

## The Creation of the World

**A**t this point, we'd like to zoom out and consider the general approach of positivity that we've been taking. A big part of us still may want to first deal with our weaknesses. The approach of focusing on positives features prominently in the most fundamental teachings of the Torah. This is precisely what we will learn in this section.

We will start with the concept of gratitude for the qualities with which we were endowed. As surely as gratitude is due for the blessings we've received all around us, our unique strengths, which define our individuality to our core and shape our lives, deserve especially deep and constant gratitude. Building a life based on these strengths is fueled by the constant appreciation and debt of gratitude for these gifts. It follows then that the engine to power our lives is our capacity to appreciate.

Appreciation features centrally in the Torah as early as, and even prior to, the creation of mankind. The Chumash opens by revealing Adam HaRishon's essential role in the Creation—the slot he was made to fill—before he was created:

### *Bereishis 2:5*

וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח כי לא  
המטיר ה' אלקים על הארץ ואדם אין לעבד את האדמה.

*All the plants of the field were not yet on the earth, and all the vegetation of the field had not yet sprouted, because Hashem Elokim had not caused it to rain on the earth, and man was not [there] to work the soil.*

*Rashi* looks at this verse and is bothered by the seemingly over-complicated explanation as to why there was no plant life on earth. Was it because there was no rain (a seemingly more obvious reason) or because there was nobody to work the earth (a seemingly non sequitur since plants need rain regardless of people working the soil)?

### ***Rashi 2:5***

כי לא המטיר. ומה טעם לא המטיר, לפי שאדם אין לעבוד את האדמה ואין מכיר בטובתם של גשמים, וכשבא אדם וידע שהם צורך לעולם התפלל עליהם וירדו, וצמחו האילנות והדשאים.

*“Because [Hashem Elokim] had not caused it to rain.” For what reason did He not bring rain? Since “man was not [there] to work the field,” and there was no one to recognize the goodness of the rains. When man came and realized that they were necessary for the world, he prayed for them [the rains], and they fell, and the trees and plants sprouted.*

*Rashi’s* careful reading of the Torah’s words reveal that man’s very creation was to recognize the potential around him, to pray for what was needed for that potential to be realized, and by doing so, to fill the world with the blossoming of life. This explains the otherwise cumbersome flow of the verse: there was no plant life *because* it had not rained, and it had not rained *because* there was no one to appreciate the value of the rain.

The *Maharal* elucidates the mechanics as to why Hashem “needed” us to recognize the goodness of blessings in order to receive them:

*Maharal, Gur Aryeh 2:5*

ואין מכיר בטובתם. כלומר, ואסור לעשות טובה לאיש שאין מכיר  
בטובה, ולפיכך כל זמן שלא היה האדם, לא המטיר.

*“There was no one to recognize the goodness of the rains,”  
means that since it is forbidden to do good for someone who  
does not recognize that goodness, as long as there was no  
humanity, it did not rain.<sup>1</sup>*

The *Maharal* shows us that *Rashi* is revealing a fundamental life principle beyond the historical event of how Adam HaRishon was created: **Hashem gives to us only to the degree to which we can “recognize the goodness” of that which He is giving to us.** We could explain the mechanism as follows: If we recognize it as goodness, then it is indeed “good” and draws us closer to Him, but if we were to take the goodness for granted, it would just make us more spoiled and numb, and would therefore no longer be called “goodness” at all.

The (positive) flipside of this statement is that to the degree to which we are aware of the blessings that Hashem is sending to us, and to the degree to which we are grateful for them, we enjoy them more, and, as a result, those same blessings become even bigger blessings. Hashem loves us without limit, but He can only give us as much as we are capable of receiving.<sup>2</sup> Even the ocean cannot fill an eight-ounce cup with more than eight ounces. Since our capacity for appreciation is what

1 According to Rav Yehoshua Hartman, this comment of the *Maharal* is based on the Gemara in *Berachos* 33a: “וכל מי שאין בו דעה אסור לרחם עליו”—It is forbidden to have mercy on a person who has no *de’ah*.” This statement of Chazal is not speaking about people who halachically have no *daas* like children and those who are mentally unwell (see the published correspondence, in *Eitzos V’Hadrachos* between the Steipler Gaon and Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Greenwald, which clarifies this point). It is a mitzvah to help people who are categorically incapable of helping themselves; this is *chessed*. Chazal are cautioning us against *rachamim* (mercy) toward a person with no sense of appreciation. *Rachamim* is giving with an expectation that the recipient will grow from the gift and come to take more responsibility for himself. But when a person is not appreciative, not only will gifts not help—they will make the recipient feel more entitled, and therefore less responsible for himself—hence the prohibition.

2 *Kuzari* 5:12: “There is no stinginess [whatsoever] in the Divine.”

determines how much we get from our experience of life, increasing our capacity to appreciate increases Hashem's "capacity" to give to us.

There is one further point here to mention. *Rashi* himself points out a glaring contradiction in the Chumash. According to *Rashi*, the above-quoted verses in the second chapter of *Bereishis* show how Hashem staggers His giving to us until we develop our appreciation. How are we to understand that the Torah describes vegetation sprouting on Day Three of Creation if human beings were not created until Day Six?

### ***Bereishis* 1:12**

ותוצא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע למינהו ועץ עשה פרי אשר זרעו  
בו למינהו וירא אלקים כי טוב. ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום שלישי.

*The earth brought forth grass, seed-bearing herbs according to its kind, and fruit-bearing tree that has its seed in it, according to its kind; and Hashem saw that it was good; and there was evening and there was morning, a third day.*

Here is *Rashi's* resolution to the apparent contradiction:

### ***Rashi* 2:5**

וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח. עדיין לא צמח, ובשלישי שכתוב ותוצא  
הארץ, על פתח הקרקע עמדו עד יום ששי.

*"All the plants of the field were not yet on the earth." They had still not sprouted. [When it] is written on the third day, "The earth brought forth [vegetation]," [it means that] they were standing in wait at the cusp of the earth until the sixth day.*

The plants had grown on the third day but were hidden from view until Adam HaRishon appreciated their need and prayed for them, thereby catalyzing their emerging above ground. The lesson for us is profound: Hashem wants us to have the best possible life, He already knows what we need in order to live that life—even before we ask for

it—and He has even already created it for us. The blessings in our lives have been there all along but exist beneath the surface, invisible to us. Hashem waits for us to pray and become appreciative of what we lack in order to make visible the goodness He very much wants to give us.

Of all living beings, only humans have the ability to perceive value that has not yet been realized, and then work to bring it forth. Only humans, through this capacity, can bring about real growth, which brings the world from what it is to what it can be. The world was created טוב, “good,” but it needed someone to recognize this goodness in order to make it worthwhile to blossom in all its goodness. Hashem created a great universe with enormous value, immeasurable potential. He left an open slot in the middle for us. Our task is to perceive the value and potential around us and bring it to bloom by recognizing everything as a gift.

This is the Torah’s introduction to the mission of human beings. Our success and the vibrancy of the entire world depends on our ability to see the gifts that Hashem has given to us as gifts, and in turn, to use them properly. Otherwise, the blessing will not flow from heaven, and our gifts will tragically remain out of sight, buried just under the cusp of the ground.

This essential mission of humanity is to actualize the blessing of the world and bring it to fruition. Developing the deepest potential of our children and students is an expression of this mission.

### Humanity’s Mission from the Time of Creation

What was Hashem’s original plan in creating the world? The entire Creation was an act of love to give man the supernal gift of life itself.<sup>3</sup> For man’s sake, Hashem made a place called עֵדֶן (Eden), a name related to the Hebrew word עֵדֶן, meaning “pure pleasure.” This joy was not intended to be static, but to be changing, growing, and intensely alive.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, it came in the form of a living

3 Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *Derech Hashem* I:2:1 and *Mesilas Yescharim*, ch. 1.

4 *Derech Hashem* I:3:7.

Garden. Hashem placed man in the Garden and entrusted him with helping the Garden bloom.<sup>5</sup>

Then came the first command: “You shall surely eat from every tree of the Garden.”<sup>6</sup>

This may come as a surprise. Most people, when asked to identify the first command given by God to man, would answer, “The command to *not* eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.”<sup>7</sup> This answer, however, is incorrect, and it is an error that goes all the way back to Adam and Chavah.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the classic commentators, including the Vilna Gaon, point out that the first commandment was, in fact, the active, positive command *to eat from every tree of the Garden*.<sup>9</sup>

5 *Bereishis* 2:15.

6 *Ibid.*, 2:16.

7 Some might suggest instead that “פרו ורבו—Be fruitful and multiply” actually preceded both as it does in the text of the Chumash (1:28 as opposed to 2:15–16). Context, however, reveals that in this case we would have to apply the principle of “אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה—there is not [necessarily an implication of chronology of] before and after in the Torah [as implied by the order of the text]” (*Pesachim* 6b). The commands to eat from every tree of the Garden and to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil were given in the singular to Adam before the creation of Chavah, which occurs in 2:21–24. It stands to reason that the mitzvah of פרו ורבו was relevant to be commanded only once Adam and Chavah were split into two entities who could procreate. This, in turn, would make “eat from every tree of the Garden” the first mitzvah commanded to humanity.

8 The King James Bible mistranslated the initial command to eat from all the trees as a “permission”: “Thou mayest freely eat.” According to that translation, the first command does not appear until the words that follow, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” It seems that Jewish translators absorbed this mistranslation.

9 Rabbeinu Bachya, *Aderes Eliyahu, Meshech Chochmah* (with footnotes of Rabbi Yehuda Cooperman), ad loc., and Rav Tzaddok HaKohen in *Pri Tzaddik, Shavuot* 12. The analysis is based on two primary points. First, verse 2:16 says clearly that Hashem is “commanding”—“ויצו ה' אלקים על האדם לאמר מכל עץ הגן אכול תאכל”—Second, the double-verb אכול תאכל connotes the imperative form as in הוכח תוכיח (*Vayikra* 19:17) and השב תשיב (*Devarim* 24:13). The Vilna Gaon explains that obviously a person cannot eat constantly without taking a break; rather, the verse means that just as the mitzvah of זכור—remember” Shabbos implies thinking about it throughout the week even when it is not Shabbos, so, too, the mitzvah of “אכול,” which has the same grammatical construct, implies that we should have in mind to enjoy the pleasures of Hashem’s world at all times.

This notion should significantly shift our perspective. The original command, which set the tone for all commands that followed, was simply to enjoy and appreciate all the fruit trees that Hashem had provided. Of course, those fruits, like the Garden and the first human, existed on a plane of reality far beyond our grasp. Their tastes provided not only what we would call purely physical pleasures but also what we would classify as “spiritual,” “intellectual,” and “emotional” joys—the enjoyment was an integrated satisfaction of the entire being. But the basic idea remains the same: the first command was to achieve the fullest range of pleasures able to be experienced by a human being. This, then, serves as the archetype through which we can understand the ultimate purpose of all mitzvos.<sup>10</sup>

The serpent’s line of attack was to make Chavah miss this point entirely. Starting with the first “big lie,” it framed the discussion in the negative: “Has Elokim<sup>11</sup> not even said that you shall not eat from all the trees of the Garden?”<sup>12</sup> In court, this is called “leading the witness.” The serpent’s question was a set up for the answer he ultimately wanted from her. In response, Chavah retorted, “We are permitted to eat from the fruits of the Garden. Hashem said not

10 According to the *Ramchal*, as stated in the opening of chapter 1 of the *Mesilas Yesharim*, this is the normative opinion of Chazal:

והנה מה שהורונו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה הוא, שהאדם לא נברא אלא להתענג על ה' ולהנות מזיו שכינתו שזהו התענוג האמיתי והעידון הגדול מכל העידונים שיכולים להמצא.

*Behold, what our Sages, of blessed memory, have taught us is that man was created solely to delight in God and to derive pleasure in the radiance of the Shechinah (Divine Presence). For this is the true delight and the greatest pleasure that can possibly exist.*

It is the understanding of Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, the Alter of Slobodka (in “*The Tastes of Berachos*,” *Ohr Hatzafun*) that the *Ramchal* is referring here to delight and pleasure “even in this world.” This understanding is echoed and elaborated upon by his son-in-law, Rav Isaac Sher in *Leket Sichos Mussar* II, pp. 374–375, and by Rav Shlomo Wolbe in *Alei Shur* II, p. 567, and in *Igros U’Kesavim* #158.

11 Even the serpent’s conspicuous omission of the name “Hashem” (Y-H-V-H) served to blur Hashem’s true loving intention. We know that the Name “Hashem” (Y-H-V-H) connotes love and mercy, while the Name “Elokim” connotes law and judgment (*Rashi* on *Bereishis* 1:1, “ברא אלקים”). The serpent’s omission was insidious indeed—the first case of *motsi shem ra*, “libel.”

12 *Bereishis* 3:1.

to eat from the tree at the center of the Garden...”<sup>13</sup> She tried to push back, arguing that the fruits of the Garden are “permitted” which is, of course, the opposite of “prohibited.” But, alas, she fell for the serpent’s shrewd trap. With that response, she unwittingly distorted everything. From Chavah’s now-confused perspective, they were merely *permitted* to eat most of the fruits. She missed Hashem’s positive desire that they should *proactively enjoy* every tree of the Garden. She missed how His very goal was for them to live life as fully as possible.<sup>14</sup>

With this single, subtle shift, everything changed. If the positive mitzvah of eating from every tree becomes merely a permission and preamble, the first mitzvah becomes the negative mitzvah to *not* eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This was further deftly spun as Divine oppression to keep us from knowing as much as He.<sup>15</sup> The serpent had succeeded in framing everything in terms of arbitrary limits. The only categories in its worldview were (1) objects that Hashem withholds from people, and (2) those that He allows people to have.

According to this worldview, the only questions were how large the jail cell was, and how strong the cage. Hashem’s essential will that we live and enjoy this epic opportunity called “life” was hidden from view. Instead of a flourishing garden where we, too, could flourish, the world was transformed in our minds into a minimum-security prison. In such a world, who would not want to rebel?

The results surround us. All of the pain in the world, and even the very fact that we die at all, stems from that first mistake. All those who, despite being endowed with every material blessing, live lives of diminished joy, vitality, and purpose, are blocked by nothing

13 Ibid., 3:2–3.

14 The one who was directly commanded was Adam, so this misunderstanding may be due to her learning error, or to Adam’s teaching error. The *Leshem* observes that the Sages seem to place more of the blame on Adam, as alluded to in their coinage of “the sin of Adam HaRishon” as opposed to “the sin of Chavah.” This seems to put the burden of responsibility more on parents and teachers than on children and students.

15 *Bereishis* 3:5.



other than that lie of the serpent. Even for many Torah-observant Jews, the serpent's words obscure the truth that there is a Hashem Who loves us, believes in us, and wants us to be happy. When "*frumkeit*" becomes synonymous with restriction and self-critique, we have let the serpent win.

Nevertheless, although it is now more difficult to perceive, the original plan remains. While we no longer see that Garden, we still can reach out and eat from one of its trees: the Torah is the Tree of Life in the center of the Garden,<sup>16</sup> each of its mitzvos a fruit from therein. These mitzvos teach us how to eat from that tree and live more deeply and vibrantly.

This is the essential struggle. The serpent's words come in a vast variety of forms, but its goal is always the same. It always seeks to make Hashem out to get us, and conceal from us the fact that the Torah shows us how to live the richest and fullest life possible. It kills us by portraying the very Tree of Life as a set of meaningless impositions. Our essential battle, then, is not simply to be on the defensive, responding to the blows of the serpent, but rather to go on the offensive and find the good that Hashem still wants us to bring to bloom.

This fundamental perspective of how we are meant to view the world that Hashem created outside of us also applies to the world that He created inside of us. Above all else, He desires the flourishing of our individual selves with all the good that He implanted within us. We have to ensure that we do not lose sight of this by falling prey to the serpent.

---

16 *Mishlei* 3:18.