



*Parashah Insights*  
by  
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*Parashat Bereshit*  
*Earning Reward*

*The Purpose of Creation*

“In the beginning Hashem created the Heavens and the earth” (*Bereshit* 1:1).

Rashi, citing the *Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 1:1)*, discusses the word *bereshit*. “This verse requires explanation. As our Sages, of blessed memory, said, [*bereshit*, for *reshit*, means] for the Torah which is called *reshit darko* (the beginning of His way) (*Mishle* 8:22), and for Israel, who are called *reshit tevuato* (the first of His crop) (*Yirmiyahu* 2:3).” With these words, our Sages teach us that the world was created in order for the people of Israel to learn and fulfill the Torah.

Realistically, it is impossible for the human mind to fathom the depths of the Al-mighty’s reasons for creating the world. Nonetheless, the Arizal did open a tiny window of insight into this extremely profound topic (*Etz Hayyim, Shaar Alef, Anaf Alef*). He explains that the purpose of Creation is to reveal Hashem’s forces of creating, sustaining, and ruling to His created beings. Because man is by nature limited, this revelation takes a very limited form.

The various Names of Hashem which are used in the Torah, such as *alef-keh-yud-keh*, *yud-keh-vav-keh*, *alef-daled-nun-yud*, *E-l*, *Eloh-im*, *Tzeva-ot*, and others, relate to different aspects of the revelation of Hashem’s greatness and Oneness. Before Creation, the potential implied by these Names was unrevealed, because there was no one to appreciate it. Creation brought all the potential of Hashem’s Attributes to realization, so to speak. When we are the recipients of His



many Attributes, among them lovingkindness, bounty, strict judgment, truth, and more, we recognize and appreciate His greatness. Our appreciation and reception of His bounty reveals what was potential and brings it to fruition.

The *Zohar* teaches that the Creator was wise and all-knowing even before Creation (*Zohar, Parashat Pinhas*, p. 257b). These Attributes were related to Hashem even before Creation, in accordance with what He would eventually create. For example, the Name “Judge” implies that there are beings to be judged, and the Name “King” implies that there are subjects to be ruled. These many Names depict characteristics of the Divine Attributes through which the Al-mighty relates to mankind.

Hashem, in His unlimited greatness, encompassed all of these Attributes and powers even before the world was created; His perfection was not dependent on Creation or the existence of created beings. Creation brought all these potential traits into actual being, because now there would be someone to comprehend and appreciate Hashem’s manifold powers and revelations.

According to this opinion from the writings of the Arizal, it would seem that the Al-mighty created the world for Himself, as it were, in order to actualize His powers. We find this concept in our Sages’ teaching (*Avot* 6:12), “Everything the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He created only for His glory, as it says, ‘For all that is created in My Name and for My glory, I created it, and formed it and also made it’” (*Yeshayahu* 43:7).

On the other hand, elsewhere in the writings of the Arizal we find a different reason for Creation: the world was created by Hashem in order “to bestow good on His created beings, so that they will recognize His greatness and merit being a Heavenly Chariot which cleaves to the Al-mighty” (*Etz Hayyim*, beginning of *Shaar HaKelalim*). According to this opinion, Hashem created the world to lavish good upon His created beings, as we learn from the verse, “I said, the world was created for lovingkindness” (*Tehillim* 89:3).

The Ramhal elaborates on this topic (*Derech Hashem* Part 1, Chapter 2, and *Daat Tevunot* 1:42-43). He explains that it is the nature of one who is good to bestow good. As we shall see, it is specifically because Hashem is absolute good that He created this world inherently lacking, structuring a setting which enables Him to bestow perfect good on His created beings.

We are left with a question: was the world created for the Al-mighty, so to speak, or was it created for the benefit of man?



## ***Bread of Shame***

In the first chapter of *Mesillat Yesharim*, the Ramhal explains that man was not created for the sake of his position in this world, but rather for his position in the World to Come, which is the world of true reward. In the World to Come, “the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and bask in the light of the Divine Presence” (*Berachot* 17a). This world is not the be all and end all; it is merely a necessary preliminary to life’s real goal.

By choosing good and withstanding trials and tests in this world, man merits eternal reward. Hashem made the granting of this reward dependent on the fulfillment of Torah and *mitzvot*, so that we earn our reward, rather than receiving it as Divine charity. This is a crucial element, because reward is only perfect and complete, as Hashem wishes it to be, when we earn it.

The Ramhal explains this fundamental concept. In order for reward to be truly complete, the recipient must obtain it through his own efforts, making it part of himself, rather than an incidental acquisition. In this way, to the degree possible for a human being, man emulates the Al-mighty. Hashem is perfect in essence, and not due to a chance combination of circumstances. Clearly, no man can reach this exalted level. However, at least in a small way, he can come closer to it by working to rid himself of his faults and acquiring additional perfection. To this end, Hashem created both good and evil, and gave man the ability to choose between them. By making the right choices, man attains enhanced levels of perfection, emulating the Creator and becoming worthy of cleaving to Him (*Derech Hashem*, Part 1, Chapter 2).

As we see, the purpose of man’s creation in a world of good and evil is for him to earn reward by exercising Free Will. Otherwise, G-d’s bounty would be an embarrassing free handout, marring the perfection of the reward. Our Sages explain this concept with an interesting analogy. They write that one who eats what is not his is embarrassed to look the giver in the face. The food he consumes is *nahama d’kisufa*, literally “bread of shame” (Jerusalem Talmud *Orlah* 1:3). The humiliation of standing on the Heavenly bread line, so to speak, detracts from the pleasure of what is received there. If the recipient is embarrassed about what he gets, it is not a perfect gift befitting the giver – Hashem – Who wishes to give in absolute perfection.

## ***Worlds of Perfection***

The *Nefesh HaHayyim* (*Shaar Alef*, Chapter 13) discusses the concept of four created worlds, each on a successively lower level of sanctity and spirituality. In descending order, they are the *Olam Ha’Atzilut*, the World in Which Hashem



Reveals Himself; the *Olam HaBeriyah*, the World of the Throne; the *Olam HaYetzirah*, the World of the Angels; and the *Olam Ha'Asiyah*, the physical world of earthly activity. The higher worlds are far, far beyond our capacity to comprehend. The lower the world, the more material it becomes, bringing it within the realm of human understanding.

The *Olam Ha'Asiyah*, the fourth and lowest world, is the culmination of the other, higher worlds which preceded it, because it is in this world that man grapples with trials and tests, evil and temptation. Our Sages tell us that the Torah's words describing Creation, "and behold, it is very good" (*Bereshit* 1:31) refer to man (*Bereshit Rabbah* 8:5). As the only being endowed with Free Will, man is considered the peak of Creation.

In his Introduction to the *Sefer Yetzirah* (cited in *Shomer Emunim, Vikuah Rishon, Ot Mem-alef*), the Raavad writes that Hashem had to create the higher worlds, as it were. This is a very surprising statement. How can we say that Hashem "had to" do anything or create anything? All that Hashem did was *b'retzono*, because He so willed.

What this really means is that the Al-mighty's conduct is not random; it operates according to what we may call principles. One of these principles is that perfection must produce perfection. Because Hashem is the very essence of perfection, it follows that His giving of goodness – the reward He bestows upon man – must be perfect. In order for this to be accomplished, the higher worlds were a necessity. Only when man's soul ascends to those worlds can it reach the highest possible level of closeness to the Al-mighty attainable for a created being. Accordingly, it is there that the perfect reward is given. Under any other circumstances, the reward could not be perfect; it would be a compromise.

Let us try to understand more about this profound concept.

The early stages of Creation, the Higher Worlds created before our own lowly world, were at the highest level of perfection, because Hashem Himself is perfect. After that, the created worlds descended to increasingly lower levels, all the way down to the confusing jumble of good and evil which is our world. The Higher Worlds are entirely spiritual, while our world is entirely physical and material. It is so very, very far from Hashem's Divine light that we can hardly differentiate between good and evil.

It is Hashem's ultimate Will to give of Himself, revealing Himself in full and bestowing reward in full. This can only take place at the very highest level, which has the capacity to receive complete spiritual reward. The Arizal writes that *Gan Eden* (Paradise) exists at all four levels of Creation: there is *Gan Eden* of the *Olam Ha'Asiyah*, *Gan Eden* of the *Olam HaYetzirah*, *Gan Eden* of the *Olam*



*HaBeriyah*, and so on, up to the very loftiest of levels. Eventually, man's soul will be sufficiently refined to receive reward at the highest level of *Gan Eden*. Hashem's desire to confer maximum good will not be satisfied with anything less, and it is only there that the soul is capable of receiving it. This is why the Raavad says He "had to" create the higher worlds, even though there is nothing which obligates the Al-mighty. It is the only way that Hashem's ultimate Will in creating the world – the bestowing of perfect reward – can come about.

However, this is still not perfect, flawless bestowal of good. Even if the reward is given on the highest level, it will not be perfect if man has not earned it through his own labors; it will be "bread of shame." The only way to resolve this problem was for Hashem to create worlds on progressively lower levels. On the very bottom rung of Creation is the extremely material and earthy *Olam Ha'Asiyah*, where evil is dominant and good is overwhelmed by its power. Since evil is more powerful in *olam hazeh*, it is the ideal place for man to contend with trials and choose between good and evil. When he chooses good, he acquires perfect good as part of his essence, rather than as an incidental accessory. Because it is the result of his own efforts, it is not "bread of shame." As the Ramhal says, it is truly his; he is its owner, and it is part of him.

As we see then, however, in order for Hashem's bestowal of good to be perfect, it was necessary for Him to create the Higher Worlds, which are close to Him and can receive perfect good. In order to eliminate the element of "bread of shame" from the recipients of this massive good, He also created the lowly *Olam Ha'Asiyah*, where man's struggle with the evil inclination earns him perfect reward as his rightful due.

### ***The Limitations of Olam Hazeh***

What, then, is the purpose of Creation? Is it for this world, where man has Free Will and contends with the trials it presents, gaining eternal reward? Or is it for the sake of the lofty Higher Worlds, those which were created before our world?<sup>1</sup> As far as bestowing reward in full measure, our world has very limited capacities. Our entire vast universe is not capable of grasping more than the merest glimpse of the Al-mighty's radiance, something akin to the faint glow of a bright light viewed through a tiny crack. And how much are we, as physical beings of flesh and blood, capable of receiving and appreciating of Hashem's great bounty? The true, boundless spiritual ecstasy of cleaving to the Al-mighty is beyond our present capacities. What can He actually give us in the here and now?

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<sup>1</sup> See *Shomer Emunim* by Rabbi Yosef Irgas, *Vikuah Rishon, Ot Mem-alef – Nun-gimel*, for a fuller discussion of this topic.



Our Sages teach that “there is no reward for *mitzvot* in this world” (*Kiddushin* 39b), because it is far too petty and small. There is no way for *olam hazeh* to contain the complete influx of the Al-mighty’s great bounty. Compared to the real value of Torah and *mitzvot*, any material good He may grant us in this world is even less than small change. Hashem wants to give perfectly, in full, in a way which befits Him, making it impossible for Him to give real reward in our material world.

If Hashem’s sole purpose in Creation is to give perfect good, the higher spiritual worlds are a much better recipient. As spiritual entities on an extremely exalted level, they are capable of comprehending Hashem’s greatness on a very high level, enabling them to receive maximum spiritual bounty, incalculably more than any human being could possibly cope with while still in this lowly world.

### ***Complementary Worlds***

Since this world is so very limited in what it can receive, how can it be the ultimate purpose of Creation? Perhaps the higher worlds, which are capable of receiving goodness in full measure, are truly the ultimate purpose of Creation.

This world and the Higher Worlds are in fact complementary. This world is essential, because it is the arena of man’s Free Will; it is the place where reward is earned. But it is only the arena, not the actual prize. The reward we work for in this world will be given to us at a much higher level, because the Al-mighty’s Will to give is not satisfied by anything less than giving in full. In order to receive the very best, which can only be achieved in the Higher Worlds, our souls gradually ascend after death to increasingly higher spiritual levels, until they are capable of receiving the maximum good these worlds provide.

This is why Hashem “had to” create Higher Worlds. After death, the soul continues to ascend to increasingly higher levels of spirituality and closeness to Hashem, until eventually it is capable of receiving the maximum at the highest levels. As our Sages teach, “Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi said, Rav said, Torah scholars have no rest, not in this world and not in the World to Come, as it says (*Tehillim* 50:3), ‘They will go from strength to strength’” (*Berachot* 64b). This means that even in the Higher Worlds, the righteous continue to ascend from level to level.

Our Sages cite the verse, “‘And His surroundings are exceedingly turbulent (*nisarah*)’” (*Tehillim* 50:3). We find that the Holy One, blessed be He, is exacting with His righteous ones to a hair’s breadth (*hut hasaarah*)” (*Yevamot* 121b).

Why must Hashem be so very exacting with the righteous? Because that is how He brings them to their highest spiritual level, where they can receive ultimate reward. Continual ascent requires continual purification. When this



happens, the giving is perfect: Hashem bestows bounty at the maximum level, as He wishes, and man enjoys it to the fullest, because it is justly earned reward, rather than an uncomfortable handout.

### ***Precious Service***

This world is indispensable because it allows for the existence of both good and evil. A world without Free Will is a world without the pleasure of achievement, as we find in the verse, “And remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the bad days come, and the years come of which you will say, there is no pleasure in them” (*Kohelet* 12:1). Our Sages tell us that “these are the days of *Mashiah*, when there is neither merit nor guilt” (*Shabbat* 151b).

This concept is alluded to in the verse “I will make you a walker among these standing ones” (*Zechariah* 3:7). The term “standing ones” is a reference to the angels (Rashi and *Metzudat David*). Angels, who have no Free Will, are merely standing ones, while man’s Free Will enables him to ascend continuously from level to level. Angels can only fulfill their duties through man. They are activated exclusively by means of the soul of the Jewish people, as we see in the verse which describes our Forefather Yaakov’s prophetic dream (*Bereshit* 28:12): “A ladder standing on the ground and its head reaching to the Heavens, and behold, angels of G-d are ascending and descending on it (*bo*).” The word *bo*, usually translated as “on it,” referring to the ladder, can also be translated as “on *him*.” The angels were only able to move up or down “on him,” meaning on Yaakov. He, Yaakov, was the “ladder standing on the ground and its head reaching to the Heavens.” Our soul is the ladder which connects this world to the Higher Worlds. The angels are able to perform their duties in keeping with man’s service of Hashem.

Our Sages teach that “at the time when Hashem created the world, He desired to have a dwelling place in the lower world as He has in the Higher World” (*Tanhuma Naso* 16; see *Nefesh HaHayyim, Shaar Alef*, Chapter 13). We find this concept in the verses “For Hashem chose Zion, He desired it as a dwelling place for Himself. This is My resting place forever, here I will dwell for I desire it” (*Tehillim* 132:13-14), and “A dwelling place for You, You made, Hashem. Hashem’s Sanctuary Your Hands established” (*Shmot* 15:17).

Hashem’s *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence, resides in this world through the righteous, who obey His Will. Man has been granted the opportunity to reveal Hashem’s light on earth by choosing good over evil. Without question, this service on man’s part, which proclaims that “His Kingdom rules over all,” is the greatest source of pleasure and satisfaction to the Al-mighty.





We may compare this to the difference between a subject living in a distant outpost, and the king's personal guard. While it is fine for the faithful retainers in the palace to declare their undying allegiance to his royal highness, what else can one expect of them? For them, the king is a very visible presence, aware of their every word and move. But the lonely fellow out near the border is in a different position. Where he lives, the king's enemies are closer at hand than his supporters. He is not under constant surveillance, and at times, the king may seem distant indeed. His declarations of loyalty are worth much more than those of the palace entourage, precisely because he is so very far away.

Man too serves Hashem from a distance, so to speak. We do not see Him as a tangible physical presence hovering close at hand, making our constant choice between good and evil a very great struggle. When we subdue our natural impulses and choose good despite the distance, our deeds are very precious and beloved to Him.

### ***One Moment***

With this in mind, we can explain our Sages' teaching in *Avot*: "One moment of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than the entire life of the World to Come. And one moment of satisfaction in the World to Come is better than the entire life of this world" (4:17).

This statement appears to be contradictory. The *mishnah* first tells us that one moment of Torah and *mitzvot* in this world is better than the life of the World to Come. Then it goes on to say that one hour of satisfaction in the World to Come is better than the entire life of this world. Which is better – the moment of Torah and *mitzvot* in *olam hazeh*, or the moment of satisfaction in *olam haba*??

In order to appreciate our Sages' words, let us first understand what they describe. How long is the "moment of satisfaction in the World to Come?" Just a brief, fleeting second. Yet even so, that flash in time is greater than the entire life of this world.

What is "the entire life of this world?" Imagine that we could combine all the greatest pleasures that this world has to offer, from the dawn of Creation until the end of time, all wrapped up in one unbelievably spectacular moment. All of that – every last ounce of enjoyment anyone ever has and ever will experience in this world – cannot compare to a quick whiff of the satisfaction of spiritual reward in the World to Come.

We can understand this intriguing statement in light of the two aspects of Creation which we have discussed. The "moment of repentance and good deeds in this world" refers to man's deeds in *olam hazeh*. When he overcomes the





pervasive darkness of this world, withstanding life's trials and fulfilling the Will of the Creator despite the hardships, there can be nothing more precious to the Almighty. The only place where man can reach such heights of dedication to Hashem is in this world, with its built-in structure of evil and good and the need to choose between them. In this sense, this world is better than the next.

In the World to Come, Free Will, its opportunities, and the satisfaction of achievement no longer exist. It does, however, have something which this world lacks: the conditions which allow for the complete bestowing of absolute, perfect good on the part of the Al-mighty. It is only there that Hashem can give fully, as He wishes to. From that standpoint, "One moment of satisfaction in the World to Come is better," for only there can the Creator bring to fruition His Will to give in full.

### *Quantity and Quality*

Our Sages provide a vivid description of the spiritual bliss which the righteous will experience in the World to Come: "Rabbi Elazar said, in the future, Hashem will make a dance for the righteous, and He sits among them in *Gan Eden*. Each one of them will point with his finger, as is written, (*Yeshayahu 25:9*), 'And he will say on that day, here is our G-d Whom we hoped for and He saved us. This is Hashem Whom we hoped for, we will rejoice and be happy with His salvation'" (*Taanit 31b*).

In the World to Come, the righteous will dance in a great circle with Hashem at its center. Each one will literally point to Hashem in the center, saying, "This, the One at Whom we are pointing, He is the G-d in Whom we trusted, and now we rejoice in His salvation." The ecstasy of coming close to the Al-mighty in the World to Come is the reward for man's efforts in this world.

What is the significance of dancing specifically in a circle around one central focus? Rabbi Tzadok HaCohen of Lublin explains that it is because every point on the radius of a circle is equidistant to its center. So too, all the dancers in the great Heavenly circle will be equally close to the Al-mighty at its center. This means that in the future, all souls will come close to Hashem at the same very lofty level mentioned by our Sages. This seems surprising. Can it be that no matter what the souls did here, they all reach the same exalted level there?

Rabbi Tzadok explains that there will indeed be a difference, but it will lie not in distance or proximity, but rather in the clarity of the influx and revelation that each one receives. This will *not* be the same for everyone. It will be in direct proportion to every individual's personal service of Hashem while still here in this world. This is why the righteous point to the Al-mighty in the circle's center and



say, “This is our G-d *Whom we hoped for.*” The influx and revelation which a given soul will merit in the World to Come will be in keeping with the intensity of that soul’s “hope” – its longing to come close to G-d – in this world. In quantity, all souls will indeed come equally close to Hashem, as in the analogy of the circle. But in quality, the influx will change in keeping with the spiritual level acquired by the individual’s labors in this world. This is the result of Hashem’s desire to bestow perfect good. Every soul will receive the ultimate reward of cleaving to G-d, but the degree of clarity it enjoys will be determined by the level it earned during its earthly existence (*Mahshevot Harutz, Ot Zayin*).

This may be the meaning of our Sages’ teaching that the world was created for Israel and the Torah, both called *reshit*. As we can now understand, this statement includes both aspects of Creation. “Torah,” the expression of G-d’s Will, is a reference to the Al-mighty’s desire to bestow perfect good, and “Israel,” the nation chosen to fulfill G-d’s Will, refers to man’s struggles in this world to earn that perfect good.

### ***Striving for Reward***

With this in mind, we can understand another apparent contradiction. The Ramhal writes that the main purpose of man’s life in this world is the reward of the World to Come, and that this should be his motivation and goal (*Mesillat Yesharim*, Chapter 1). In other words, the Ramhal says, every move we make in this world should be directed towards future reward in the World to Come. However, our Sages explicitly teach us, “Do not be like servants who serve the master in order to receive reward. Instead, be like servants who serve the master not in order to receive reward” (*Avot* 1:3). In fact, the Ramhal himself later explains that our service of the Al-mighty should be *lishmah*, strictly for Hashem’s honor, pure and clean of ulterior motives and personal interests (Chapter 16).

Our Torah and *mitzvot* in this world should indeed be directed to the reward of the World to Come, although not in the way we might imagine. We should not strive for eternal reward for the pleasure it will undoubtedly afford us. Rather, we should work to earn reward in order to fulfill our Heavenly Father’s purpose in Creation. It is His sacred Will to give, and by serving Him, we enable Him to realize that Will. Our Sages tell us, “Who is a saintly person (*hassid*)? One who is saintly (*mit’hassed*, literally ‘does *hesed*’) with his Creator” (*Zohar, Helek Bet*, p. 114b). By exerting ourselves to fulfill Hashem’s Will, we literally do *hesed* with our Creator by allowing Him to shower us with His unending bounty.

***This essay contains divre Torah. Please treat it with proper respect.***