consulting with the ministering angels about the creation of Adam, God made it known that man would exceed them in knowledge. God accomplished this by giving him the capacity to name the animals. After doing so, God asked the man what he should name himself. The man replied Adam (אדם) was an appropriate name, since he had come from the ground (אדמה). When God asked what His name should be, Adam replied, "Adonai (My Lord)," since God is Lord over all creatures. God subsequently brought all of the animals before Adam in pairs. Upon seeing this, Adam asked God why he was the only one who did not have a partner, as it is written: "...but for Adam, no fitting helper was to be found" (Genesis 2:20).

Why is it that God did not provide Adam with a partner from the start? It is because God foresaw that Adam would make accusations against her, not bearing any responsibility. That is, after both ate from the tree, he would say, "She made me do it." Therefore, she was not created until Adam specifically asked for her. As soon as

Adam asked, however, "the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man..." (Genesis 2:21).[59]

Adam and, subsequently, human beings in general, were treated differently from the rest of the creatures that God had made. First, they exceed the others in knowledge. They have an ability to think, to reason, and to name. In other words, they have use of language as a means of expression. They also have the ability to comprehend the moral nature of the universe and to acknowledge God's rulership and right to be obeyed and revered. In addition, man's partner was not created until she was asked for. This implies a certain sense of awareness and discovery. Man noticed that it was not right that he was alone. Therefore, he asked God to provide him with a partner.

Just as humans have some characteristics in common with animals and some which are distinct, so do men have some characteristics in common with women and some which are distinct. The following midrashim give examples of some of these characteristics. Some of the comments about Adam, however, seem to be relevant for human beings in general.

There is a Rabbinic understanding that Genesis 2:7, "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth...," reveals Adam's stature. Although the word עפר, meaning "dust," seems to be superfluous, it is actually there in order to teach us that Adam was a "young man" (שפר). In other words, Adam was created with strength in order that he

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[59]Chapter 17, paragraph 4.

might endure. Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Simeon adds that this also applies to Eve. In fact, Rabbi Johanan suggests that both Adam and Eve were created as twenty-year-olds. This is as if to say they were created at a point of maturity. Rabbi Huna notes that the fact that עפר is a masculine word and אדמה is a feminine word indicates that the combination of male dust and female earth makes sound vessels.[51]

This explanation of Genesis 2:7 speaks to the idea of humanity's endurance and God's providing for it. The choice of words reveals the strength which was instilled in both Adam and Eve. They were not created as children because they would lack the stamina to survive. In addition, both male and female were created because together, through procreation, they can produce strong, sound vessels.

Another midrash is devoted solely to the reasons why men and women are different from one another. Rabbi Joshua answers questions about such differences as: why a woman wears perfume and a man does not, why a man is easily satisfied while a woman is not, why a man makes sexual demands on a woman but not the reverse, and why a woman menstruates. Each of his answers has to do with the nature of Adam and Eve and the situations surrounding their creation and life on earth. For example, the reason why man does not need to wear perfume is that he was "created from

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[51]Chapter 14, paragraph 7.

the earth" (Genesis 2:7), which never rots, while woman was created from a bone, as it says, "and the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman...."[52]

Rabbi Joshua's comments show how there is divine justice involved in the differences between the (first) man and woman as perceived in Rabbinic culture. They are paradigmatic for the species as a whole. That is, the reasons why certain differences remain between men and women is a direct result of what had transpired with Adam and Eve.

One midrash tells a story which explains how the word וסגר indicates that man was "delivered over" to the influence of woman. It so happened that a pious man and women were married to one another. However, they bore no children together. Seeing that they could not procreate, they divorced one another. The man married a wicked woman and became wicked. The woman, on the other hand married a wicked man, and the man became upright. This is a comment on social relations and cultural perceptions of women. The story shows that women have influence over the deeds of men. A pious woman can make a wicked man good, and a wicked woman can make a pious man evil. The redactors of the midrash seem to present woman as the more influential partner. She is the one who molds and shapes the other.[53]

There are further commentaries on the nature of women found in the midrashim which expound on Genesis 2:22. One

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[52]Chapter 17, paragraph 8.

[53]Chapter 17, paragraph 7.

midrash, in particular, explains the reason why Eve was made from Adam's rib. To begin with, Rabbi Joshua points out in the name of Rabbi Levi that the word רבן indicates that God greatly contemplated (התבונן) just how the woman should be made, i.e., this was a matter of due deliberation. Seeing that she was the last living being to be created, God decided not to create her from man's head lest she become big-headed. She was not created from the eye in order that she should not become too inquisitive. Furthermore, God chose not to create her from the ear so that she should not become an eavesdropper. In addition, she was not created from the mouth because this may make her into a gossip, she was not created from the heart so that she not be as susceptible to jealousy, and she was not created from the hand, lest she be prone to stealing. She was not even created from the foot, for this might cause her to become a gadabout. Instead, woman was created from a modest part of the man, a part which is always covered, even when he is naked.

In spite of all this contemplation, however, women did not wind up lacking any of these qualities. Even though God told Eve to be modest, Scripture recalls, "You spurned my advice, and would not hear my rebuke" (Proverbs 1:25). Despite the fact that she was not created from the head, she became "big-headed," as it is written: "...because the daughters of Zion are so vain and walk with heads thrown back..." (Isaiah 3:16). She, likewise, became inquisitive,

as also expressed in Isaiah 3:16 with the phrase: "...with roving eyes...." Scripture recalls that she became an eavesdropper by mentioning: "Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent..." (Genesis 18:10). The woman is also known as being susceptible to jealousy, as was the case with Rachel and Leah: "...she became envious of her sister" (Genesis 30:1). She is known to steal, as it is written: "Rachel stole her father's household idols" (Genesis 31:19). The woman is even recorded as being a gadabout, as recorded in Genesis 34:1, which reads: "Now Dinah...went out...."[54]

Here is a rabbinic view that God tried to protect the woman from acquiring undesirable habits. However, even though God tries to reduce the chances that they would be adopted, women were destined to succumb to them. Perhaps this is a comment on free will, i.e., human "nature" expressed freely thwarts God's plans. That is, God tries to set woman on the right course, but she has the ability to choose the path that she wishes to take. (This can also, of course, be applied to humanity in general.) The midrash also seems to be making a statement about the nature of women. In a sense, it is a cultural encoding of what should be the woman's "place" in society. Here, they are discussing the value of modesty. The "negative" character traits are those regarding which women were sometimes accused. It is as if to say that women go against their

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[54]Chapter 18, paragraphs 1-3.

God-given nature when acting in these socially unacceptable ways.

Although men and women have some differences, both the Bible and the Rabbis explain that it was meant for every man to find a woman. In fact, some Rabbis go so far as to show all of the many things which are lacking when this union does not take place. There are social, emotional, and physical implications to this union. The Rabbis even go so far as to say that an unmarried man impairs the divine image. His remaining single affects the plan that all people should be fertile and increase. Therefore, in order to live life in the most suitable way, it is strongly recommended that each man seek to find a suitable mate with whom to share his life. In short, the above midrashim make it clear that this idea is central to the worldviews of both the Bible and the Rabbis.

There is another midrash which explains the importance of the partnership between man and woman. This one derives from various scriptural verses a lesson that a man who has no wife exists without good, without help, without happiness, without blessing, and without atonement. He exists without good since Genesis 2:18 states that "it is not good for man to be alone...." He has no help because, according to the same verse, woman is brought to man because God said, "I will make a fitting helper for him." Man has no happiness without woman as it says: "...and rejoice with your household" (Deuteronomy 14:26). Here, it is implied

that a wife is the foundation of man's "household." A man with no wife has no blessing, as it is written: "You shall further give the first of the yield of your baking to the priest, that a blessing may rest upon your home" (Ezekiel 44:30). That is, since the woman does the baking, through her contribution, a blessing is made upon the home. Last, a man without a wife exists without atonement as it says, in Leviticus 16:11: "...he shall make expiation for himself and his household." A household is only possible with a wife. Rabbi Joshua son of Levi uses I Samuel 25:6, "I swear, my lord, as the Lord lives and as you live...let your enemies and all who would harm my lord fare like Nabal," to show that this is also the case with peace. Likewise, Rabbi Joshua of Siknin in the name of Rabbi Levi adds life. His prooftext is Ecclesiastes 9:9, "Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days. For that alone is what you can get out of life and out of the means you acquire under the sun." Rabbi Hiyya son of Gomdi mentions that man is incomplete without a wife, as implied by Genesis 5:2, "...male and female He created them. And when they were created, He blessed them and called them Man." Others even go so far as to say that man without woman reduces the divine image. This is because both are necessary to follow the commandment to be "fruitful and multiply."[55]

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[55]Chapter 17, paragraph 2.

In fact, the importance of both partners in the creation of life is commented on by an explanation of Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man...." Although the verse says us (plural), it has nothing to do with a plurality of gods. We know this from Genesis 1:27, "God (in the singular) created." Rather, the plural tells us that while God created Adam from dust, and Eve from Adam, it is the union between Adam and Eve that will make additional human beings. Therefore, the lesson is derived: "Neither man without woman, nor woman without man, and neither of them without the Divine Spirit." It is the job of men and women to participate with God in continuing this chain of making human beings through the acts of marriage and procreation.[56]

Another midrash derives the command to procreate from the fact that the word, "וכבשה," although pointed as a plural, is actually written as a singular. This would imply that, in the case of procreation, man, alone, and not woman is commanded. Rabbi Johanan disagrees, saying that the verse states, "God blessed them" (plural). These Rabbinic ideas have implications for sexual conduct, as well as for the relationship between the sexes. In fact, later halakhah derives rules for sexual behavior from this verse.

Rabbi Isaac, in the name of Rabbi Hanina, states that Rabbi Johanan son of Berekiah derived a legal ruling from the fact that וכבשה is written in the singular. He claims that this implies that man shall master his wife. Every

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[56]Chapter 8, paragraph 9.

woman who goes to the market alone shall come to grief, as was the case with Dinah. For it is written, in Genesis 34:1: "And Dinah went out..."[57] Although this idea is not readily accepted today, it is interesting to note that it reflects the gender ethos of its time.

As has been illustrated, there are many midrashim that comment on the nature of human beings, in general. However, other midrashim, although derived from biblical verses about the creation of all humanity, are actually comments about the Jewish people. That is to say, humanity was created ultimately for the sake of Israel. This is because the Jewish people were chosen as the special group who would manifest God's glory throughout the world. Their actions will eventually bring all others to obey God.

This idea is expressed in a homily about how, from the start of creation, God wanted to enter into a partnership with human beings. The lesson is learned from the references to the various days of creation. That is, they are reckoned "one day, second day, third day," and not consistently "one, two, three" or "first, second, third." The reason for this strange numbering is that "one day" is, in actuality, a reference to the day in which God and humanity will be at one with each other. The first day will not be complete until this occurs. According to the midrash, this harmony came about on the day that the

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[57]Chapter 8, paragraph 12.

Tabernacle was erected. In reference to its erection, Scripture says "the one who presented his offering on the first day..." (Numbers 7:12). Since this verse mentions the "first day," a connection is drawn between the erection of the Tabernacle and the beginning of creation. Additionally, the use of the definite article "the," allowed Rabbi Samuel son of Ammi to conclude that it is as if God said "It is as though on that day I created My world." Only at this time of unity and harmony was the first day of creation truly completed.[58] The idea is that the Temple service renders the world complete. It is at this time that there will be harmony between God's activity above and Israel's below. God requires human service--specifically the cultic service of Israel--in order that the world may be fully established.

Other midrashim illustrate how Abraham, and subsequently the Jewish people as a whole, were elected to make known God's will to all of humanity. Thus, the phrase, "when they were created," as in Genesis 2:4, alludes to the fact that all the world was created for the sake of Abraham. This is derived through a play on words. Rabbi Joshua ben Korhah points out that the word בהבראם, here translated as "when they were created," is made up of the same letters as the word באברהם, meaning "for Abraham" (another example of the significance of words and their letters). In connection with this, Rabbi Azariah cites Nehemiah 9:6, which speaks about all of God's creations. He, too, reiterates that they

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[58]Chapter 3, paragraph 9.

were all placed on earth for the sake of Abraham. This is because the very next verse in Nehemiah reveals: "You are the Lord God, who chose Abraham...."

This point is strengthened through an a fortiori argument. Rabbi Judan comments that Psalms 104:18 does not say, "On the high mountains are the wild goats." Rather, it says, "The high mountains are for wild goats..." This indicates that the high mountains were only created for the sake of the wild goats. Furthermore, since the roe is weak and afraid of wild animals God takes care of it. When it wants to drink, the Holy One makes it panic and beat with its horns on the rocks until the wild animals hear it and run away. The verse continues, "the crags are a refuge for the rock badgers." This means that the rock badgers hide in the crags so that the birds do not come along and eat them. Therefore, if the Holy One created the world as it is for the sake of these animals, even though they are unclean, how much the more so did God create the world for Abraham.[59]

Similarly, in a comment on Genesis 2:7, "The Lord God formed the man...," the Rabbis question why Abraham was not the first person that God created. After all, the verse says, "the man." This seems to indicate a specific person. Therefore, why was it not Abraham, who is identified by the Rabbis with "...the great man among the Anakites" in Joshua 4:15. He is called great because he was worthy of being

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[59]Chapter 12, paragraph 9.

created before Adam. The reason why he was not, in fact, created first is because of the possibility that Abraham might sin. God reasoned that, if this happened, there would be nobody to make things right. Therefore, Adam was created, so that if he should sin, Abraham could come along and make things right.

A related analogy, told by Rabbi Abba son of Kahana, explains why Abraham was created in the middle of the generations. As a pair of beams, joined in a slope would be placed in the middle of a room to provide the most support, so was Abraham placed in the middle of the generations. Similarly, Rabbi Levi notes that you bring a virtuous woman into the house of a corrupt person, but you do not bring a corrupt woman into the house of a virtuous person. This is because the household will learn from that person who was brought in from the outside.[60]

There is a time and a place for righteous people, like Abraham, to be brought into the world. These people help to reduce sin and set the world right. They are brought in to strengthen the generations of the world. All of this indicates the goodness of God's plan for the world. That is, sin and disobedience are not allowed to exist without a remedy for curing them. It is as if God has the "cure" in mind before the "disease" had been created.

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[60]Chapter 14, paragraph 6, also see Chapter 15, paragraph 4.

Just as the cure had been created before the disease, so was Adam's reward created for him even before he had been placed on earth. This idea is expressed by the way in which God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden. According to one midrash, the word מקדם, as it is found in Genesis 2:8, indicates that the garden of Eden was purposely created before (קדם) the creation of Adam in order that he might dwell inside of it. Thus his reward was prepared for him even before he had begun to labor. This illustrates God's providential foresight and goodness.[61]

One Rabbi describes Adam's entrance into the garden by saying that God convinced Adam to come and eat as a king would invite guests to an elaborate banquet.[62] Prior to the sin, it was God's intention that human beings stay there forever. God took pride in having created Adam.[63] However, in sinning, Adam spoiled the harmony with his Creator.[64]

There is a lot to be said about the creation of human beings. They, alone, have features of both the heavenly and the terrestrial worlds. Unlike the angels, human beings are mortal, and unlike the beasts, they have the ability to name and to distinguish right from wrong. Furthermore, although men and women are different from one another, it is clear that their union is imperative. Together, they become

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[61]Chapter 15, paragraph 3.

[62]Chapter 15, paragraph 4.

[63]Chapter 15, paragraph 5.

[64]Chapter 16, paragraph 1.

complete. This is because they are spared lives of loneliness, and they are able to carry out the command to "be fruitful and multiply." Also, with the creation of human beings came the creation of the people Israel. This is important because Israel was chosen to ensure that the world will eventually be redeemed.

Purposes of the Natural World

Both the Bible and the midrash recognize a specific order in the natural world. That is to say, nothing was created without purpose. The Rabbis interpret Scripture to explain how much of the natural world was created in order to benefit human beings. It can serve as a source for food, for direction, or for signs of God's beneficence. The following section provides illustrations of some of these purposes. At times, the midrash brings out the significance of things that might otherwise be considered unnecessary.

One midrash begins with the question of how the earth drank before rain was created. Three answers are provided, essentially making the claim that the earth drank by means of overflow from the rivers, in line with Genesis 2:6, which states that "a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth." However, upon further consideration, God decided that the earth should only receive its drink from above. Rabbi Hanan of Sepphoris explains, in the name of Rabbi Samuel son of Nahman, that

there were four reasons for this decision. One was on account of people who would steal the water if it came from the ground. Another was so that the vapors could be washed away. A third was to allow both the highlands and the lowlands equal opportunity to obtain water. Last, this was done in order that all would lift their eyes upward, as it is written: "who raises the lowly up high" (Job 5:11).[65]

The Rabbis here interpreted Scripture in such a way as to indicate the careful consideration that God took in creating the world. The decision that the earth should drink from above had positive consequences for the world. Not only did it allow for equal access to the water, it also affected all creatures in that it encouraged them to lift their eyes upward. That is, people must look to God for their livelihood. This inspires both piety and obedience. In this way, the order of the divine cosmos is contemplated and the role of God's involvement in rainfall is recognized.

A midrash on Genesis 2:1, " The heaven and earth were finished, and all their array (צבאם)," indicates the function of the natural world in enforcing moral order. The Genesis verse is juxtaposed with Job 7:1, "Truly man has a term of service (צבא) on earth, his days are like those of a hireling." Where in one interpretation, צבא is understood to refer to the heavenly hosts who act through the natural order, Nahman, son of Samuel ben Nahman asserts that if a person merits it, the host (צבא) is for him. If not, it is

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[65]Last part of Chapter 13, paragraph 9.

against him. This implies that a person's merit determines whether or not divine power will be on his or her side. Nahman continues with examples. If a person successfully builds a building, this proves that the hosts are with that person. If, instead, the person falls from it and dies, this proves that they are against him. Similarly, if a person eats and digests a piece of bread, this proves that the host is for him. If it gets caught in the person's throat, causing him to choke to death, this proves that the host is against him. The Holy One has appointed a variety of hosts against people, to enforce their punishments. Among them are bears, lions, snakes, fiery serpents, and scorpions. Furthermore, (the Job verse continues),"his days on earth are as hirelings." Just as hirelings are called upon, at the end of their day, to give an account of their work, so it is with human beings. The deeds in this world are tallied and accounted for by the hosts so as to determine one's fate in the next world.[66]

Further comments read צבאו to indicate all the variety of things that God created in heaven and on earth for the sole purpose of benefiting humankind. The Rabbis quote Ben Sira's dictum that God caused medicines to spring from the earth so that doctors could heal people (Ben Sira 38:4,7,8). Rabbi Simon says that every herb has a constellation which encourages it to grow.[67] Each of these explanations show

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[66]Chapter 10, paragraph 5.

[67]Chapter 10, paragraph 6.

that there is a purpose to all things. That is, all of nature is providentially arranged to carry out God's reward and punishment of human beings.

The Rabbis point out how all plant and animal life serves as agents for God's justice. They mention that even such creatures as fleas, gnats, flies, snakes, scorpions, and frogs have a purpose. For example, Rabbi Aha tells a story (also found in b. Nedarim 41a) which proves the need even for frogs. A person was standing at the riverbank when he noticed a frog who was carrying a scorpion across the river on its back. As soon as the scorpion carried out its mission, to kill somebody, the frog took it back across. Similarly, there is a story told that Rabbi Jannai was speaking at the entrance to his city when he saw a snake slithering to and fro. He commented that the snake seemed to be going after someone. It was slithering with a purpose. Sure enough, a report soon came saying that "so and so" had been bit by a snake and died. In both cases, the murderous animals are perceived as carrying out divine providential justice against someone who "deserved" to die.[68]

There are several other examples that illustrate how God's desire for good to prevail can be seen in the workings of the natural world. At times, it seems that God controls human behavior by controlling the plenitude of natural elements. This is especially the case with rainfall.

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[68]Chapter 10, paragraph 7.

The ambivalence toward the natural world as agent of God's providence can be seen in the reasons the Rabbis give for the omission of the phrase, "it was good," in connection with the second day of creation. One reason, they say, is because this is similar to a king who had a very stern legion. Since it was so stern, the king would ask that his name not be mentioned in connection with it. Likewise, the word "good" should not be mentioned in connection with water, since water is used an agent of punishment. There were three times when sinful generations were punished with water: the generation of the Flood, the generation of Enosh, and the generation of the Tower of Babel. Therefore, water is not called "good."[69]

Although God is good, the agent of God's anger, water, cannot be called good unequivocally. This is because of its association with destruction. The problem is ultimately one of good and evil. In the parable, the king's name should not be associated with his stern legion, the agent of his wrath. This way, we finger the legion, but not the king. Likewise, we should finger the water, but not God. Ambivalent feelings about divine wrath and punishment are here displaced onto water, rather than calling into question the goodness of God.

A second midrash which shows that water is an agent of God's providence is cited in the name of Rabbi Eleazar. He asks why, if at Genesis 1:9 God calls for the waters to be

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[69]Chapter 4, paragraph 6.

gathered into a single place, Scripture elsewhere says twice that the waters were called forth and poured out upon the face of the earth (Amos 5:8 and 9:6)? This, it is explained, is in reference to the generations of the flood and the Tower of Babel. What is God's reason for doing such? According to Ecclesiastes 3:14, "...God has brought this to pass so that men may revere Him." The various destructions with water were brought on in order that humans might fear God.

This can be compared to a country where the people rebelled against the king. In response, the king set up a strong army to march around the land so that they would be seen, and the king would be feared. Similarly, "God heaps up the ocean waters like a mound, stores the deep in vaults." This is in order to "let all the earth fear the Lord, and let all the inhabitants of the world dread Him" (Psalms 33:7-8).[79]

Here, once again, nature is merely God's agent. The midrash illustrates how human rebellion will be punished by acts of natural disaster. These should be viewed as manifestations of God's power. They serve to teach people to show reverence and humility for God.

Elsewhere, however, the Rabbis note that the full name of God is used in connection with rainfall, as it is written: "the Lord God (יי אלהים) had not sent rain upon the

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[79]Chapter 5, paragraph 6.

earth" (Genesis 2:5). This is only the second time in Genesis that God's name appears this way. (The first was after the creation of the world was complete.) It stresses the great importance of rain for the world.

In fact, Rabbi Simeon, son of Yohai, claims that there are three things which are equally important in the world: earth, human beings, and rain. An additional comment made by Rabbi Levi, son of Hiyyatha, asserts that all three of these have names consisting of three letters (ארץ, אדם, גשם). This teaches that all three are dependent upon one another (a further example of how biblical words have intrinsic relationships to each other). Without earth, there would be no rain, and without rain there would be no earth. Similarly, without the presence of either of them, human beings could not live.[71]

Some important ideas are articulated here. First, this comment indicates the necessity of rain. Even more important, however, for a study about human conduct, is the way in which rain is linked with earth and human beings. All three are dependent on one another. None can survive without the others. This notion raises all sorts of questions about conservation of nature and water. Without enough of these natural elements, human beings will not be able to survive. They are necessary for our nourishment.

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[71]Chapter 13, paragraph 3.

Similarly, people are necessary to nature in order that the soil be tilled and the water channeled to its proper place.

Other midrashim show the benefit of rain as well. Some Rabbis suggest that rain is invaluable to the world. Rabbi Simon claims that rain will gather exiles who have been dispersed throughout the world. Rabbi Johanan asserts that it lightens God's anger. Rabbi Tanhum son of Hanilai goes so far as to say that it makes atonement for sins. Others say that commerce is blessed by it and the sick are able to find some comfort in it. In fact, animals, stones--all of nature--feel the positive effects of rain. All of these lessons are derived from reading scriptural verses.[72]

Additionally, there is a midrash that asks not only how much rain must fall in order that a blessing be recited, but also what should be the content of that blessing. One suggestion (found also in Mishna Berakhot 9:2) is: "Blessed is the One who is good and does good." Rabbi Berekiah indicates, in the name of Rabbi Levi, that Proverbs 25:25, "Like cold water to a parched throat is good news a distant land," can be used to show that just as good news is commemorated by this blessing, so is rain. Other blessings indicate the great praise that people gave to God for delivering such an abundance of rain to the earth.[73]

All of these midrashim address the theme of rainfall as a major sign (and agent) of God's providence. At times

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[72]See Chapter 13, paragraphs 5-6, 14 and 16.
[73]Chapter 13, paragraph 15.

rainfall is sent to bring about prosperity. At times, it is an agent of destruction. In either case, this theme is critical and ubiquitous in both biblical and rabbinic literature.

Yet another example of the way in which human behavior affects the natural order can be found in an interpretation of Genesis 2:5, "and there was no man to till the soil." The Rabbis use the verse to suggest that there was yet nobody to inspire others to serve the Holy One. They draw this conclusion by changing the vocalization of the word לְעַבֵּד (to till) to reveal לַעֲבֹד (to serve). This is to say that proper service of God causes the rains to fall.

The verse also suggests to the Rabbis that people were created only so that they might toil. Those who are deserving shall toil in the Torah. Those who are not shall work the ground. That is, given the choice, it is better that one should engage in Torah study. This statement seems to suggest a class distinction between the scholar and the farmer. The scholar, representing a higher nature, exemplifies how some human beings can emulate the upper world. However, the lower nature of the farmer shows that other humans must assume their position with the mindless beasts.[74]

It is noteworthy, however, that another midrash interprets Genesis 2:5 in the opposite way. The editors of

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[74]Chapter 13, paragraph 7.

the text deemed it important to preserve both traditions. This midrash suggests that God made a covenant with the earth and caused rain to fall on it even before humans were created. It implies that rainfall is independent of human action.[75]

Connected with the idea that people are destined to toil is the notion that sleep is counterproductive. Rabbi Joshua of Siknin claims, in the name of Rabbi Levi, that this is because a sleeping person neither studies nor works. He draws his conclusion by playing on the words in Genesis 2:21, "a deep sleep fell (ויפל) upon man." That is, a deep sleep caused man to fall (נפל).[76] The midrash considers the negative aspects of sleep. Those who are not aware, who always sleep, are less likely to achieve. Alertness is a component of success. Therefore, one can conclude that sleep should only be for as long as is absolutely necessary.

While some traditions maintain that the physical world was created for the sake of humankind, i.e., for their benefit, enjoyment, and livelihood, others maintain that man was created in order to care for the earth. For instance, Rabbi Huna in the name of Rabbi Aibo claims that God did not create human beings without forethought. First God created Adam's food requirements. Only afterwards was Adam himself created. The ministering angels inquired of God, "What is man that You have been mindful of him..." (Psalms 8:5)?

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[75]Chapter 13, paragraph 8.

[76]Chapter 17, paragraph 5.

"Why have You gone through so much trouble for him?" God responds by questioning, "If so, you may also ask why, 'sheep and oxen, and wild beasts, too,' (Psalms 8:8) or 'the birds of the heaven, the fish of the sea' (Psalms 8:9) were created? What pleasure is had by the owner of a tower full of good things if there are no guests there to enjoy them?" The ministering angels answered, "'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth' (Psalms 8:10). Do what pleases you."[77]

This midrash implies that the natural world was created with the expectation that human beings would inhabit it. The decision to make human beings thus came after much planning. Since they are the central purpose of creation, special preparations were made so that they would be able to feed and sustain themselves. That is, nature was created for the benefit and exploitation of human beings.

In addition to providing creatures for food, God also revealed how this food should be prepared. This is suggested in the Torah's wording of Genesis 1:20, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures...." The Rabbis use this verse to discuss ritual slaughtering for the purpose of kashrut. The accompanying story also illustrates the Rabbis' mode of scriptural interpretation for legal purposes.

Jacob of Kefar Nibburaya declared, in the city of Tyre, that fish must be ritually slaughtered. When Rabbi Haggai

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[77]Chapter 8, paragraph 6.

heard of this ruling, he ordered that Jacob be whipped. In response to the order, Jacob exclaims, "Should a person be whipped for putting a scriptural ruling into practice?" He had derived this ruling from the decree: "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth...." Just as birds are ritually slaughtered, so must fish, since the two are spoken about in the same sentence of Torah. Rabbi Haggai tells Jacob that he has not ruled well. "Lie down to be lashed," said Rabbi Haggai, "and I will tell you why you are wrong." To prove his point, he recalls Numbers 11:22, "Could enough flocks and herds be slaughtered to suffice them? Or could all the fish of the sea be gathered for them to suffice them?" It says that the fish shall "be gathered," not slaughtered. Jacob responds by telling Rabbi Haggai that his explication is good, and therefore, he should be flogged.[78]

An idea brought out by several midrashim is that seemingly insignificant aspects of creation can serve a greater purpose vis à vis human beings. This notion is illustrated with respect to the heavenly luminaries and trees.

Why was it necessary for God to create both the sun and the moon to light up the sky (Genesis 1:14)? One comment, by Rabbi Johanan, juxtaposes this verse in Genesis with Psalms 104:19: "God made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows when to set." This verse suggests that while the

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[78]Chapter 7, paragraph 2.

sun is used for light, the cycles of the moon mark the change of the seasons. Thus the moon was created to benefit humankind in its calendrical calculations. These directly relate to the agricultural cycles which are so important in producing food. Rabbi Shila of Kefar Temarta adds, in Rabbi Johanan's name, that the second half of the Psalms verse explains that the sun, also, is used for marking time. The beginning of the month is reckoned according to the setting of the sun.

Justa Habra, in Rabbi Berekiah's name, makes an additional comment on the subject. From Numbers 33:3, "They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month...," he reasons, that if time was reckoned only by lunar calculations, there would have been only thirteen sunsets. Therefore, we must conclude that time was also reckoned by counting sunsets.

Rabbi Azariah, citing Rabbi Hanina, also gives an explanation of why there are two great lights. The reason is that God knew that people would want to worship the sun as a divine being. Therefore, the moon serves a pedagogical purpose to discourage this type of idolatry. That is to say, if it is the case that some people will worship the sun even when there are two opposing lights, how much more would it be probable that people would want to worship it if there was only one great light! Rabbi Berekiah, in the name of Rabbi Simon, states that both the sun and the moon were

created for the purpose of providing light. This is why verse 1:14 says, specifically, "Let them be for lights..."

The midrash concludes by clarifying the rest of the verse. The phrase, "and they shall serve as signs," refers to the lights being used to mark the Sabbaths. The phrase, "and for seasons" is a reference to the three pilgrimage festivals: Succoth, Simkha Torah, and Shavuot. "And for days," signifies the use of the lights to signal the start of a new month, and the phrase, "and years," refers to the ushering in of new years.[79]

This midrash is important because it designates various purposes for the creation of the sun and the moon. These luminaries are created in order to benefit humankind. For instance, they mark specific holy times in the Jewish calendar year. Therefore, the sun and moon must be watched and observed. By their reckoning, people have the ability to perform acts at their proper times and in their proper seasons. Rabbi Azariah's words serve as a reminder that God alone created the world and that the sun and moon, being God's creations, are not meant to be worshipped.

Another purpose of the natural world is for certain elements to serve as signs of God's grace. Rabbi Jonathan remarks that the world received three gifts: Torah, the luminaries and the rains. Peace is added by Rabbi Azariah, in the name of Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simon. Likewise,

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[79]Chapter 6, paragraph 1.

Rabbi Joshua, son of Rabbi Nehemiah remarks that the Torah also tells us that salvation was given to the world. Furthermore, Rabbi Tanhuma adds the land of Israel. Some add vengeance, while others say compassion. Rabbi Isaac son of Marion also claims that the crossing of the Great Sea[80] is a gift that God gave to the world. Each of these suggestions derives from the reading of a particular verse of Scripture.

To conclude, God fashioned the world with specific goals in mind, the most important being the creation of human beings. According to the Rabbis, the natural world was often seen as having been created to benefit human beings, but, it also serves as agent for God's providence. Thus, by observing the natural world, human beings could better know what it is that is expected of them while they sojourn on earth.

Divine Providence, Free Will, and the Problem of Evil

The issues which fall under this sub-heading appear time and again within the scope of the relevant chapters. The Rabbis skillfully derive their comments from verses which would not at all seem to lend themselves to such discussions. Yet, because they are such an integral part of the rabbinic world view, these issues readily spring forth.

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[80]This is usually taken to be the Mediterranean Sea.

They are relevant to our subject because they directly affect issues of human behavior.

There are many midrashim which defend God's honorable intention and intrinsic goodness in creating the world. This is most likely due to the dualistic views of the Gnostics, who held that this world was a place of evil, created by an evil and inferior deity. In order to combat these views, the Rabbis often used Scripture to prove the existence of one God who created the world for good. Several midrashim illustrate this activity. One has to do with the suggestion that time existed prior to God's act of creation. Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simon draws this conclusion from the phrase, "And there was evening, and there was morning...." He notes that Scripture says, "and there was...," rather than, "let there be...." If this was the beginning of time, it would not be spoken of in the past tense. Rabbi Abahu infers from this that God created and destroyed worlds until this one. When the present world was created, God said, "This one pleases Me. Those others did not please me." Rabbi Phineas justifies Rabbi Abbahu's reason with Scriptural proof: "And God saw all that He had made, and, behold it was very good." That is, he suggests that the word הנה indicates that now, "behold," God was pleased with the world that was created.[81]

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[81]Chapter 3, paragraph 7.

Furthermore, Genesis 2:4, "These are the generations of heaven and earth...," implies the praiseworthiness of our world. This suggestion is derived by Rabbi Abbahu, who understands the word "these" as a contrastive sign of disqualification. That is, all that came before this is now disqualified, or rejected.[82] This, too, is a persuasive midrash about the goodness of our world, in that it has been allowed by God to persist. From this point on, "these are the generations...." It is as if tohu and bohu have been replaced by the later generations.

The notion that all of human nature and experience ultimately serves a higher end is illustrated in the many interpretations of the "vav" in the word והנה, as it appears in Genesis 1:31, "and behold, it was very good." Many Rabbis construe this "vav" to denote extension. Rabbi Yohanan, for example, interprets this to mean that God can see both the upper and the lower worlds with one glance. Rabbi Simeon, son of Lakish, claims that this verse implies that in one glance, God was able to see both the goodness of this world and of the world to come. This idea suggests that the two worlds are linked to one another.[83]

Others use the notion of "vav" being an extension to declare the goodness of having opposites in the world (i.e., paired qualities). For example, Rabbi Nahman asserts that

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[82]Chapter 12, paragraph 3.

[83]Chapter 9, paragraph 3.

it is good that people have both a good and an evil inclination. He claims that if people did not have both inclinations, no man would ever take a wife, or build a house, or have children.[84] Rabbi Huna suggests that it is good that both happiness and suffering exist in the world. This is because suffering actually helps to ensure that one has a place in the world to come (i.e., suffering in this world effects atonement so that one does not have to suffer in the world to come).[85] Rabbi Ze'ira interprets the phrase to imply the goodness of having both Paradise and Gehenna (i.e., reward and punishment after death).[86] Rabbi Samuel, son of Rabbi Isaac, uses the same hermeneutic to assert that both the angel of life and the angel of death are good. The angel of life is set aside for those who perform good deeds, and the angel of death for those who are sinful.[87] Rabbi Simeon, son of Abba, claims that this phrase alludes to the dispensation of reward and punishment. That is, God took time to contemplate how to exact punishment for those who deserve it. These comments indicate that the threat of punishment, death, and Gehenna serve as deterrents to improper, immoral behavior.[88]

Another interpretation of this phrase made by Simeon

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[84]Chapter 9, paragraph 7.

[85]Chapter 9, paragraph 8.

[86]Chapter 9, paragraph 9.

[87]Chapter 9, paragraph 10.

[88]Chapter 9, paragraph 11.

son of Eleazar, takes it to mean that sleep is good. That is, sleep is beneficial both to the wicked and to the rest of the world. For when the wicked are asleep, they are not causing any harm in the world. Rabbi Simeon's dictum also is construed to mean that a person sometimes sleeps a little and then is able to toil much in the study of Torah.

The main idea of these last midrashim seems to be that God takes time and effort to fashion a good world, hospitable to human effort and achievement. Even things which at first glance appear to be hostile turn out to be beneficial. How is this accomplished? Many Rabbis suggest it is through the combination of God's attributes of mercy and justice.

A discussion of this sort takes place in connection with Genesis 1:26, "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image...'" The verse is problematic because it seems to suggest a multiplicity of creators. This, after all, opens up an opportunity for the Gnostic dualists to prove from Scripture that more than one god created the world.

Rabbi Berekiah explains the verse by saying that the word "us" refers to the combination of more than one quality or attribute existing in the single God of the universe. According to him, God's attribute of mercy confronted that of justice in order to deliberate whether or not Adam should be created. In the end, mercy is responsible for the creation of human beings.

Rabbi Hanina interprets this verse a bit differently. In his opinion, the verse is plural because God had taken counsel with the ministering angels. However, God only revealed the human quality of righteousness to them. The ways of the wicked were kept hidden because this information would have forced God's attributes of justice and truth to refuse the creation of human beings.[89]

Rabbi Simon also tells about how God consulted with the ministering angels by recalling an argument that the angels had when it came time to create Adam. They formed themselves into alliances, discussing whether or not he should be created. Psalms 85:11 reveals, "Love and Truth fought together, Righteousness and Peace combated each other...." Love argued on behalf of Adam's creation because he would display acts of love. Truth took the opposite stance, declaring that man will lie. Righteousness fought for man's existence by saying that he would perform acts of lovingkindness. Peace disagreed, asserting that he would be full of strife. In response, God knocked Truth to the ground. The ministering angels asked why God did such a thing, seeing that Truth was God's seal. God declared, "Let truth spring up from the earth" (Psalms 85:12). The duality of man's moral nature is a problem, even in heaven. God creates man, nonetheless, for the sake of the righteousness and good deeds that he will do.

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[89]Chapter 8, paragraph 4.

The midrash continues by explaining how the creation of Adam is good. This idea is generated by comparing the name Adam (אדם) with the Hebrew phrase טוב מאד, meaning "very good." That is, the Hebrew word מאד can be unscrambled to reveal אדם (another example of letter-play interpretation). Thus, Genesis 1:31, "And God saw all that He had made, and, behold, it was very good (טוב מאד)," implies that Adam was uniquely good.[90] This tradition suggests that human beings are good in the divine scheme of things. This is not to say that people have no inclination to do evil, but that God's plan to put Adam on earth was thought to be "very good."

An additional statement, made by Rabbi Huna the Elder of Sepphoris, explains that while the ministering angels were arguing with one another, God created Adam. Afterwards God said to them, "Why do you argue? Man has already been created." Rabbi Huna's derivation is made by reading the word נעשה, in Genesis 1:26, as "has been made," instead of "Let us make."[91]

Rabbi Hila, on the other hand, explains that God did not seek advice from the ministering angels. Rather, this situation can be compared to a king who found a clod of earth. When the king wondered what to do with his find, some suggested it be used in building a public bath. Others, however, said that it should be for private baths.

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[90]Chapter 8, paragraph 5.

[91]Ibid.

The king, instead, chose to build a statue. In other words, he did not, strictly speaking, take counsel with anyone when it came time to make his decision.[92] Therefore, according to this midrash, נעשה at Genesis 1:26 does not refer to taking counsel with others.

God's balance of mercy and judgment in the world is further illustrated by a midrashic interpretation of "when the Lord God made earth and heaven" (Genesis 2:4). This verse is explained by a parable. It is said to be similar to a king who had empty glasses. In deciding what to put into the glasses, the king reasoned that if he poured hot water into the glasses, they would shatter, and if he poured cold water into them, they would contract and ultimately break. In order to prevent either of these situations from happening, he poured a mixture of both hot and cold water into the glasses.

Likewise, the Holy One reasoned that if the world had only been created by the attribute of mercy, sin would exist in great proportion. On the other hand, the world could not exist if it were only created through divine justice. Therefore, both attributes had to be combined in order to create the world. Genesis 2:4, "...When the Lord God made earth and heaven...," proves this because it refers to God as אלהים יי. The Rabbis take the first divine name of God to denote God's attribute of mercy. The second, on the other

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[92]Chapter 8, paragraph 8.

hand, is used when expressing God's attribute of justice. Therefore, since both were used in a single verse, God must have used both attributes in creating the world.[93]

This midrash suggests a number of themes: the dual nature of human beings, and that both good and evil arise from the same source. This means that there can be no question as to whether or not the world would include both types of people. However, given God's preference for good, evil behavior must somehow be accounted for in the divine scheme of things. This is attributable to the fact that people are endowed with free will, the capacity to both obey and disobey God's will. These midrashim also respond to accusations that Scripture suggests the work of more than one god in creating the world. The Rabbis rather refer the alleged plurality to one God who has more than one attribute. These attributes confront one another at times of uncertainty. In other words, there are times when God's attribute of mercy overrules, and there are times when the attribute of justice comes out on top. The following midrashim illustrate this further.

The story of Adam and Eve provides an occasion for the Rabbis to remark on God's mercy. The words מות תמות, as they appear in Genesis 2:17, intimate the eventual deaths not only of Adam and Eve but also of all human beings.[94]

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[93]Chapter 12, paragraph 15.

[94]Chapter 16, paragraph 6.

However, death does not come without life. Adam and Eve were allowed to have children, even after they sinned. Why was this the case? After all, Genesis 2:17 reveals, 'as soon as you eat of the tree, you shall surely die?'"[95]

Rabbi Joshua son of Nehemiah, uses Psalms 25:6,"O Lord, be mindful of Your compassion and Your faithfulness, they are old as time," to show how God was, in fact, mindful of Adam. Rather than giving him a day to live according to worldly time, God gave him one according to the divine reckoning of time. In this case, one day is equivalent to one thousand years.[96] Therefore, he was given the opportunity to beget children, as it says, "Now the man knew his wife..." (Genesis 4:1).[97]

This is as if to say that God was merciful to Adam and Eve because of a greater divine purpose. From their seed came descendants who would ensure the continuation of humanity. God did not want mortal life to end just because of the sins of two people. It is at this time that a continuous cycle of death and renewal is set in motion.

God's mercy is also illustrated when Rabbi Nehemiah explains how Adam and Eve's punishment might not carry over into the next world. He argues this point by citing Psalms 17:15. This verse, when rearranged, shows that David will

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[95]See Chapter 19, paragraph 8 for a further explanation God's attribute of mercy in connection with this verse.

[96]See Psalms 90:4.

[97]Chapter 22, paragraph 1.

be satisfied when Adam repents for his sin and resumes his state of righteousness. It is to this time that God refers in Genesis 3:22, "Behold, the man has now become like one of us."[98] Hence, we learn that God's punishment of man is not eternal. The Rabbis are wary of claiming that a sinful man can never be redeemed or that God remains angry forever. This would be an unbearable counsel of despair or nihilism.

In fact, God's mercy extends to all beings. This is demonstrated in a rabbinic reading of Genesis 7:3, "of every fowl of the sky, seven and seven--male and female." One might interpret this verse as referring to a combination of male and female animals which would make a total of seven. However, this would imply that one animal would not have a partner. Therefore, the verse must refer to seven of each sex, male and female. We know this because the verse reveals God's purpose as being, "to keep seed alive upon all the earth." In a sense, we find the fulfillment of the command to "be fruitful and multiply." In addition, however, we also see an example of divine love. By requesting seven pairs who will mate with each other, the population will once again increase. In this way, the earth will be rejuvenated even after God called for the earth to be destroyed.[99]

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[98]Chapter 21, paragraph 7.

[99]Chapter 32, paragraph 4.

A further example of divine mercy is illustrated in a comment made by Rabbi Levi on the subject of rain. He suggests that the upper (male) waters conversed with the lower (female) waters saying, "Receive us, you who are creatures of the Holy One, and we are His messengers." Immediately they receive one another, as it is written: "Pour down, O skies, from above...let the earth open up and triumph sprout. Yes, let vindication spring up: I the Lord have created it" (Isaiah 45:8). This shows how the waters are "fruitful and multiply," and that God created the rains for the benefit and stability of the world. That is, food depends on rainfall, which derives from God; it serves as an agent of divine providence.[100]

Rain is associated here with salvation because of its life-giving qualities. It is shown to be beneficial to people in that it keeps the ground moist, thereby allowing produce to grow on earth. It takes on such an important role in human survival and prosperity that a blessing of praise to God must be recited as soon as a certain amount of rain has fallen. Rabbi Levi feels so strongly about the value of rain that he claims it plays a part in the world's stability: rainfall has a profound effect on the lives of those on earth. It not only maintains the viability of life on earth, rather, it also becomes a symbol of resurrection and messianic fulfillment.

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[100]Chapter 13, paragraph 3.

One final example of God's merciful character is found in the Rabbis' discussion of the identity of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil." A number of Rabbis offer suggestions, yet, Rabbi Azariah and Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simon state in the name of Rabbi Joshua son of Levi that it is not for us to know which type of tree it was. God purposely withheld this information so as to protect Adam's honor, so that no person can say that a certain tree was responsible for Adam's bringing death into the world.[101]

Balancing divine mercy, however, is divine justice, which also can prevail. Divine justice teaches that actions do have consequences. At times, it was necessary for God to hold people culpable. For instance, Genesis 2:7 is juxtaposed with Proverbs 29:4 in order to show what happened when God put the first human being on earth. The Proverbs verse states: "By justice a king sustains the land, but a fraudulent man tears it down." Interpreting this verse, the "king" is taken to refer to God, while the "justice" is said to be indicative of God's quality of justice. The "fraudulent man" is none other than Adam, who was the completion of the world.[102]

The creation of man overthrew God's gift, the land. That is, because of Adam's sin, the ground was cursed, and human beings were forced to till the soil in order to gather

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[101]Chapter 15, paragraph 7.

[102]Chapter 14, paragraph 1.

food for survival. Adam's sin was not without consequence. In fact, his one action affected every human being that came after him, as well as the land itself.

This point is also made by another midrash that explains how judgment was brought upon the earth after Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Rabbi Nathan suggests that Adam, Eve, and the serpent were not the only ones to be punished for this transgression. Rather, judgment was also executed on the ground, as it is written, "Cursed be the ground...." (Genesis 3:17).

Here, too, is an example of how human action can have consequences in the natural world. In fact, Rabbi Nathan maintains that this explains why God caused the earth to produce annoying little creatures such as gnats and insects. Rabbi Isaac of Magdala adds, however, that despite their distasteful nature, these insects can also have a positive benefit for the world. This is because they can be killed and used for other things.

Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Shalom suggests, however, that the reason why the earth was punished was because, on its own, it had disobeyed God's will. God commanded the earth saying, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it" (Genesis 1:11). This implies that both the trees themselves and their fruit should be tasty. However, the earth brought forth trees which only had edible fruit. Therefore, because the ground did not heed God's

command in making the tree, it was punished. Rabbi Phineas, on the other hand, conjectures that the ground was punished because it exceeded God's will when it caused even the non-fruit-bearing trees to produce fruit.[103]

One explanation blames the fate of the earth on the actions of human beings. However, a second offers an interpretation in which the earth was responsible for its own fate. Each response reveals something about the hierarchical nature of the world order. In the first instance, human beings not only rule over the earth, they also control its destiny. In the second, the natural world seems to have accountability for itself.

The story of Noah also reveals to the Rabbis another time when the earth was punished as a result of human sin. In this narrative, the people and the earth are destroyed together, as it is written, "I am about to destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:13). Commenting on this notion, Rabbi Huna and Rabbi Jeremiah, in the name of Rabbi Kahana, suggested that even the three handbreadths of earth, sown by the plow, was destroyed. The situation was compared to a king's son who had a tutor or a nurse, and every time that the son did something wrong, the tutor or nurse was punished. So it was during the generation of the flood. When the Holy One said, "I am about to destroy them with the

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[103]Chapter 5, paragraph 9.

earth," it meant that the people and the earth would be destroyed together.[104]

In this case, the earth was regarded as "nurse" for the people. That is, their misbehavior brought about the destruction of the land. Human actions have consequences not only in society, but also in the natural world. People were given the land to till and to tend. It is a gift to them. They are, as it were, the gardeners of the earth. If they are sentenced to death, so is the land which they were given.

Other examples illustrate the calibration of God's response to the behavior of the offender. For instance, the punishment exacted on the serpent shows what happens when one does not act according to God's wishes. Rabbi Issi and Rabbi Hoshaya explained in the name of Rabbi Hiyya the Great that the four punishments indicated in Genesis 3:14-15 correspond to four transgressions which the serpent committed. God said to the serpent, "I made you so that you should be king of all the animals, but you would not heed my request. Therefore, 'more cursed shall you be than all cattle and all the wild beasts.' I made you so that you should walk upright like man, but you did not listen to my request. 'On your belly you shall crawl.' I made you so that you would eat the same food as man, but you would not listen. 'Dirt shall you eat all the days of your life.'

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[104]Chapter 31, paragraph 7.

You wanted to kill Adam and marry his wife. Therefore, 'I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.'"[105]

As a result of his actions, that which the serpent wanted was not given to him, and those characteristics which made him unique were taken away. This same thing happened to transgressors such as Cain, Korah, Balaam, Absalom, and Haman. The Rabbis here indicate their belief that the "punishment fits the crime," i.e., that divine recompense is calibrated precisely to the offense or good deed. In other words, this is an example of divine justice in operation--tit for tat.

God also responds to the sinful behavior of the generation of the Flood. The Rabbis interpret their most severe crimes to be acts such as robbery, idolatry, incest and murder. Scripture recalls that as a result of their behavior, "God said to Noah, 'I have decided to put an end (קץ) to all flesh (בשר)..." (Genesis 6:13). That is, God has decided that it is time for these people to be cut down (הקצץ) and to be treated like grapes which have not yet become ripe (בושר). What does God cite as the reason for this? God cites the fact that "the earth is filled with lawlessness (חמס) because of them" (ibid). Rabbi Hanina explains the meaning of the word "חמס," here translated as "lawlessness," and of the word "גזל," meaning robbery. The first refers to stealing anything which is appraised as

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[105]Chapter 20, paragraph 5.

being at least a perutah, and the second designates the act of stealing something worth less than this. (A perutah was the smallest denomination of coin--anything worth less than a perutah could not be compensated for monetarily because there was no denomination small enough to pay for it.)[106] The generation of the flood used to practice the latter form of thievery. However, since they stole items of such little value, they had no punishment by law. Therefore, God told them that because they were behaving improperly, they would be treated improperly. God punishes that which the human court cannot punish, measure for measure.

The generation of the Tower of Babel also comes under the scrutiny of God's justice. This turns out to be an example of history repeating itself. That is, people do not learn from the mistakes of their ancestors. Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi began his discussion of this topic by citing Isaiah 44:28, "They have no wit or judgment, their eyes are besmeared and they see not; their minds, and they cannot think." This, he claims, is why Genesis 6:4 says, "it was then, and later too, that the 'Nephilim' appeared on earth...." One generation did not learn from those that had come before it: the generation of the Tower of Babel did not learn from that of the Flood, although the two had only been separated by two years.[107]

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[106]Chapter 31, paragraphs 1-3, 6.

[107]Chapter 38, paragraph 4.

In the end, later generations do not learn from the mistakes of their ancestors. Human stubbornness and willfulness dictate that the sins of the past will recur in the future. This midrash seems to imply that, despite the fact that God endowed human beings with wisdom, they are quick to forget, and quick to commit the same mistakes as their ancestors. This is an example of human "hardness of heart."

The previously cited midrashim address the question of God's intentions, be they merciful or just. Yet, they reveal nothing about the will of human beings. Since both the Bible and the midrash maintain that human beings have been endowed with free will, it is clear that they also have a certain responsibility to use this gift appropriately. For when we abuse our power, we learn that it is God who, in actuality, has ultimate control over the fate of all that is on the earth. That is, human actions have consequences.

This notion is exemplified in the story of Adam and Eve. Because God created human beings with free will, it was Eve's choice to eat of the tree. That is, she gave in to temptation. Rabbi Eleazar in the name of Rabbi Zimra explains that Genesis 3:6 reveals three virtues of the tree which might lead to temptation. The first part of the verse tells us that "the tree was good for eating," the second part says that it was "a delight to the eyes," and the last part informs us that Eve thought it "was desirable as a

source of wisdom."[108] Here one finds a suggestion that free will can be influenced by desire. That is, the more desirable something is, the more people are tempted by it. Therefore, since this tree had not one, but three virtues, Eve was even more tempted to eat of its fruit.

This is why the Rabbis claim that one should be careful not to make too big a fence around a certain law or principle. In fact, there is a midrash which expresses this very point. In this case, the consequences of excessive scrupulousness are exemplified by Adam's warning to Eve about the tree of knowledge. Although he himself was only warned by God not to eat of the tree, Adam told Eve, "it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die" (Genesis 3:1). Rabbi Hiyya employs Proverbs 30:6, "Do not add to His words, lest He indict you, and you become a liar," to illustrate the problem with Adam's behavior. Because Adam's words were not the same as those of God, the serpent was able to trick Eve. He pushed her into the tree, proving that she did not die when she touched it. He continued by telling her that, similarly, she would not die by eating of the fruit. Rather, "God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad" (Genesis 3:5). That is, rather than dying, the woman would then know the difference between good and evil (i.e., she would possess

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[108]Chapter 19, paragraph 5.

divine knowledge and power).[109] This example shows that one should not make a greater fence around the principal matter, lest it should fall down and crush the plants.

Another midrashic interpretation suggests that Eve acted as she did in order to assume her rightful place in the world. She felt her actions were necessary because the serpent had told her that God prohibited her from eating the fruit only in order to protect His power.

There are two different suggestions made as to what the serpent might have said to entice Eve into eating. Rabbi Joshua of Siknin explains in the name of Rabbi Levi that the serpent told Eve that God had created the world only after eating of this tree. This means that if she ate of the same tree, she, too, could create a world. Since God did not want her to create her own world, she was prohibited from eating. Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simon, on the other hand, argues that each act of creation was successively more dominant than the one before--the firmament dominates the heavens, the herbs dominate the firmament, the luminaries dominate the herbs etc. Hence, the serpent reasoned, if Eve did not eat of the tree, God would create other things which might rule over her. In order to protect herself, Eve "saw that it was good."[110]

This midrash not only fills in the narrative details of the story, it also makes a statement about the relationship

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[109]Chapter 19, paragraph 3.

[110]Chapter 19, paragraph 4.

between God and humanity. It suggests that God is protective of power (like human beings). Furthermore, it suggests that God could ultimately curtail human power by creating something greater. Here, human sin is rebellion against God's authority, an attempt to displace God. It must be noted, however, that these views are put into the mouth of the crafty serpent. Therefore, they seem to represent a heretical view. It is as if to say that one should not be so power-hungry as to give in to such forms of persuasion as the serpent had to offer.

Having sinned by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, "the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked..." (Genesis 3:7). One rabbinic understanding of this verse suggests that the two of them had stripped themselves of the one commandment they had been asked to keep. That is, they had disobeyed God. They were no longer innocent of sin or of the consequences of disobedience. Furthermore, Rabbi Simeon son of Yohai reads the phrase, "and they sewed together fig (תאנה) leaves," as indicating that it was with this action that the opportunity (תאנה) for death was brought into the world.[111] Another comment explains what is meant by the fact that their eyes were now opened. Was it that they had been blind? Rabbi Judan in the name of Rabbi Johanan son of Zakkai and Rabbi Berekiah in the name of Rabbi Akiba

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[111]Chapter 19, paragraph 6.

answered this question with an analogy. This situation was compared to a villager who swung his staff and broke an entire basket of glassware. The owner of the store confronted the man saying, "I know that you cannot compensate me for the loss, but I wish you to see how great a loss this really is." Similarly, God showed Adam and Eve just how many generations were lost as a result of their deed.

A universal lesson is taught by the midrash just cited. That is, sin has consequences, sometimes amounting to a great deal of loss. People must think of the possible consequences before they act, and afterwards, they must be willing to take responsibility for their actions. In addition, the actions of one can affect the lives of many. Adam and Eve came to this realization only after having made a mistake. Perhaps they should serve as an example for others.[112]

According to Rabbi Akiba, Adam's changed perspective is also illustrated in Genesis 3:22, "Behold the man has become like one of us." By interpreting the verb "ממנו" as "of himself," rather than "of us," he is able to comment on the changed nature of Adam after having committed the sin. That is, Genesis 3:22 can now be seen as an indication of Adam's newly acquired ability to differentiate between good and

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[112]Similar ideas are expressed in chapter 19, paragraphs 8-10. These comment on the lasting effects of the expulsion on the history of the world.

evil. Since he can make this distinction, he is now free to choose between the two options. Rabbi Akiba explains that Genesis 3:22 reveals that God put two paths before Adam, life or death, and Adam chose the latter.[113]

Although God is the arbiter of human actions--in delivering reward or punishment--we find that humans' free will dictates the course of God's action. That is, people have some power in controlling the specific execution of divine retribution. It is through moral discretion that people learn to act in a fitting manner.

Eve is an example of how one person's actions can have lasting consequences. Because she sinned, all women were destined to have pain while having children. The Rabbis intensify the biblical lesson through a close reading of Genesis 3:16, "And to the woman He said, 'I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing; in pain shall you bear children....'" The two different words used to indicate "pain" are interpreted as having two different meanings. The word "עצבון" refers to pain during conception, and "הרון" is taken to indicate discomfort during the term of one's pregnancy. The second part of the verse is read in such a way that it reinforces the first. That is, "in pain" refers to the suffering that goes along with miscarriages. Likewise, "you shall bring" reveals that the actual process of childbirth will be difficult. In addition, the word,

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[113]Chapter 21, paragraph 5.

"children" indicates that the process of raising them will be challenging. The midrash closes with a comment attributed to Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Simeon who says, "it is less trying to grow a bunch of olives in the Galilee than it is to raise a child in Eretz Israel."[114]

Another midrash builds upon the idea of pain by claiming that the process of making a living was made even harder than that of having children. Rabbi Issi draws this conclusion by looking at the word used for pain in this context, "עצבון," which is deemed to be an intensive form. Rabbi Eleazar notes that achieving redemption is similar to attaining sustenance: both require the help of God's wonders. Furthermore, just as sustenance must be earned daily, so does redemption occur every day in that God daily redeems human beings from evil. Rabbi Nahman, on the other hand, explains that the two are different from one another since redemption comes through an angel, as indicated by Genesis 48:16, but sustenance comes from God, as is explained in Psalms 145:16. Rabbi Joshua son of Levi remarks that sustenance is even harder to attain than dividing the Red Sea, both of which are mentioned in Psalms 136. Theodor explains that this is because the Red Sea was only divided for the people of Israel, while sustenance is for all human beings. Therefore, the lives of both men and

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[114]Chapter 20, paragraph 6.

women were made more difficult as a result of the deed of Adam and Eve.[115]

The Rabbis also express the idea that sin can distance the Divine Presence from the earth, while righteousness can draw it near. That is, sin causes alienation of people from God. When the Divine Presence ascends above, intimacy is lost. However, obedience to God's will repairs the breach and reestablishes the intimacy. This is illustrated in the following midrash.

In commenting on Genesis 3:8, "they heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day...," Rabbi Abba bar Kahana notes that Scripture uses the reflexive form of the verb "מתהלך," meaning "to move back and forth." This suggests that the Divine Presence moves closer to or further away from human beings depending on their actions. Thus, divine intimacy or alienation are determined by our own deeds.

Seven sins caused the Divine Presence to distance itself from the earth, ascending progressively to each of the seven planetary spheres. These included, in successive order, the sins of: Adam, Cain, the generations of Enosh, the generation of the Flood, the generation of the Tower of Babel, the Sodomites, and the Egyptians who lived at the time of Abraham. However, the actions of seven righteous people brought the Divine Presence back down to earth.

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[115]Chapter 20, paragraph 9.

These were: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses.[116]

This notion is further exemplified by another midrash. It was God's intention that human beings be endowed with everlasting strength. However, because Adam sinned, God withdrew some of this power. The Rabbis reach this conclusion by juxtaposing Job 14:20 with Genesis 3:22. The first part of the Job verse, "You give him power forever, but he goes...," exhibits that God had originally empowered Adam with strength, however, he sinned by going and following the advice of the serpent. The consequence of his action is suggested in the rest of the verse: "...You alter his visage and dispatch him." This shows that God changed Adam's physique and sent him out of the garden of Eden. Therefore, having expelled him and stripped him of his great strength, God lamented saying, "Now the man was like one of us." This implies that he is not this way anymore.[117] Behavior is not without consequence. If people do not follow the rules, then they are stripped of their power. Strength is a gift, only suitable for those who are worthy of it.

Despite the presence of evil in the world, the Rabbis did not seem to think that this was human destiny. Rather, there is room for redirection and change: People have the opportunity to turn from evil to good. This notion is

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[116]Chapter 19, paragraph 7.

[117]Chapter 20, paragraph 12.

exemplified by a comment made by Rabbi Yannai about how God foresaw the deeds of both the righteous and the wicked from the beginning of creation. For instance, Genesis 1:2, "Now the earth was unformed and void...," refers to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, "And God said: 'Let there be light'," (Genesis 1:3) symbolizes the deeds of the righteous. Furthermore, Genesis 1:4, "And God saw the light was good...," makes it clear that God prefers the latter. Genesis 1:5, "and there was evening," refers to the wicked, while the phrase, "and there was morning," refers to the righteous. In addition, "one day" indicates the presence of one day a year, the Day of Atonement, as a day of judgment.[118]

This midrash shows how moral good and evil are represented, symbolically, in the physical universe. Light and darkness are symbols of moral attributes in a world where light/goodness is preferable. Since people have free will to choose, they also are given the opportunity to change. This, according to Rabbi Yannai, is accomplished by atonement. In fact, atonement is so important that God set aside a specific day for it at the very outset of creation.[119]

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[118]Chapter 3, paragraph 8.

[119]Note also Chapter 1, paragraph 4 which indicates that atonement was one of the things which was preconceived by God prior to creation, as explained on p. 32.

Another comment about human atonement is derived by taking the word אדמה to mean "of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). Rabbi Berekiah and Rabbi Helbo in the name of Samuel the Elder suggest that this means that Adam was created in the same spot where he will eventually make his atonement, the site of the Temple, as it is written, "Make for Me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you" (Exodus 20:21). Here, Adam's name (and his origin) is seen as a metonym for the future reconciliation between human beings and God through atonemert offerings.[120] God's foresight is indicated here. There is an inherent connection between the status of man--in need of atonement--and the remedy provided--the Temple. Both man's "flaw" and the remedy for it were provided for at creation.[121] This is a case of providential foresight. That is to say, the very physical elements of man's creation are connected with the religious ideas of repair and restoration.

There is some discussion as to what exactly are the criteria which differentiate a wicked from a righteous person. This question is considered in the material pertaining to the story of Noah. Here the Rabbis debate

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[120]Chapter 14, paragraph 8.

[121]It would also be fitting to include this midrash in the section about divine providence since it clearly is an example of God's benevolence.

whether or not Noah was, indeed, a righteous man. From their commentary, it seems that Noah's merit is judged in relative terms.

According to Scripture, "Noah was a righteous man, he was blameless in his generation" (Genesis 6:9). Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah disagreed as to the meaning of this verse. Rabbi Judah suggests that Noah was righteous only in comparison with others in his generation, the generation of the Flood. However, he was not so righteous when compared to others, such as Moses or Samuel. This point is illustrated through the example of a one-eyed man and the young child who would be considered to have perfect vision among a street of blind people. Similarly, if a person had opened two vats of wine which had turned to vinegar, and then opens a third which has just started to sour, he would ask, "Is there any greater than this?" Likewise, "Noah was a righteous man...in his generation."

Rabbi Nehemiah interprets the verse in the opposite way. If Noah was righteous is his generation which was filled with evil, how much more would this be the case in a generation such as that of Moses. He illustrates his point by comparing Noah to a phial of perfume which still gave off a sweet fragrance inside a graveyard. How much more would this be the case if the phial were someplace else.[122]

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[122]Chapter 30, paragraph 9.

Even though the Rabbis disagree as to the meaning of the verse, they both show that righteousness is relative to the actions of the rest of a community. People may appear to be more or less righteous depending on the group with whom they were placed. In the case of Noah, his degree of righteousness was enough for him to be spared when all of the others were to be destroyed.

The differential treatment of the righteous and the wicked is explained by interpreting Psalms 11:5, "The Lord tests[123] the righteous man, but loathes the wicked one who loves injustice" (Psalms 11:5). Rabbi Jonathan explains this verse by way of analogy. An artisan does not test defective vessels, for they cannot be hit without breaking. Likewise, the Holy One does not test any other but the righteous, as it is written, "The Lord tries the righteous."

Rabbi Jose son of Rabbi Hanina explains the verse with a similar analogy. A flax worker who is certain of the fine quality of his flax will beat the strands into perfection. However, those pieces which are not as good will split as soon as they are beaten a single time. So it is that the Holy One tries only the righteous, since those who are not as upright will crack immediately.

A third example is cited by Rabbi Eleazar, who suggests that when a person has two cows, one stronger than the other, the yoke is placed on none but the stronger one. So

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[123]My translation departs here from that of the Jewish Publication Society so as to render a more exact meaning.

is this the case with human beings. In a world full of both righteous and wicked people, God tests only the righteous, as Scripture says, "The Lord tests the righteous..."

Another interpretation applies this verse to Noah. Noah was spared, when the rest of the world was destroyed, on account of his righteousness. However, because he was righteous, he had first to weather the storm, as it is written: "Then the Lord said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, with all your household, for you alone have I found righteous before Me in this generation.'"[124]

This is an attempt to explain why some of the most righteous people seem to struggle the most. These people, because they are righteous, are better equipped to withstand the test. This implies that people should not despair in their struggles. Rather, through their experience, they can emerge having more strength and endurance than when they began.

Until now, this section has addressed the topics of justice and mercy, good and evil, without mentioning the matter of law. A basic system of law is, in fact, derived from these first few chapters of the book of Genesis. From God's commands to Adam and Noah, the Rabbis derive fundamental norms of human conduct that apply to all. These laws are meant to be the minimum standard to which all people are required to adhere.

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[124]Chapter 32, paragraph 3.

Rabbi Levi derives these laws from Genesis 2:16, "The Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat..." ויצו, "and He commanded," alludes to the prohibition against idolatry, in accordance with the usage in Hosea 5:11, "...because he has willingly gone after צו." The words, "the Lord," indicate that humans should not blaspheme, as in the verse: "If he also pronounces the name Lord, he shall be put to death" (Leviticus 25:16). "God" refers to the authority given to judges, as in Exodus 22:27: "You shall not revile אלהים" (here taken to mean judges). A prohibition against murder is alluded to by the words "the man." Proof of this is found in Genesis 9:6, which states: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed...." "Saying" is an allusion to the commandment not to practice incest, as it is written, "...saying if a man divorces his wife.." (Jeremiah 3:1). The precept against stealing is hinted at by the phrase, "of every tree of the garden you are free to eat...."

Additionally, the Rabbis interpret the entire verse as a command that God be treated as God, and not cursed. Rabbi Jacob of Kefar Hanan uses this verse to make a statement about when animals are fit to be eaten. In his opinion, this is only when they have been ritually slaughtered. His comment alludes to the prohibition against tearing the limb

off of a living animal which was given to Noah explicitly.[125]

Thus in Genesis 2:16, describing God's command to Adam, the Rabbis see an allusion to what is later termed the "Noahide" laws. There are seven in all. Six of these are prohibitions: against idolatry, blasphemy, incest, murder, theft, and tearing a limb off of a living animal. The seventh is a positive commandment to establish courts. The prohibition against tearing a limb off a living animal was not mentioned by Rabbi Levi since Adam was a vegetarian, and therefore this prohibition would have been irrelevant.

These "Noahide" laws, are basic norms for maintaining proper harmony--both social and cosmic--in the world. They elicit proper behavior, and make a statement concerning what is morally wrong. This, of course, is not enough for Jewish people. While the rest of humanity is held accountable for only seven, the Jews were specifically given 613 mitzvot that they are expected to follow.

What might entice a person to act contrary to these laws? In the case of Cain and Abel, the problem seemed to have been one of sibling rivalry. According to one midrash, they quarreled because each brother was self-righteous. One Rabbi held that the division of property ownership in the earth was the object of the argument; another thought it was over whose land would house the future site of the Temple.

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[125]Chapter 16, paragraph 6, see also chapter 34, paragraph 8.

A third Rabbi conjectured that their fight was about who would claim an additional twin girl who had been born with Abel.[126]

Along with the question of motive emerges the question of consequence. What happens when a "Noahide" law is broken? The following midrash concerns itself with fratricide as it occurred in the account of Cain and Abel. It, like the sin of Adam, has universal consequences.

Three interpretations are cited, that of Rabbi Judan, Rabbi Huna, and the Rabbis. Rabbi Judan notes the fact that Genesis 4:10, uses the form דמי (plural), rather than דם (singular). This indicates that Cain not only killed Abel, but all of the descendants that would have come from him. Rabbi Huna observes that the same usage--with the same meaning--occurs in II Kings 9:26, which states, "I swear, I have taken note of the blood (דמי) of Naboth and the blood (דמי) of his sons...," and the Rabbis cite yet another example, II Chronicles 24:25, "...his courtiers plotted against him because of the blood (דמי) of the sons of Jehoiada...."[127]

These examples reinforce the Rabbinic notion that a murder does not only take the life of one individual. Rather, all descendants who may have arisen from that individual have also been killed, as the Rabbis state, "He

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[126]Chapter 22, paragraph 7.
[127]Chapter 22, paragraph 9.

who kills a single soul, it is as if he has killed an entire world" (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5).

Why was Cain not killed because of his act of murder? Rabbi Nehemiah, in interpreting Genesis 4:15, "The Lord said to him, 'I promise, if anyone kills Cain...,'" explains that Cain's judgment was different because he was the first to commit such a crime. He had nobody from whom to learn proper behavior. But now that people should know better than to murder, their actions are punishable by death.[128]

As in the case of Adam, however, there is a suggestion that God and Cain were reconciled. While some Rabbis see the verse, "and Cain went out from the Lord..." (Genesis 4:16), as indicative of Cain's unrepentant attitude, others see in it a hint that Cain in fact repented. Rabbi Aibu claims that since it is impossible for one to escape from God, the verse must mean that Cain threw out God's words as if he was trying to deceive God. Rabbi Berekiah in the name of Rabbi Eleazar says, similarly, that Cain went out like a hypocrite. Only Rabbi Hanina son of Isaac maintains that Cain went out joyful, as in the verse, "Even now he is setting out to meet you and will be glad to see you" (Exodus 4:17). That is, Adam met Cain along the way and asked about his judgment. When Cain told of his repentance and his reconciliation with God, Adam began to sing the praises of repentance saying, "A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day: It

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[128]Chapter 22, paragraph 12.

is a good thing to make confession unto the Lord" (Psalms 92:1-2). This explanation shows the power of repentance and its central place in the rabbinic view of the world.[129]

The themes investigated here, divine providence, free will, and the problem of evil, go to the very essence of the human condition on earth. While human beings are free to chose between good and evil, they are born with the capacity for both. Furthermore, God has ultimate control over human destiny. The righteous are rewarded, and the wicked punished at the proper time and in the proper manner. God uses the proper proportion of the divine attributes of justice and mercy in carrying out these measures. Yet, despite human sin, God also ensures that the time will come for redemption and restoration.

God and the Natural World as Exemplars For Human Conduct

Some say that the best way to teach is by example. That is, if one models a certain behavior, others will follow. This section shows how, according to the Rabbis, both God and the natural world play this role. Their actions/activities were construed as paradigms for proper moral behavior.

Such conclusions were possible because anthropomorphism is quite common in Rabbinic literature. It is if both God

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[129]Chapter 22, paragraph 13.

and the natural world can act and think as humans. Sometimes, God is thought to act as the universal parent. Other times, God is a Sage. Sometimes the physical world acts as the model child. Other times, it is a paradigm for proper social etiquette. The point is, if God and God's world can behave in a certain way, who are we as humans to deviate from this example?

One case of divine modeling pertains to the criteria for reciting the Havdalah blessing. Rabbi Zeira, son of Rabbi Abbahu, claims that Genesis 1:4 proves that one should not recite the Havdalah blessing over the flame of the candle unless its light has first been enjoyed. How so? First, "And God saw that the light was good," and only afterwards, "God separated the light from the darkness." Therefore, by example, one should benefit from the candle's radiance before reciting the proper prayer.

The Rabbis also commented on the separation between light and darkness. In their opinion, this division was made for the sake of the righteous in the future. They draw a comparison between this separation and that of a king who sets his portion aside for his son. Here, light stands for goodness, and the physical process symbolizes a moral process.

Rabbi Eleazar uses Genesis 1:5, to emphasize how God identifies more positively with good than with evil. In the first part of the verse, "God called the light day," God's name appears before the word "light." However, with

darkness, God's name is not mentioned until afterwards. That is, the verse reads, "And the darkness, He called night."[130] The proximity of God's name provides a clue as to the nature of Deity. The creator of this world definitely is associated with good, not evil. Although, at the time, this was probably an anti-Gnostic statement, today, it can continue to have relevance. That is, it shows that just as God prefers good, so should human beings. By doing that which is good, people will become worthy of meriting God's approval.

Another midrash which illustrates how God's behavior is to be emulated by humans derives this lesson from a subtle difference in phrasing between two biblical verses: the discrepancy between Genesis 1:24 and Genesis 1:25 reveals something about God's behavior. The former verse states, "God said: 'Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature, cattle, creeping things and wild beasts of every kind.'" The latter tells us, "God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things on the earth." In the first instance, four kinds of beings are mentioned: living creatures, cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts. In the second, however, only three are mentioned: wild beasts, cattle, and creeping things. When Rabbi Hama son of Rabbi Hoshaya asks why this is the case, Rabbi answers by explaining that there was an extra soul made without a body. This, he says is the soul of the

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[130]Chapter 3, paragraph 6.

demons. The reason that their body was never created was because the Sabbath began before God was able to do so. "Therefore," continues Rabbi, "these verses teach a lesson in behavior." A person who has precious stones or other valuable items should put these things aside as the Sabbath approaches. As God stopped creating bodies once Shabbat began, so, too, should people desist from their activities as well.[131] Thus, God's primal activities are viewed as paradigmatic for human behavior.

The deference for those of lesser status that God showed when creating human beings is discussed by Rabbi Samuel son of Nahman in the name of Rabbi Jonathan. The Rabbi explains that, when Moses wrote the Torah, he had to write an account of the works which were created on each day. When he came to the verse which says, "Let us make man...," he questioned God, saying, "Why do you give heretics an excuse?"[132]

God instructed Moses to continue his work saying, "Whoever jumps to this conclusion will be in error." Furthermore, God adds, "Have I not caused both great and small to descend from this one man, Adam, whom I have created? It might be the case that a great person will rebel when forced to ask a lesser one for permission on a

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[131]Chapter 7, paragraph 5.

[132]By using the plural, "us," the heretics (i.e., Gnostic dualists) may claim that a plurality of gods created the world. See above, pp. 83-84.

certain matter. However, the lesser ones can respond by saying, "Learn from your Creator. Even God, who created all that is above and below, consulted with the ministering angels when it came time to create human beings."[133]

The point is, just as God found it appropriate to counsel with the ministering angels who are certainly of lesser status, so should people be willing to do the same. What God did serves as a model for proper human conduct. Furthermore, the midrash explains that since all people came from a single source, all are equal before God. Therefore, nobody ultimately is of greater or lesser status than anybody else. All should therefore be treated with equal respect.

According to Rabbi Abbahu, it was God who set the example for human wedding ceremonies. God did this by reciting a blessing for Adam and Eve over a cup of wine. Furthermore, Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simon adds that the angels, Michael and Gabriel served as Adam's best men. Rabbi Simlai, likewise, declares that God serves as an example of one who performs acts of lovingkindness. First, we can learn that God blesses bridegrooms from Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them...." Likewise, the fact that God adorns brides is derived from Genesis 2:22 , "And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the

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[133]For additional discussion about how God took counsel with the ministering angels, see chapter 8 paragraphs 5-6, as well as the analysis of these materials above, pp. 83-85.

man into a woman; and He brought her to the man."[134] Furthermore, Genesis 18:1, "And the Lord appeared to him (Abraham, who was recovering from circumcision)," shows that God visits the sick. Additionally, we know that God buries the dead from Deuteronomy 34:6, "He buried him (Moses) in the valley in the land of Moab...." Rabbi Samuel, son of Nahman adds that Genesis 35:9, "And God appeared to Jacob again, in his arrival from Paddan-aram, and blessed him," tells us that God visits mourners since this takes place shortly after the death of Rachel. That is, God blessed Jacob with the blessing of mourners. These behaviors, as it were, are rooting "in the nature of things." It is as if God is teaching us social etiquette.

An example of God as the compassionate parent is found in a midrash which explains the reason that there was a seven-day time lapse between God's announcement to Noah that the rains would come and the actual beginning of the deluge. This time is described as the period of shivah (i.e., the seven days of mourning). That is, even at the time of punishment and destruction, God still cares about the people.

Who was God mourning for? One understanding is that God mourned for Methuselah, the righteous one, in order that the generation might see this and repent for its sins. However, despite the fact that God did this, the people did not repent. A second interpretation is that God was, in

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[134]Genesis 2:22.

fact, grieving for the world as a whole. God grieved for the creatures that had been made according to divine will, even though it was the Eternal, alone, who was to do the destroying. This is drawn out from Genesis 6:6, which says, "and the Lord regretted...," which is parallel to II Samuel 19:3, "...and the king grieved for his son..."[135]

God mourned for the world for seven days, as one would mourn for the death of a close relative. By divine example, it becomes clear that loss is traumatic, and one must be given the opportunity to properly grieve. In the first example, it seems that the Rabbis understood the verse to mean that the grieving process was a time for people to repent and say that they were sorry. Yet, they did not take advantage of this privilege. The second example seems to indicate the simple process of working through the loss that occurs after the death of a loved one. Even though God felt that destruction was necessary, God's divine attribute of compassion saw to it that a time was allotted for mourning.

A comment about how God is concerned for man's modesty is derived by reading the word תחתנה in Genesis 2:21, "..and closed up the flesh at that spot," as a notarikon. By splitting the word into two, it becomes תחת נוה. This shows us that God provided Adam with a "fitting outlet." According to Rabbi Hanina, this was in order to allow him a certain sense of modesty. Rabin Yannai and Rabbi Yannai while differing as to the details, agreed that God gave man

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[135]Chapter 32, paragraph 7.

buttocks so that it should not hurt when he sits down. Similarly, Rabbi Ilai and Rabbi Ammi, although disagreeing on the details, claimed that this shows us how God took care of man after he died. One said that this indicates that God saw to it that Adam received a proper burial. The other said that God made shrouds for the man.[136] God provided for man's modesty in excreting and formed him with buttocks so that it would not be painful for him to sit down. Furthermore, God saw to it that the man was properly covered when he died. Although the midrash is specifically about Adam, it is assumed that it applies to Eve as well.

As God was seen by the Rabbis as an exemplar for human conduct, so, too, was the natural world. At times, the Rabbis interpret names of natural phenomena to show how the natural world symbolically adumbrates the moral order. For instance, in Genesis 1:8, the name of the expanse is שָׁמַיִם, meaning "heaven." One explanation for this is that the heavens weigh up, שָׁמַיִם, the deeds of humans. Psalms 97:6 proves that for the one who is worthy, "The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all people see his glory." On the other hand, Job 20:27 reveals that for the one who is not worthy, "heaven will expose his iniquity, earth will rise up against him."[137]

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[136]Chapter 17, paragraph 6.

[137]Chapter 4, paragraph 7.

A second example of this is found in a midrash which explains how nature is to be seen as an agent of God's providence. In this case, the name given to designate the earth illustrates the obedience that it shows to God. The word, ארץ, is used because the land agreed (רצתה) to do God's will (רצון). Rabbi Nathan, in the name of Rabbi Aha, and Rabbi Berekiah, in the name of Rabbi Isaac, claim that God, sometimes called El Shaddai,[138] told the land that it was enough (די), and the earth stopped extending itself.[139] In the same vein, the behavior of the land can be seen as an example to humans. When God dictates that it is enough, people should obey God's will. In this way, humans will learn to set limits and to act with moderation.

A third example of how the Torah's designations of natural processes in fact symbolize norms of behavior is a midrash about Genesis 1:13, "there was evening and there was morning, a third day." Here, the Rabbis link the word for three, שלישי, with שלישים, meaning "strong ones," as found in Ezekiel 23:23, "...captains and warriors (שלישים), all of them riding on horseback." This is as if to say that on this day, strong things were created. Yet, although the trees, which were created on the third day, were strong, they began to quiver when they saw that iron had been created. For axes, which can cut down trees, are made with

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[138]See Genesis 17:1.

[139]Chapter 5, paragraph 8.

iron. God responded to their fear by saying: "If none of your wood enters the iron as a handle, you shall not be harmed."[140]

This latter part of the midrash comments on the ability of the trees to exercise free will. That is, they can choose whether or not to give the iron an opportunity to become a weapon. Likewise, people should not give others the opportunity to build on their strength, and, subsequently, use it against them.

The sun and moon can also be exemplars of human conduct. As metaphors for Esau and Israel, they teach that people should not encroach on their neighbor's territory. In short, they show how social etiquette and moral conduct can be learned from the physical universe.[141]

Rabbi Aha explains how social etiquette and humility can, likewise, be learned from the moon and stars. He does so by citing a parable in which the placement of the stars can be compared to a king who had two governors, one ruling in the city, and the other over the entire province. The king decreed that since the one ruling in the city humbled himself to rule over a smaller area, he would receive a special honor. When he left the city, the townspeople would leave with him, and when he entered the city, the townspeople would do the same. So it is with the moon.

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[140]Chapter 5, paragraph 9.

[141]Chapter 6, paragraph 3.

Since it humbled itself to rule the evening, it would be honored with the stars. When the moon comes out, the stars would come out with it, and when it disappears, so would the stars.[142] Nature is demonstrating humility to human beings. It is as if to say that those who humble themselves will go farther than those who are too proud and too selfish. As a leader, the way to gain a following is to bring yourself down to the level of your people.

Comments about water also fall into this subsection. In this case, there are a few midrashim which speak about how water is obedient to God's will. A third midrash explains a connection between water and salvation.

One of the midrashim concerning Genesis 1:9, "God said, 'Let the waters below the sky be gathered together into one area, that the dry land may appear,' and it was so," compares the obedience of water with the sin of humans. Ironically, these humans ultimately get punished by water. Here, poetic justice characterizes the workings of divine retribution through the natural order. That is, floods are not just blind natural disasters, but appropriate punishments for those who sin.

Rabbi Abba son of Kahana explains in the name of Rabbi Levi that God is calling for the waters to be gathered for divine purpose, so that they can one day do God's will. A comparison is drawn between the situation with the water and a king who had simple people living in a castle that he had

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[142]Chapter 6, paragraph 4.

built. Each day, these people would pay their respects in their simple little ways. The king reasoned that if simple people pay their respects, how much more so would this be the case with those who had all of their faculties about them. When he replaced the simple people with those who were more intelligent, however, he found that these people were haughty and that they began to take over the kingdom. Because of their attitude, the king had the palace put back to its former state.

So it was with the water. At the beginning of creation God saw how obedient the water was. This is indicated by Psalms 93:4: "From the thunder of the mighty waters..." What did they say? "...More majestic than the breakers of the sea is the Lord, majestic on high." God reasoned that if the waters were this obedient, even though they have no mouth with which to speak, how much more so would this be the case with people, who had all of their faculties. But after God created humans, generations such as those of Enosh, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel arose and rebelled against Him. Therefore, God ordered the world to be returned to its previous state. This is why water was used by God to destroy these sinful generations.[143]

This midrash also speaks about the relationship between humans and God. That is, humanity should be the pinnacle of God's creation. God was proud to create human beings, the best and brightest of all creation. They, in turn, were

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[143]Chapter 5, paragraph 1.

expected to love and revere God. Seeing that they used their faculties for rebellion, God caused them to perish. Life was then returned to its more simple, but more obedient form. That is, creation resumed the form of "dumb nature" which had no free will to disobey God's rules.

Here, we see a contrast between nature which must obey God's wishes, and human beings, who are free to rebel. Free will allows people both to deviate from God's will and to voluntarily conform to it. Voluntary compliance with God's wishes is the greatest human good. Yet, when this does not happen, it is sometimes necessary for God to take action, such as causing natural disasters, in order to turn people away from evil and towards the good.

Perhaps this lesson can also be applied analogically today. In 1993, human technology can be used to benefit or destroy the world and its inhabitants. If our use of technology is respectful of nature, we will continue to thrive. If, instead, we are headstrong and heedless of the effects of our activities on the ecology of our world, the world will begin to perish. In other words, we learn from examples such as these that human disobedience to God's purpose can end in disaster.

In a further comment about the great discipline displayed by water, Rabbi Johanan indicates how the sea submitted to God's discipline. In this case, God commanded that the Red Sea part for the Israelites as they made their way out of Egypt, and that it retreat as the Egyptians

approached (Exodus 14:27). Here, nature was commanded to come to the aid of the Israelites.

Rabbi Jeremiah son of Eleazar notes that at various times God charged the order of nature on account of Israel's needs. At the exodus from Egypt the sea was commanded to divide, and the heavens to become silent before Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1). Before Joshua the sun and the moon were told to keep still (Joshua 10:13). The ravens were instructed to feed Elijah (I Kings 17:6). Fire was commanded not to harm Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Daniel 3:23). The lions were instructed to let Daniel alone (Daniel 6:23). The heavens were told to open up before Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:4). The fish was asked to release Jonah from its stomach (Jonah 2:11).[144]

This midrash both displays the obedience of nature to God's will and provides a unique perspective on the treatment of Israel by God. The passage displays Israel's special place in the cosmos. That is, the natural order is interrupted in order to protect Israel. Furthermore, this "contract" with nature has been established at the very beginning of creation. When necessary, God interferes with the natural order in order to protect and shelter the people.

The serpent in the story of Adam and Eve is also used to teach moral lessons. Following are midrashim about the reasons why the serpent was more cursed than any other

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[144]Chapter 5, paragraph 5.

beast, and about the punishment it was given as a result of its unseemly behavior. One exegesis reads Genesis 3:1, "now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts," in light of Ecclesiastes 1:18, "for as wisdom grows, vexation grows; to increase learning is to increase heartache." Thus it was taught in the name of Rabbi Meir, "According to the greatness of the serpent was his downfall." Because he was "shrewdest of all the wild beasts" (Genesis 3:1), he was "more cursed..." than they (Genesis 3:14). That is to say, "the greater they come, the harder they fall."[145] Despite the fact that this midrash ostensibly deals with the question of why the serpent was more cursed than all of the other beasts, it also makes a statement about human conduct. It shows that people who are wise should know better than to disobey a precept. Therefore, if they do so, they are susceptible to greater punishment than those who are not so enlightened. A double standard is set for them. This idea may indicate a rabbinic understanding that those who are gifted with knowledge should model proper behavior for everybody else.

This unit has illustrated the Rabbis' conviction that one can discern correct patterns for human behavior from close attention to the Torah's depiction of the ways of God and nature. These examples, in a sense, put human beings in their place. That is, if God and/or the natural world can behave in a certain way, it is appropriate for human beings

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[145]Chapter 19, paragraph 1.

to act similarly. They should perform deeds of lovingkindness and treat one another with proper respect. They should humble themselves and be obedient to God's will. In short, they should learn to follow in the footsteps of God and God's creation.

Shabbat

The observance of Sabbath assumes an important place in the world of the Rabbis. Beresheit Rabbah devotes over a chapter to the exegesis Genesis 2:3, "...And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done." The Rabbis recall many ways in which Shabbat should be honored by human beings. This subject receives special distinction because of its importance for social and physical harmony in the cosmic scheme of things. It is also important because of its prominence at the very end of creation. Here, too, God "models" human ritual activities (or cessation from working). Shabbat is more than simply rest. Rather, it is also a time where "special" activities take place.

For example, Genibah and the Rabbis explain the cosmic significance of the Sabbath by explaining the meaning of Genesis 2:2, "On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing...." What work did God do on the seventh day? God created the Sabbath. Genibah compares this to a king who makes a bridal chamber. He plasters it, paints it,

and fixes it up, yet, after all of his efforts, it still lacks something. A bride is needed to make the chamber complete. So it is that God created the entire world. Yet, after all of creation, it still lacked something. The Sabbath was needed to make it complete. The Rabbis compared the Sabbath to a king who made a ring. After its completion, it still lacked something: it needed the signet. Likewise, after the completion of the world, it still appeared to be lacking something: it needed the Sabbath. Therefore, what God "created" on the Sabbath day that finished the work of creation was the Sabbath itself.[146]

These Rabbis point to the Sabbath as the pinnacle of creation. It serves as more than simply a day of rest. Without the Sabbath, humanity and all of creation remained incomplete. The Sabbath itself was created on the seventh day as the "signet" in the crown of creation. Since the Sabbath was the finishing touch, it becomes a symbol of wholeness and completeness. As such, the day deserves proper respect and sanctification.

There are many examples of how "God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy..." One explanation is that God blessed the Sabbath by allowing for additional expenditure--food, drink, etc. That is, Rabbi Jose, son of Rabbi Hanina, states that a blessing is written concerning every day on which supply diminishes, so that no loss is felt as a

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[146]Chapter 10, paragraph 9.

result. For example, God blessed the birds and fish, which were created on the fifth day. Although people kill these animals for food, their numbers on earth do not decrease because God provided for the replenishment of nature. Likewise, in regard to the seventh day, Rabbi Leazar said, in the name of Rabbi Jose, that this means that those with digestive problems who could not eat all of the lavish Shabbat food would be blessed with the ability to eat it. Also, the additional expenditure for food appropriate for the Sabbath would be recompensed by God, such that Sabbath observance would not cause impoverishment.[147]

This midrash seems to be a lesson for humanity that God will help to maintain a homeostasis in the world. When the food supply has diminished, God will ensure that it is refilled. Because God has blessed the seventh day, no one shall lack on this day. No wealth shall be diminished as a result of providing for additional food to observe a day of rest.

Yet, this idea does not anticipate problems such as overpopulation or humanity's overutilization of natural resources. Today, in fact, we must worry about such things. We are not assured that the necessary resources will not diminish. This, again, brings up the idea that everything should be in its proper measure. Perhaps these problems confront us today only because human desires have exceeded the abundance of natural resources.

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[147]Chapter 11, paragraph 3.

Another example of how God rewards Sabbath observance with a blessing of prosperity is a story told by Rabbi Hiyya son of Abba about the time that he was invited to Laodicea, a town in Syria. The hosts brought out a table full of all that had been created on the first six days of creation. A child sat in the middle, reciting Psalm 24:1. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof..." He did this so that the owner would not become conceited. Everything--wealth, prosperity, the world--belongs to God, not human beings. Therefore, people should not think that they own the food that they eat. In fact, they do not own any part of the physical world.

When Rabbi Hiyya son of Abba asked how the man got all of his wealth, he replied, "I was a butcher, and whenever I saw a good animal, I set it aside for Shabbat." Thus, the man paid deference to God and God's ownership of the world. This, in fact, is the road to wealth and prosperity.[148] God saw to it that the man and his family would receive a goodly portion as a result of the butcher's obedience to God. By setting aside the best of all of his animals, the butcher was provided a life of plenty.

Other ways that God blessed the Sabbath are noted as well. Rabbis Ishmael, Nathan, and Isaac suggest that God blessed the Sabbath by providing the Israelites with an extra portion of manna on the sixth day (i.e., by providing the Israelites with food in advance, it would not be

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[148]Chapter 11, paragraph 4.

necessary for manna to fall on the Sabbath). Rabbi Huna, on the other hand, claims that God blessed the Sabbath with special clothing. Even if we cannot afford to don all new clothes, our clothing must include at least one special thing in order to honor the Sabbath. Some say that God blessed the Sabbath through light. Rabbi Eliezar makes this claim because there was a time when a lamp of his was lit for the Sabbath eve, but it still burned at the close of Sabbath day. A second understanding of the blessing of light says that God blessed the Sabbath with the light of a person's face. That is, this light is different on Shabbat than it is the rest of the week. Alternatively, God blessed the Sabbath by allowing the primal light (i.e., the light created on the first day before the creation of the sun and the moon) to remain in place throughout the first Sabbath, removing it only at the close of the Sabbath. This was a gift because Adam's sin, which occurred on Sabbath eve, had warranted the removal of the primal light. Yet, because of God's blessing, it remained until the close of the Sabbath.

The continuation of this tradition also signifies God's blessing. As night fell, Adam became terrified. Therefore, God showed Adam how to make light for himself. God made him find two flints, which Adam struck against each other until light came forth. Adam then pronounced a blessing over the light, as Scripture suggests, "If I say, 'Surely darkness will envelop me, but night will provide me with light'" (Psalms 139:11). This contextualization of the Psalms verse

is achieved by reading the word בעדי (on my behalf) as "my Eden." That is, the night produced light in his (Adam's) Eden.[149] This shows God's mercy towards Adam, the world, and the Sabbath. Although Adam sinned, God still provided him with a path towards light as the Sabbath departed. This, in a symbolic sense, seems to indicate that God is showing Adam the way towards a more righteous life. That is, God is helping Adam to "see the light." Also, God's behavior is (in part) paradigmatic since this is how human beings should behave as well--with forbearance and compassion.

Furthermore, the midrash is an etiology for the custom of lighting a flame at the end of the Sabbath and reciting a blessing. One Rabbi mentions that this agrees with Samuel who explains that fire is used for Havdalah because the first fire, that made by Adam, was kindled at this time. Rabbi Huna, in Rab's name, and Rabbi Abbahu in the name of Rabbi Johanan add that a blessing is recited over the fire which is lit at the conclusion of Yom Kippur because no fire had been lit that entire day.[150]

There are other customs derived from the scriptural account of Shabbat. For instance, the rabbinic prohibition against mourning on Shabbat is derived from juxtaposing Genesis 2:3 with Proverbs 10:22, "It is the blessing of the

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[149]Chapter 11, paragraph 2.

[150]Ibid.

Lord that enriches, and no grief can increase it." The two verses are linked by the root ברך, meaning "bless." Therefore, the first part of the intersecting verse, "the blessing of the Lord," is said to refer to Shabbat, while the second part, "no grief can increase it," is taken as referring to the process of mourning. The latter assertion is substantiated by II Samuel 19:3, "...the king was grieving over his son." Therefore, grieving is not allowed on the Sabbath.[151]

Yet, not all customs take on the same significance for all people. Rabbi Ishmael, son of Rabbi Jose, once asked Rabbi why the Babylonians, the people living in the land of Israel, and the people living in the Diaspora each merit a life of wealth. Rabbi answers by saying that the Babylonians receive this because of their dedication to Torah study, the people of Israel because of their giving of tithes, and the people of the Diaspora because of their observance of the Sabbath and festivals. Each group of people earned a long life of wealth through their honor of God's laws that they performed.[152] This midrash claims that the deeds are deemed appropriate to the place. Only those living in Israel must separate tithes. Outside Israel, rabbinic study existed only in Babylonia. The rest of the Diaspora achieves merit through Sabbath observance.

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[151]Chapter 11, paragraph 1.

[152]Chapter 11, paragraph 4.

There is, indeed, great merit in observing the Sabbath, for those who do so are able to merit the world without measure. Rabbi Johanan cites examples of this in the name of Rabbi Jose. First, since Abraham was not commanded to observe the Sabbath, he was only able to receive the good of the world in limited measure. This claim is substantiated by Genesis 13:17, "Up, walk about the land, through its length and its breadth, for I give it to you." That is, he was only given a piece of land, and not the entire world.

On the other hand, Jacob did honor the Sabbath, as it says, "Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem...and he encamped before the city" (Genesis 33:18).[153] Therefore, God gave him the entire world without measure, as it is written, "Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth. You shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south" (Genesis 28:4).[154]

Although the midrashim illustrate how God and humans alike give honor to the Sabbath, a different behavior is mandated for humans than for God regarding when cessation from labor must begin before the Sabbath. The Rabbis derive this lesson from Genesis 2:3, "On the seventh day God finished the work..." (i.e., that God was able to "work" on the Sabbath). Rabbi Ishmael son of Rabbi Jose suggests that

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[153]This is taken by the Rabbis to imply that he stayed throughout the Sabbath.

[154]Chapter 11, paragraph 7.

this is similar to the way that a man can strike a hammer on an anvil, raising it while it is still day, and putting it down at nightfall. That is, there is only a split second which divides the day from the night. Rabbi Simeon son of Yohai comments, by contrast, that in the case of human beings, who cannot discern exact minutes or hours, additional time must be added when moving from the profane to the sacred. That is, cessation from labor must begin before the actual start of the Sabbath. However, since God can determine time precisely, and enter the Sabbath by a hair's breadth, no extra time is needed.[155]

A rather long midrash, cited to demonstrate the significance of Shabbat to those evil people who question its honor, also addresses the difference between how God and humans can act with regard to Shabbat. Tinneus Rufus, the wicked Roman provincial governor, once asked Rabbi Akiba why Shabbat is different from all of the other days of the week. Rabbi Akiba responds rhetorically by asking him why Tinneus Rufus was different from all other men. He answered by saying that the king wished to honor him. "So, this day," replies Rabbi Akiba, "the Holy One wanted to honor." When Tinneus Rufus asks for proof of this, Rabbi Akiba provides a number of examples of how the physical world is different on Shabbat than on the other days of the week. Yet, Tinneus Rufus demands that if God truly honors the Sabbath, no winds should blow and no rains should fall on that day!

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[155]Ibid

Rabbi Akiba responds by saying, "Woe to that man, for it is like one who carries an object four cubits." In other words, since the whole world is God's private domain, God is exercising the right to carry within that domain.[156] God, in fact, knows how to honor the Sabbath. Human beings, on the other hand, have stricter restrictions because they are liable to profane it.

There is another comment about the use of the word "work" in the description of the Sabbath. Since God does not actually labor in the world in the same way that humans labor (i.e., with toil and hard effort), why does Scripture talk about God "working?" Rabbi Berekiah explains that this wording is used for the sake of reward and punishment, that is, in order to punish the evil ones who destroy the world that had been created, as it were, "through hard labor" and to reward the righteous ones who help to maintain the world that was created, as it were, "with toil."[157]

God's action in creating the world is anthropomorphized (i.e., described in terms of human effort and laboriousness) only in order to teach the value that God places on the world and God's expectation that human beings should so value it as well. The word "work" (i.e., labor, toil) is used of God in order that human beings might understand God's value system in terms of their own experience. Since

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[156]Chapter 11, paragraph 5.

[157]Chapter 10, paragraph 9; This is also mentioned in Mishna Avot 5:1.

people know the value of their own work, this word is used of God, lest they think that the world was cheaply or easily made and thereby devalue it. God additionally holds people accountable for their actions. The righteous, who do whatever they can to preserve the earth, will be rewarded. Likewise, the wicked, who debase the earth, will be punished.

The Rabbis also called attention to the final phrase of Genesis 2:3, which literally means, "...because on it God rested from all of the work which God created to make, (כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלהים לעשות)" (i.e., this implies that God rested in order to make something). According to the Rabbis, God rested in order to make tranquillity, ease, peacefulness, and quietness (i.e., cosmic rest). Rabbi Levi said, in the name of Rabbi Jose son of Nehorai: "All the time that God's hands were working on expanding the things created in the world, they kept expanding. When God's hands rested, they too were allowed to rest. As it is written, '...and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath and hallowed it' (Exodus 20:11)." Therefore, a day of rest was given to all the earth, that when God rests, so does all else.[158] The earth is conceived here as a dynamic organism. When God "works," the universe expands. Conversely, when God "rests," so does the world. This implies that God's creative activity keeps the

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[158]Ibid.

world active, and when God "rests," the whole world does the same.

A final comment about the idea that work was performed on the seventh day, made by Rabbi Phineas in the name of Rabbi Oshaya, explains that, although God rested on the seventh day from the work of creating the world, nonetheless God's work with the wicked and the righteous did not cease. God works with both groups by showing each of them their character. How scripturally do we know that this act is called work? In regard to the punishment of the wicked, Jeremiah 50:25 tells us: "The Lord has opened His armory and brought out the weapons of His wrath, for that is the task of my Lord God of Hosts...." Likewise, in regard to the reward for the righteous, Psalms 31:20 tells us: "How abundant is the good that You have in store for those who fear You, that You do in the full view of men for those who take refuge in You."[159]

Here the infinitive לעשות is translated as "to do," suggesting ongoing or future activity on the part of God with respect to exacting judgment on human beings. After the six days of creation, God rested from all of this work. However, God did not rest from the job of rewarding the righteous or punishing the wicked. God does not create the physical world and then withdraw from it. Rather, God's providence over human beings and their moral behavior is ongoing and is considered to be "work." Those who are

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[159]Chapter 11, paragraph 10.

righteous will receive their just reward, and those who are evil will be punished.

This section illustrated the various ways in which God hallowed the Sabbath, as well as the ways that humans can do the same. There are, however, some differences between the way that God and human beings can do this. God, who can be more precise than humans, is able to enter the Sabbath at an exact moment. Human beings, who are less precise, need to allow extra time so that they should not profane it. The main idea is that all should give the Sabbath day the proper measure of honor, on account of its cosmic significance.

Conclusion

The textual analysis has served systematically to show how the Rabbis discerned norms of behavior from the creation and early history of the world. It was broken down into six sub-sections, each illustrating a specific way that this interrelationship can be seen. By dividing the presentation in this way, one can now more easily make sense of this material when arranging it for a classroom, as we will discuss in the following chapter.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATION

It seems that תורה שבעל פה, i.e., the literature of rabbinic tradition, is one area that is not widely taught in American Reform Jewish education. Perhaps one reason is that Reform Jews do not believe this material to be sacred. Another may be the fact that the Hebrew may be too difficult for most people to study. However, given that there is a wide range of this type of literature that has been translated into English, it might be the case that people simply have not been exposed to such a body of literature. Furthermore, many might find the midrashic mode itself to be very difficult. This is because of the artificial manner in which the Rabbis manipulate the text. This type of interpretation is seldom practiced today.

Overcoming these barriers is a great challenge in light of contemporary culture. It involves a lot of planning on the part of the Jewish scholar, the educator, and the teacher. Bodies of literature must be analyzed in terms of their ability to be read and appropriated in the modern day. In addition, people need to learn about the availability of this genre of literature.

Reform Jewish education must do more than impart "Jewish knowledge." Rather, it must show people why and how Judaism can be an important component of their lives. This is because of the changed relationship to Judaism for many American Reform Jews. In the past, Judaism was inseparable from one's identity. Today, Jewish educators have to work hard to make Jewish ideas fit into the schemata of American secular life.

Today, our world has forces which detract from the ability to transmit Jewish ideas and values. One is the fact that we live in a multicultural society. America is often termed a "melting pot" because of the number of different peoples who have somehow found their home in this country. While cultural diversity is beneficial in many respects, it also contributes to the breakdown of the Jewish community.

This is due, at least in part, to secularization. Peter Berger notes that "by secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."[160] Once religion is not "the" major factor in guiding and maintaining a person's identity, it is hard for it to remain central at all. Therefore, people need to be convinced of its relevance and significance, rather than taking these things for granted.

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[160]Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 107.

The secularization of a society has many implications. One is the widespread study of subjects which have their cognitive basis in western secular empiricism such as history, science, philosophy and mathematics. In fact, the popular study of secular subjects has turned the way that we look at Jewish tradition inside out. Before, nobody ever questioned the source or legitimacy of the Torah. Now, through disciplines such as biblical criticism and philosophy, every word and every mark is questioned. In addition, the biblical story of creation has to contend with the scientific study of evolution. Furthermore, theology is subjected to the questions generated by Greek and modern philosophy. As Erik Schwimmer suggests, "Environments, social, political, and economic systems, technologies and rules of behavior all obviously influence the system of beliefs and practices that will be current in any society."[161]

Although these variables are both beneficial and important for all cultures, they can also have a number of drawbacks. That is, once one component is deemed to be irrelevant or of lesser importance, it is often tossed aside in favor of another more modern theory or mode of expression. Thus, a culture often progresses by discarding parts of the past.

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[161]Erik Schwimmer, "Religion in Culture," People In Culture: A Survey of Cultural Anthropology (New York: JF Bergin Publishers, Inc., 1980), p. 490.

This type of exercise is tragic because Judaism has always relied on the wisdom of the past to pave the way for the future. In a sense, Reform Jewish Americans often have lost sight of what it is that they are reforming. Because they generally have little knowledge of Jewish tradition, they cannot possibly know whether or not this literature is of any value in their lives today.

In a multimedia society such as ours, Jewish knowledge and values can be taught in ways that the Rabbis never imagined. Television and radio, as well as books and periodicals, can be used as vehicles whereby Jewish tradition can regain its place in society. Technology need not detract from religion. Rather, it can greatly enhance it. We, like the Rabbis, are a literate people who can develop ways to make our ideas known by the most creative and effective means possible.

Some of the issues which face twentieth-century America are not the same as those which confronted the rabbinic world. They probably never conceived of the threat of a nuclear Holocaust, overpopulation, or environmental destruction. However, they were concerned, as are we, with a certain sense of order and harmony both in the natural and the social world. Like ourselves, they were concerned with ways in which people can live their lives in upright and morally appropriate ways as well as how to come to terms with the problem of evil. Furthermore, both they and we are

interested in questions of theology, theodicy, cosmology, and cosmogony.

Although we live in a different time and place, the midrash can speak to us and to our concerns. David Stern closes his introductory remarks about his anthology of "Rabbinic fantasies" by saying that "we need not believe in them fully in order to recover these narratives for ourselves and learn what they can teach us about our past and about an aspect of Jewish creativity that some assert never existed before the breakdown of Jewish tradition in the modern period."[162] Besides giving us helpful insight on how they reasoned and dealt with similar problems, they also provide us with a viable method for reacting to new, previously unheard-of issues. It is there for the taking if we but open our eyes to their pearls of wisdom.

The participants in a faculty seminar sponsored by the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education decided that "a proper Jewish education would help develop human beings whose lives as individuals and community members are guided by the insights of Jewish tradition." They further explain that the way to accomplish such an end is to turn the philosophy which is implicit in Jewish texts into what they term "life forces." That is, it is not enough to simply read the texts. Rather, the literature must be rearranged

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[162]David Stern and Mark Jay Mirsky, eds. Rabbinic Fantasies (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 28.

so that it can enrich the teaching of modern values and ethics.[163]

Indeed, midrash can assume a viable place in Jewish education of today. One way to do this is by viewing it as myth. Schwimmer explains myth as "the teller's representation of the real conditions of existence."[164] Perhaps a more complete definition of the term is the one offered by Webster's Dictionary. It describes myth as "a real or fictional story, recurring theme, or character type that appeals to the consciousness of a people by embodying its cultural ideals or by giving expression to deep, commonly felt emotions."[165] Regardless of the exact definition, mythmaking is a medium whereby a culture can systematically and creatively express its ideas and ideals. Nahum Sarna reinforces this conception by explaining that myth "can be a vehicle for the expression of ideas that activate human behavior, that reflect and validate the distinctive forms and qualities of a civilization, that signify a dynamic attitude to the universe and embody a vision of society."[166]

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[163]Seymour Fox, "Introduction," From the Scholar to the Classroom: Translating Jewish Tradition into Curriculum, ed. Seymour Fox and Geraldine Rosenfield (New York: Melton Research Center for Jewish Education, 1980), p. xv.

[164]Schwimmer, p. 500.

[165]Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), p. 782.

[166]Nahum Sarna, Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel, (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), p. 6.

The Judaic myth is unique in that it has been transmitted as a sacred document for thousands of years. The original myth was embedded in the Hebrew Bible. Subsequently, its relevance was maintained through the aid of various exegetical works. In fact, many of these layers of Jewish mythmaking have survived intact until today.

These layers become obvious when looking at the vast amount of literature which was derived from this original source. The Bible itself has been carefully copied, as well as translated into many different languages. Various books of commentary have been generated such as the apocryphal and the pseudipigraphical works, the various corpora of midrash, the Mishna, the Talmud, and the codes. All of these works seek to clarify, decode and apply the Bible, which served as a source for deriving both legal and moral standards. Although the methods and the details may have changed, the ultimate source has not.

What is particularly striking about the traditional study of the Hebrew myth is that there was no question about the source of the material. That is, while there have been many books written in the modern day which examine the ways in which the biblical creation myth, for example, resembles other Near Eastern creation myths, the Rabbis did not spend their time trying to speculate on the source of various motifs of the narrative. Rather, they were more interested in the values and lessons which they could derive from the text. As far as they were concerned, the Bible was a sacred

document which had been handed down to them from generation to generation dating all of the way back to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Why do people rely on myths? Schwimmer explains that "myths have to do, first of all, with the experience and exploration of uncontrollable forces in nature."[167] They are a means of explaining that which seems to be inexplicable. They serve to synthesize world view and ethos.

Reform Judaism of today is like the Judaism of the Rabbis in that it contemplates the same myth, i.e., it operates with the same set of symbols. That is, regardless of whether or not people believe the Torah to be the revealed word of God, it still has been handed down as valued tradition from generation to generation. However, it must be noted that it is not always valued by moderns in the specific ways that it was by medievals and the Rabbis. Still, Jews of all ages have been linked by this very book. In order to make it relevant, every generation has the challenge of transforming the myth in such a way that it speaks to their contemporary circumstances.

The Rabbis did this through midrash. Although this medium can tell us a lot about rabbinic culture, it must be understood that "mythical information, although faithfully transmitted for hundred and sometimes thousands of years, was not in fact a reliable chronicle of deeds or customs of

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[167]Erik Schwimmer, p. 505.

the distant past."[168] It transmits, rather, cultural ideals. The Rabbis preached these ideas to the common people. Nevertheless, there is no recollection of whether or not they were actually followed.

Reform Judaism also perpetuates the biblical myth in a number of ways. The rabbi uses the sermon as a means to convey biblical interpretation, and Reform Jewish educators have integrated storytelling and "contemporary midrash" into their curriculums. Yet, the Hebrew myth has rarely been contemplated by individual Reform Jews outside the synagogue. It seems as if many Reform Jewish lay people have no means whereby they can obtain the tools necessary to foster their own ideals in a similar manner. These skills can, however, be enriched through the study of Bible and Rabbinic midrash. By contemplating these texts, those who are lacking these skills can be shown a very old, yet very powerful way of thinking.

Beresheit Rabbah can be an effective source for this type of Jewish education precisely because it does illustrate the way in which the biblical myth was perpetuated and transformed. One of the primary goals of this type of literature was to address contemporary issues through the lens of the Bible. The Rabbis, too, seemed to have some concern over how to keep the ancient literature relevant in the modern day. Therefore, in a sense, we Reform Jewish professionals have a shared mission. That is,

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[168]Schwimmer, p. 500.

we, like the ancient Rabbis, are trying to move Judaism forward while retaining (and, perhaps transforming) that which is both relevant and important from the past.

Various conclusions can be drawn about rabbinic culture from the textual analysis. The midrashic style indicates that the Rabbis were literate people. They expressed their ideas by means of biblical interpretation and storytelling. One of their goals seems to have been to increase their knowledge of divine processes and purposes in the world through an inferential, analogical, and associative method of reading the biblical text. Another seems to be to illustrate how value-concepts can be both read into and taken out of (i.e., discovered in) the biblical text.

For the Rabbis, the cosmic order could be discerned (however problematically) in their current life situations. Therefore, the biblical story of creation was a useful means for teaching contemporary values to the people at large. As Max Kadushin suggests, "the Rabbis trained the folk by means of stories in which God's love and justice were organismically interrelated with concepts like that of charity, deeds of loving-kindness and others so often concretized in day-to-day living."[169] In other words, divine attributes are related to, and should be embodied in, human conduct. It seems that the Rabbis' ideas of proper behavior assumed greater significance when seen in this light. That is, by "projecting" their social and cultural

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[169]Max Kadushin, The Rabbinic Mind, p. 141.

issues on earth to the realm of the cosmos, the Rabbis linked human action with Divine will and future restoration.

However, because the people did not live in a world where Jewish ideas were universally accepted, the Rabbis had to take their arguments a step farther. In a comment about religion and social values, Clifford Geertz tells us that "the force of a religion in supporting social values rests...on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as the forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients." Therefore, according to Geertz's contention, the Rabbis had to do more than show the folk how their ideas of social order were pre-ordained by God. Rather, they also had to contend with other ideas which were prominent in their time. They had to argue why both the Gnostics and the gentiles were wrong about their conceptions of God and the world. In order to do so, they had to show why their mode of thinking was correct. For the Rabbis, this is accomplished by revealing the many truths which are implicit in the Torah (i.e., by showing how these truths can be derived from the Torah through the act of interpretation). They know and understand the validity of Torah because this is believed to be God's divine medium of communication.

The behavior of both God and the natural world was made intelligible to the masses by projecting human qualities onto them. This, of course, was done with the understanding that there is an unequal relationship between God and human

beings. That is, humans are completely subordinate to the will of God.

Furthermore, the Rabbis had to demonstrate how we know that it was the one God, Adonai, who created the world out of divine goodness and beneficence (as opposed to some malevolent Gnostic demiurge). They did this by showing how Scripture indicates that, through divine attributes of mercy and justice, God ensures that harmony and balance will be maintained in the world. This often happens through natural agents of divine providence. Those who are upright and deserving will be rewarded, while those who are not are punished. This experience gives some reason to believe that both the righteous and the wicked will eventually receive their just desserts and that there is an interrelationship of all things. In the fullness of time, God will restore and redeem all creation. The road to restoration can be sought by following the example of the Jewish people who were specifically chosen to carry out this task. They are the ones who were given the Torah as a means of learning what is expected of them, as well as all of humanity. Over time, all will see that the way of Torah is the way of truth.

As we have seen, these ideas were illustrated over and over again throughout the course of the midrash. Although the amount of data generated from the biblical verses is quite large, one finds that the number of concerns is actually quite small. This became clearer by rearranging

the relevant texts so that they were grouped thematically rather than in their order of redaction. The entire thirty-eight chapters of material which expounded on the creation and origins of the natural and social world could be divided into six major categories.

The midrash suggests issues which still preoccupy people today. There is still concern over the origins of the world. People still contemplate the order and structure of the universe. In addition, issues of reward and punishment continue to remain relevant today. Along with this is the question of why the righteous sometimes suffer and the wicked go unpunished. Furthermore, there are still questions as to such issues as why natural disasters occur and what constitutes proper behavior.

On the other hand, there are times when the value-concepts being addressed differed considerably from those of the modern day. For instance, Reform Judaism today does not emphasize future reward, punishment, or restoration after death. Instead, it advocates proper conduct in the here and now. Also, some of the views about women seem to be antiquated. They suggest a time when women were not allowed all of the freedoms that they are allowed today. It is as if they had a certain subordinated place carved out for them in society. Furthermore, even the most universal biblical narratives, those of the first two <u>parsheot</u>, are understood as relating directly to the people of Israel. The Rabbis speak as if the only purpose for the world to be created is

for the Jewish people to carry out God's divine will. This notion is implicit (and sometimes explicit) in the Bible as well. Yet, many American Reform Jews do not seem to value this special nature of Israel in the same way that it once was valued. Rather, there is often a more generalized approach and concern for all people.

This is only a preliminary catalog of similarities and differences. In fact, if the midrash is to speak to the individual, it must be contemplated by the individual. It is up to each person to respond to those ideas which are meaningful for him or her.

One can see this by studying the midrashic process itself. That is, there is not just one opinion cited. Rather, midrash allows for variety as well as individuality. One Rabbi is free to speak in the name of another. Yet, at the same time, he is free to add his own thoughts to the words which he is citing. Likewise, a single paragraph might have several different opinions. The only criterion is that an opinion be substantiated through the use of accepted hermeneutical principles. Furthermore, there is very seldom a time when a claim is made without being followed by a prooftext. One part of the Bible is used to strengthen that which was ascertained from another. Sometimes it is the co-reading of the two texts that yields the insight.

Yet, as stated earlier, the individual Reform Jew today may not have the means to give the midrash such

individualized attention. Therefore, a curriculum which can attend to the development of these skills needs to be created. In order to do this, I would identify three areas of concentration: myth and culture, midrash, and values. Furthermore, each of these areas needs to be sensitive to the various cultural differences between Reform Jewish America and the rabbinic period as revealed in Beresheit Rabbah.

The first area, "myth and culture," should be explored both generally and specifically. That is, there needs to be some attention given to the creation and formulation of both cultures and myths. The curriculum needs to facilitate an understanding of why these are integral parts of human existence and what can be learned by studying them. For instance, in American culture one can find myths in literature, myths in advertising, myths in politics, and myths in religion. By starting with the more familiar cultural myths, the discussion can eventually progress to an understanding of how the Bible can be viewed as a myth.

The second area is "midrash." The textual analysis provided in the previous chapter shows how the myth progresses through interpretation. In other words, the Rabbis showed how their contemporary issues and concerns could be filtered through the lens of the past (and vice versa). In studying a number of midrashim which fall under each of the six categories, one can facilitate a new understanding and a new appreciation for both the problems

and the solutions of today's issues and the various ways that biblical interpretation can facilitate this process.

Furthermore, the midrash, Beresheit Rabbah, can be used as a model whereby new interpretations can be created. Just as the Rabbis were able to generate homiletical and exegetical interpretations of the Bible, so, too, can Reform Jews of today create such materials. That is, the genre of midrash need not be reserved for the Rabbis of the past. Instead, it can be a vibrant source of wisdom in the present. As Ben Ezra Green states in his introduction to the teacher's guide of The Rabbis' Bible, "the Bible is open-ended, the text is open-ended, and the midrash points the ways, creating modern relevance out of ancient Scripture."[170]

Therefore, the third area of exploration is the values themselves. What are the issues according to Reform Jewish Americans? Can they be addressed through the use of the biblical and rabbinic myths? If so, how do these sources address the issues? What conclusions can be drawn?

In a sense, the second and third areas are integrated. This is because the midrash should serve as a model for contemporary study. At times, Reform Jews might accept the ideas which were put forth by the ancient Rabbis. However, there may also be instances where their ideas will be rejected because of a difference in world-view and/or ethos.

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[170]Ben Ezra Green, The Rabbis' Bible, (New York: Behrman House Inc., 1969), p. 6.

While the student body of this hypothetical curriculum is Reform Jewish America at large it must be understood that it is difficult at best to create a curriculum for such a wide range of individuals. That is, although they may have Reform Jewish affiliation in common, there are probably a hundred other criteria which exemplify their differences. Therefore, an actual curriculum must be catered to the specific concerns of the class.

In fact, Joseph Schwab mentions that there are five "areas of experience" which must be considered when developing a curriculum centered around Jewish tradition. These areas are: the text as well as other relevant subject matter, the students, the community, the teachers, and the curriculum-making process.[171] Because these areas are so diverse, it is often the case that a number of different professionals have to work together in creating a suitable curriculum. The entire process involves open communication with the various members of a curriculum-writing committee, as well as clear-cut and agreed upon goals in order to make the process both effective and worth while.

Although time and space prohibit the creation of an entire curriculum in the framework of the thesis, a preliminary syllabus for a semester-long course, as well as a few illustrative lesson plans are included. The syllabus is generated directly out of the material discussed

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[171]Joseph Schwab, "Translating Scholarship into Curriculum," in From the Scholar to the Classroom, pp. 4-5.

previously in the thesis. It is geared towards high school students, possibly even a tenth grade confirmation class. Each lesson is designed to be approximately 1 1/2 to two hours in length. The first half of a given lesson should pertain directly to the midrash(im) relevant to a given topic, and the second half considers the topic as it applies to today. The samples which follow are meant to illustrate the method and rationale for such a teaching style.

PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS

Week 1: Introduction to Course; What is "cosmology" and what does it have to do with "conduct?"

Week 2: Myth and Midrash

Week 3: Torah as Intermediary Between God and Humanity

Week 4: Torah as Intermediary Between God and Humanity (pt. II)

Week 5: The Unique Position of Human Beings in the World

Week 6: The Unique Position of Human Beings in the World (pt. II)

Week 7: Purposes of the Natural World

Week 8: Purposes of the Natural World (pt. II)

Week 9: Divine Providence, Free Will, and the Problem of Evil

Week 10: Divine Providence, Free Will, and the Problem of Evil (pt. II)

Week 11: God and the Natural World as Exemplars for Human Conduct

Week 12: God and the Natural World as Exemplars for Human Conduct (pt. II)

Week 13: Shabbat

Week 14: Shabbat (pt. II)

Week 15: Wrap-up; Where do we go from here?

RATIONALE FOR SYLLABUS

Given that a semester-long syllabus would probably be structured in this way, I, as a teacher, would only be able to touch briefly on the various topics that have been analyzed in detail in the earlier portion of the thesis. Therefore, I need to choose ideas which seem to be most central to the Rabbis as well as most congenial to class discussion. Furthermore, it would be helpful if one topic was related to the next so that the course would progress in a logical and coherent way. Of course, given the nature of the material, many midrashim could overlap into more than one thematic group. If time permits, topics could and should be discussed more thoroughly.

LESSON PLAN

WEEK: 2

TOPIC: Myth and Midrash

GOALS:

1. Define the word "myth"
2. Understand the importance of myth and how myth functions in a society.
3. Evaluate various myths of "cosmology."
4. Consider possible rationales for Rabbinic midrash.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES: Students will:

1. State and group into categories what they already know about "myths" as an introduction to further study. (Concept diagnosis)
2. Use information gathered in Concept diagnosis to create a definition of the word "myth."
3. Compare students' definition to several other "textbook" definitions in order to come up with a single working definition of the term.
4. Compare and contrast the myths presented in three different "cosmology" myths. (Greek, Near Eastern, Bible)
6. Discuss the reasons why midrash might be an important addendum to a myth (i.e. the Bible).

PROCEDURE:

1. Set Induction: " In order to understand the study of midrash, we must first understand how the Rabbis came to their midrashic style. Although they did not see this at the time, their work was actually the perpetuation of a myth. While we'll be getting to the specific myth that the Rabbis used in articulating their ideas of moral conduct, we begin with the concept of 'myth' itself and how 'myths' function in our society. Let's begin with a brain-storming session."

2. "What words or ideas come to your mind when you think of the word myth?" (Write all responses on the board. Allow students time to think.)

3. "Do you see any of these ideas to be closely related in a way that they can be grouped together?" (Group words).

4. "Can you think of a title for each of these groups of words?" (Add titles to groups)

5. "Given the various categories of "myth" that we have just compiled, let's see if we can come up with a working definition of the word." (Create a definition). "Now let's compare our definition with some that already exist." (Hand out definitions: Webster's Dictionary, Erik Schwimmer, and Nahum Sarna). (attached) Read definitions aloud and ask students to compare these definitions with the one that they generated. Ask if anybody wants to amend or change the class definition in light of those that they just read. (Record the final definition on poster board and hang in the room for reference.)

6. "Now that we have a working definition of 'myth,' let's see how myth has functioned in various societies. To do this, we are going to look at various cosmology myths. I have selected three...Let's look at each of them." (Choose two ancient creation myths such as that of the Greeks or the Babylonian epic known as "Enuma Elish" to study along with the creation narrative 1:1-2:4a from the Bible.) (Hand out copies of each of the myths for the students to read aloud.)

7. In each case, discuss the following questions:

    1. How does this myth explain the creation of the world?

    2. Is it believable?

    3. What values can be learned from the myth?

    4. Do you think that the myth is helpful for a society that believes in it? Why or why not?

8. "How can a myth be kept alive, i.e. perpetuated, over a long period of time?" (Take answers)

9. Closure: "The ancient Rabbis provide us with one method of how the biblical myth was perpetuated. They did this by making the Bible relevant for them through a unique process of interpretation known as 'midrash.' Over the next several weeks, we are going to study this process as it relates to the biblical account of cosmology. Not only will we be looking at the ways that the Rabbis interpreted the narrative, however. In addition, we will also look at ways that we might continue such a process today."

MATERIALS: Blackboard and chalk or large pad, easel and marker, pens, poster board, cosmology myths, definitions.

(Definitions to be used with part 5 of preceding lesson plan)

MYTH

"The teller's representation of the real conditions of existence."

--Erik Schwimmer, "Religion in Culture," in People In Culture: A Survey of Cultural Anthropology, p. 500

"A real or fictional story, recurring theme, or character type that appeals to the consciousness of a people by embodying its cultural ideals or by giving expression to deep, commonly felt emotions."

--Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary, p. 782

"Myths, then, in the final analysis, have as their subjects the eternal problems of mankind communicated through the medium of highly imaginative language. A myth may be a vital cultural force. It can be a vehicle for the expression of ideas that activate human behaviors, that reflect and validate the distinctive forms and qualities of a civilization, that signify a dynamic attitude to the universe and embody a vision of society."

--Nahum Sarna, Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel, p. 6

LESSON PLAN

WEEK: 9

TOPIC: Divine Providence, Free Will, and the Problem of Evil

GOALS:

1. Express personal ideas about the nature of evil people and what causes people to act in immoral ways.
2. Understand how the Rabbis' explained this nature.
3. React to the Rabbis' explanations and whether or not their ideas are helpful in looking at modern social situations.

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

1. View a news segment or a short movie which depicts an evil person. (The movie "Ambulance" about the Nazis could work well here.)
2. Orally react to the movie or news segment.
3. Read and discuss midrashic ideas about wicked people as presented in midrashim: 8:4, 8:5, 8:8, and 12:15.
4. Discuss the news segment or movie in light of the midrashic ideas.
5. In small groups, react to various situations which involve the nature and/or fate of evil people.
6. Share ideas with class.

PROCEDURE:

1. Set Induction: "Today we are going to look at the question of evil. Specifically, we are going to focus on people who do evil things. Do you think that human evil was supposed to be part of the divine plan? What function, if any, do evil people serve on earth?" "Is there a difference

between being an evil person and doing something that is immoral?" (Ask these questions rhetorically, and return to them after the movie.) "We will begin by watching a short film which shows the reality of evil in our world." (Show movie).

2. React to movie. "Is this an accurate depiction? In what other, possibly more subtle, ways can people act evilly or immorally?" (Continue with questions such as those in number 1 above).

3. "Let's look at some of the midrashim which explain the Rabbis' conception of how and why evil and immoral people came to be placed on earth. Hand out the midrashim and allow the class time to read them on their own. Next, read each one aloud. Discuss what the Rabbi or Rabbis are trying to say and whether or not their ideas can be acceptable and or believable. (See attached for possible discussion questions.)

4. "Do these midrashim give you any insight as to why the person in the movie reacted the way that he did? Are the person's actions justifiable? Why or why not?" (Continue with these types of questions.)

5. "I am going to break you up into small groups to discuss these issues under specific circumstances. One person should jot down notes about the discussion, as well as what your group decides is the correct action to be taken. You can use ideas from the midrashim or ideas of your own. In a few minutes, we will gather together as a class to see what ideas your group has come up with." (Teacher should float during this activity.) (See attached for possible worksheet.)

6. Closure: "Today we have looked at the issues surrounding the presence of evil people in the world. As you saw, these issues directly affect the way that order is maintained in our society. You saw some of the Rabbinic thoughts on the subject, and hopefully you have come up with some ideas of your own."

MATERIALS: VCR, movie or news segment, copies of all of the relevant midrashim in English, worksheet with situations.

Possible Discussion Questions

A. 8:4--"The nature of human beings"

a. What was God's dilemma according to Rabbi Berekiah?

b. How did God solve this dilemma?

c. Do you think that God handled this in the right way? Why or why not?

d. How does Rabbi Hanina explain the creation of Adam?

e. What question is he addressing? (Hint: This has to do with the phrasing of the verse: "Let us make man..." (Genesis 1:26)). How did he answer this question?

f. According to this midrash, what does God tell the ministering angels about the nature of human beings?

g. Why did God withhold information?

h. Are there times when it is appropriate to purposely omit a piece of information?

i. What would have happened if God had not done this? Therefore, was God right or wrong in acting this way?

j. What does the midrash tell us about the nature of human beings?

B. 19:4--"Temptation can cause one's evil inclination to emerge."

a. What does it mean to slander?

b. According to Rabbi Joshua of Siknin, how does the serpent slander God?

c. What is at issue here? (jealousy)

d. Why might this entice Eve to eat the fruit of the tree? What might she be afraid of?

e. Given this argument, would you have done the same thing?

f. What argument does Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simon put into the mouth of the serpent? Is this reasonable?

g. How does this argument show why Eve decided to eat the fruit? (fear)

h. Would you have done the same?

i. How does Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simon explain why Eve ate from the tree?

j. What is at issue here? (power)

k. Might you have acted similarly?

l. What do these three explanations tell you about the nature of evil? What tempts a person to do evil? Can a person have control over the urge to do evil?

C. 3:8--"Everybody is given a chance to repent and change."

a. How does Rabbi Yannai argue that God foresaw the deeds of both the righteous and the wicked? Outline the derivation.

b. Does this line of reasoning seem logical?

c. Notice how he picks up on the fact that the verse says "one day," rather than "first day." What is that "one day" that is being referred to?

d. Why is this day important?

e. What does it say about God? What does it say about the nature of human beings?

f. Do you believe that all people should be afforded this day (i.e., Will people repent and change their ways if given the opportunity to do so?)

Possible Situations Pertaining to Evil or Immoral Actions

A. As an African American top-class athlete, Michael Jordan has become a very popular role model for African American children living in the inner-city of Chicago. Recently, Jordan endorsed a pair of athletic shoes known as "Air Jordans." Because such shoes are considered "cool," all of the children want a pair. In fact, there have been cases reported where children have beaten up or even killed other children in order to obtain a pair.

Decide what the rationale is (if any) for doing evil. Discuss whether or not the action(s) are understandable. Determine what steps should be taken in order to ensure that the negative behavior is stopped?

B. SAT scores help to determine what college you will be able to attend. This decision is a very important one because it may affect subsequent applications for employment or higher education. A case was reported that one person wanted to go to an "ivy league" school so badly that she paid another person to take the test for her. She knew that what she did was wrong, yet she did it anyway.

What prompted the person to act immorally? Are her actions understandable? What should be the consequences of her actions? The national testing center has a rule that all cases of cheating be on public record. Therefore, if they find out that she did this, she might not be able to attend any school. Do you think that the actions of the testing board are appropriate? Should she turn herself in?

C. At midnight, a convicted murderer is scheduled to die in the electric chair. Last night, he made a public apology to all of the people that he wronged. He also made it known that he wished he had an opportunity to show the world that is really very good at heart. He vowed that he would have sought therapy and changed his ways if he was given the opportunity.

Should this opportunity be given to him? Why or why not? What are the alternatives? Is this a fair system of justice? Why or why not? Are there some things for which you cannot repent?

LESSON PLAN

WEEK: 6

TOPIC: Purposes of the Natural World

GOALS:

1. Understand how human beings and the natural world are dependent upon one another.
2. Compare and contrast midrashim which show the dependence that human beings and the natural world have upon one another.
3. Consider ways that class can help to maintain this partnership today.

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

1. Look at some books, periodicals, and/or pamphlets which discuss environmental issues.
2. Discuss the sources of these environmental problems.
3. Compare and contrast their ideas to those of some of the midrashim about this topic (8:6, 13:3, 31:7).
4. Come up with ways that they can help to keep this partnership strong.

PROCEDURE:

1. Set Induction: "Why has there been so much concern over the environment? What is wrong? How do we know that it is wrong to use up what has been given us on earth? Today we are going to look at the some of these environmental issues. In some ways, concern over the environment has become a fad..." (Share some of the latest books about the environment such as 50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth which was put out by the Earth Works Group (Berkeley: Earthworks Press, 1989), as well as pamphlets about concerns such as the rain forest or about groups such as "Green peace.") "What do these say about our world? Can we really make a difference?"

2. "The Rabbis speak about a 'partnership' between human beings and the natural world. This idea can be exemplified by a number of different midrashim. Today we are going to look at a few of these..." (Hand out copies of midrashim.) (See attached for possible discussion questions.)

3. "By reading the midrashim, we are able to see a certain philosophy about the world that we live in. Our role, as well as that of the natural world, seems to be perfectly laid out. Can you accept this philosophy? Does anybody have a different philosophy that they wish to offer?" (Allow time for discussion.)

4. "Given our philosophies, let's see if we can come up with ways that we can help to maintain our partnership with the world. Who has an idea about what we realistically can do?" (Jot down all ideas on the board.)

5. Closure: "Pick two of the ideas that we just came up with (or others if they can think of them). Over the next two weeks, spend some time doing the things that you chose. Record your experiences on a sheet of paper and bring it to class." (Another idea would be to go together as a class to do some environmental project.)

MATERIALS: pamphlets and books about the environment, midrashim, black board, chalk.

Possible Discussion Questions

A. 8:6--"God created the natural world for the sake of human beings."

   a. According to the biblical account of creation, and this midrash, do you think that the world was created in a hasty manner? Why or why not?

   b. How did God create the world?

   c. Does this seem logical? Why or why not?

   d. Would you have created the world any differently?

   e. What is the complaint voiced by the ministering angels?

   f. Knowing what you do about human beings, do you think that they had a good point?

   g. What was God's response?

   h. Do you think that the ministering angels were satisfied with God's answer?

   i. Would you have been satisfied? If not, how might you have pressed the point a bit further?

   j. What does this midrash tell us about the relationship between human beings and the earth?

   k. Does it show any form of hierarchy between human beings and the world?

B. 13:3--"The dependence of the earth, rain, and human beings upon one another"

   a. What does it mean when the Rabbis mention that the "full name of God" was written in conjunction with this statement? (If the students do not know, show them in a Hebrew Bible and explain the Rabbinic notion that the presence of God's attributes of justice and mercy are made known by the name used to designate God. You might want to take just a few minutes to show this using other Biblical verses as well.)

   b. Why was this important? In what ways does rain show God's attribute of justice? In what ways

does it show God's attribute of mercy? (Look specifically at Genesis 2:5).

c. As a class, look up the parallel example that the midrash cites where God's full name is used (Genesis 2:4), according to the midrash. Discuss how these two verses are similar to one another. Why are both names used in this verse?

d. What conjecture does Rabbi Yohai make?

e. Do you agree with his suggestion?

f. How does Rabbi Levi son of Hiyyatha prove that Rabbi Yohai's explanation makes sense?

g. Can you think of a similar wordplay using the English language?

h. What are the implications of the midrash?

C. 31:7--"When human beings are sinful, the earth is destroyed."

a. Read Genesis 6 in English. Focus on the fact that God is about to destroy the entire world because of human sin.

b. Do you think that this is right? Why or why not?

c. Read the midrash. Point out that this focuses specifically on 6:13.

d. What is the first point of information given to us by the Rabbis?

e. Is their point of clarification important? What is it really trying to tell us?

f. The Rabbis give us an analogy which shows why the earth was to be destroyed along with human beings. What was this analogy? Does it make sense?

g. Can you think of an analogy that might express the same point?

h. What are the implications of this passage?

i. Do you think that the earth is destroyed because of human action? In what sense?

CONCLUSION

The midrashim that are generated from the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis are many and varied. They are illustrative of just how rich and full of information the Bible can be. In researching this project, I found that worldview and ethos do, indeed, affect one's thoughts about cosmology and conduct. Yet, in a sense, I also found that these issues are perennial. This being the case, I was pleased to discover that it is possible to look at biblical interpretation from a different time and place and to use it as a model for further inquiry.

I began this project by recording all of the instances where the midrash reported the interrelationship between the biblical account of the creation of the world and the social order as these appeared in the text itself. The rationale for doing this was so that I did not distance the midrashim too far from their biblical sources. I found, however, that the material became too dense and cumbersome for those who truly wished to use it for pedagogical purposes. Furthermore, there have been scores of translations made of the text itself. I would not be adding

too much to the study of midrash by simply retelling them, even if this process included some analysis as I went along.

In order to further the study of the text, I decided to divide the information according to themes. I found that the broad topic, "Cosmology and conduct," could be further divided into six sub-sections. Each of them addressed a certain aspect of the topic as a whole. By doing this, I was able to consider the midrashim in a more clear and concise manner. Furthermore, I was able to more easily illustrate how these issues were very much on the minds of the Rabbis. That is, by seeing an idea repeated in a number of different contexts, it becomes obvious that it is important. In addition, my fear of distancing the verses was alleviated when I noticed that the base verse and references provided with each midrash would help to maintain this connection.

It struck me, as I was writing this thesis, that the midrashim that I had chosen did more than comment on cosmology and conduct. Rather, they addressed many of the theological issues that we continue to ponder today. These, it seems, are the perennial issues which a religion seeks to address.

Although Judaism has grown and changed over the centuries, the issues have remained. What role does God play in the universe? Why did God create the world as it is? Why is there evil in the world? What is the role of human beings on earth? Are human beings destined to repeat

the mistakes of their ancestors? The midrashim of the ancient Rabbis can serve us well when considering Jewish views on these issues.

For Americans, a particular value system is developed not only from family religion. Other value components in the society and culture which help to make up their world-view also serve this function. For example, public schools teach children about "citizenship." Also, literature and media convey certain attitudes about the world. Likewise, there are certain American holidays and rituals which are considered secular in nature, but are very much a part of the American world. All of these help to make us who we are. Sometimes, however, the number and variety of places from which ideas about values and behavior flow can be overwhelming.

Synagogues are one place where these issues should be considered and discussed. This is because Judaism treats these issues in a very direct way. Jewish thought is all about how to live and act righteously in this world. Sometimes, it seems to be more beneficial to look at what has been said in the past and to use this information in the present than to "reinvent the wheel." In this way, I think that this thesis serves the purpose of opening some doors for those who wish to learn from the ideas of the wise elders who came before them.

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