

A Time to Create and the Creation of Time

Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh

Based on a class given on *Tishrei 24, 5766* | October 27, 2005 | in Kfar Chabad

What Time Is It?

The Torah (and the entire Bible) begins with the Hebrew word **בְּרֵאשִׁית**. In English, the usual translation of this word is: "In the beginning." The three classical Aramaic translations of the Torah translate this word as follows:

Onkelos uses the Aramaic word "בְּקִרְמִין," literally meaning: "In the beginning." Yonatan ben Uziel's translation offers the same idea, but using a different Aramaic idiom: "מִן אֲוִלָּא," which means "From the beginning." These two translations clearly refer to the time aspect (**רֵאשִׁית**) of the original Hebrew word. Different and surprising is the translation offered by the *Yerushalmi* translation of the Torah, which translates it as "בְּחֻכְמָא," meaning "With wisdom."¹ The *Yerushalmi* translation is alluding to a verse from Proverbs describing the creation: "*Havayah*, with wisdom founded the earth, He established the heavens with understanding."² That wisdom has a time element can be learnt from another verse: "The beginning of wisdom [**רֵאשִׁית חֻכְמָה**] is the fear of *Havayah*,"³ but the *Yerushalmi* is clearly saying something different from the two other translations. Wisdom is one of the ten *sefirot*. In Chassidut, wisdom is associated with the psychological state of selflessness, or self-nullification (**בְּטוּל**). The first thing we can learn from the *Yerushalmi's* unique translation is that as a power of the soul, wisdom is the experience of the beginning of time. In other words: a true state of selflessness grants one the experience of creation.

Let us turn back to the difference between the *Yerushalmi* and the two other translations. There is a question among the Jewish philosophers whether time is something that was created. In Chassidut it is traditionally reported that the Magid of Mezritch said that indeed time was created. The Ziditchover argues with this tradition claiming that it cannot be that the Magid said such a thing.⁴

Why would the Ziditchover Rebbe be so adamant about time not being a creation (but preceding creation), so much so that he would argue that it is impossible that the Magid said something to the contrary? Does he believe that time is like the Almighty Himself? And, since there is the tradition that the Magid said that time was created, what were his reasons? Clearly, the two viewpoints are the reason for the difference in translations between the Aramaic translations of the Torah. The *Yerushalmi* does not cite time as the tool of creation,

meaning that for the *Yerushalmi*, time is a creation and comes after wisdom. But, the other two translations seem to uphold that time was the tool by which the Creator created the heavens and the earth. In other words, this difference in opinion can be traced back to the meaning of the first word of the Torah. If *בְּרֵאשִׁית* means "with [something called] *reishit*," and the *reishit*, "the beginning" refers to time, then time is the tool with which God created the world (meaning that it itself is not part of creation). But if the first word is translated as simply, "In the beginning," then time too is a creation, like everything else.

The First Four Nouns

Let us take a closer look at the first verse of the Torah. We have ascertained that if time is to be understood as God's tool for creating the world then the word *בְּרֵאשִׁית* includes a noun: *רֵאשִׁית*, *reishit*. Then of the seven words comprising the first verse, four are nouns, and these four nouns make up every other word of the verse: *בְּרֵאשִׁית אֱלֹהִים הַשָּׁמַיִם הָאָרֶץ*, *Bereishit, Elokim*, the heavens, and the earth.

The sum of these four words, in Hebrew, is 1690, or $10 \cdot 13^2$. The number 1690 is of great significance in Kabbalah as it the product of the two most important Names of the Almighty: *Havayah* (הוי" = 26) and *Adni* (אדני" = 65); the sum of these two Names is 91, the triangle of 13, meaning the sum of the integers from 1 to 13 (13, of course being the numerical value of the word "one," *אֶחָד*, in Hebrew). The two possible interweaving of these two Names forms the holy Names of God corresponding to Higher Consciousness (*יחודא עילאה*) and Lower Consciousness (*יחודא תתאה*). Higher Consciousness describes seeing the world from God's perspective, i.e., that God is a given and creation is a novelty that is as naught in His eyes. Lower Consciousness describes the normal human perspective that the reality of creation is a given and that (the revelation of) God is a novelty! Thus, the very first verse of the Torah includes both higher and lower consciousness.

1690 is also the numerical value of the four levels of the nullification of reality in face of the infinite nature of the Divine, which the Shabbat morning service speaks of. They are:

אין ערוך לך הוי" אלקינו בעולם הזה Nothing measures up to You *Havayah* our God in this world;

אין זולתך מלבנו לחיי העולם הבא There is none besides You our King in the life of the World to Come;

אפס בלתיך גואלנו לימות המשיח There is nothing but You in the Days of the Mashiach

אין דומה לך מושיענו לתחיית המתים There is none similar to You our Savior for the resurrection of the dead.

The numerical sum of the four comparative statements: **אֵין זִוְלָתֶךָ**, **אֵין עָרוּךְ לְךָ**, **אֵין דּוֹמָה לְךָ**, **אֵין דּוֹמָה לְךָ** is 1690, suggesting a correspondence between these four manners of comparative nullification before the Almighty and the four nouns of the first verse of the Torah. This correspondence also reveals an aspect of the Torah that belongs to the World of Emanation, whose central experience is one of selfless nullification before the Almighty.⁵

Each of these levels of nullification has a counterpart in our experience as human beings.

Selfless Nouns

Let us see how these four levels of nullification correspond to the four nouns in the first verse of the Torah.

The first two levels (**אֵין עָרוּךְ לְךָ** and **אֵין זִוְלָתֶךָ**) which refer to our present reality (this World) and our future reality (the World to Come), correspond to the earth and the heavens, respectively. As explained many times in Chassidut, our present reality is explicitly corporeal, while the spiritual (the heavens) remain implicitly present. In the World to Come, the heavens will be revealed.

"There is nothing but You" (**אֵין דּוֹמָה לְךָ**) corresponds to the Name *Elokim*, in the first verse. The connection between these two is apparent in the translation of the Torah by the sages into Greek (the translation known as the Septuagint). In that translation, the sages made some editorial changes in order to prevent non-Jews reading the Bible from making interpretative mistakes about the nature of the Almighty. The first of these was that they reversed the order of the first three words of the Torah. Instead of translating them following the literal form of: "In the beginning created God...", they wrote: "God created in the beginning...." The fear was of course that the Greeks would interpret this to mean that "in the beginning" is the name of a great deity or pre-deity, who created God. Indeed, this mistake is rooted in our own identification of the words "In the beginning" as referring to time as the tool by which heavens and earth were created (not that *Elokim*, God, was created by time). Since no editing of the text is required in the original Hebrew, this indicates that the word "*Elokim*" carries for Jews a natural reference to God's singularity—"there is none but You." This natural reference in the Jewish understanding prevents the Jew from making a similar mistake to the Greeks. At an even deeper level, Kabbalah explains that the Name *Elokim* does indeed emanate (**לְבָרֵא**, to come out of) out of the word **בְּרֵאשִׁית**, "In the beginning."

"There is none similar to You" (**אֵין דּוֹמָה לְךָ**) refers to the Almighty's super-rational ability to suffer opposites, i.e., to carry paradoxes without entering

infinite loops of logic. To give the simplest example of a paradox, we may cite the famous question: "Can the Creator create a rock that He cannot pick-up?" Whatever answer is given, it seems that we are led to an unbearable paradox in our minds. Either we give up our definition of what it means to have the omnipotent power to create, or we give up our notion of what it means to be able to perform a task, or not. But both cannot stand at the same time. Yet, actually, God is able to do everything, and being omnipotent also includes being able to create paradoxical situations, or objects, whose nature cannot be understood by human beings. As we shall see, the most difficult paradox that human beings have to contend with is how to entertain the notion that thought the world seems to be full of negative and bad things,⁶ God's intent and actions are all good. God's capacity for carrying paradox corresponds to the word בְּרֵאשִׁית, "In the beginning." The reference to the resurrection of the dead is also very fitting. As explained elsewhere, following the resurrection of the dead, the human body becomes immortal. Immortality is the greatest paradoxical state of matter. Whereas matter is by definition subject to the law of entropy and therefore the human body is mortal, the body that will rise up from the grave will be immortal; the paradox of the immortal body will be revealed.

Let us summarize our correspondence in chart form, adding to it how each level corresponds to one of the letters of the Name *Havayah*:

| letter of <i>Havayah</i> | level of nullification | noun in the first verse of the Torah | |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| <i>yud</i> | There is none similar to You | בְּרֵאשִׁית | In the beginning |
| <i>hei</i> | There is nothing but You | אלקים | <i>Elokim</i> |
| <i>vav</i> | There is none besides You | שמים | Heavens |
| <i>hei</i> | There is nothing that measures up to You | ארץ | Earth |

Nothing Like the Present

Let us turn our attention to the time referenced in each of the levels. They are: this World, the World to Come, the Days of the Mashiach, and the Resurrection of the Dead. The numerical value of each of these is:

This World (עוֹלָם הַזֶּה) = 163

The World to Come (עוֹלָם הַבָּא) = 154

The Days of the Mashiach (יְמֵי מְשִׁיחַ) = 819

The Resurrection of the Dead (תְּחִיַּת הַמֵּתִים) = 1313

The numerical value of the highest level, the Resurrection of the Dead, 1313. 1313 is a multiple of 13:

$$1313 = 101 \cdot 13$$

The value of the second time period, "Days of the Mashiach," 819, is also the numerical value of the phrase "David, the king of Israel is alive and well" (דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל חַי וְקַיִם). It is also the numerical value of the important Chassidic term: "Simple Oneness" (אַחָדוּת פְּשוּטָה). It is explained in Chassidut that the role of the Mashiach, the righteous king of Israel from the house of David, is to bring the experience of God's simple oneness to every single person. This will be the greatest revelation of the Days of the Mashiach. In addition, 819 is equal to the sum of the squares from 1 to 13 (or, as it is known by another name: 819 is the square pyramid of 13). 13 is the numerical value of "one" (אֶחָד), in Hebrew. However, beyond these numerical congruities, we would like to focus on the fact that 819 is a multiple of both 7 [819 = 7 · 117] and of 13 [819 = 13 · 63]. 7 and 13 are a pair of numbers that appear repeatedly in many areas of the Torah as female and male complements to one another.

The numerical value of the third time period mentioned, "the World to Come, 154, is a multiple of 7:

$$154 = 7 \cdot 22$$

So we have here an interesting relationship of the three highest levels to the number pair 7 and 13: the world to come is a multiple of 7, then Days of the Mashiach is a multiple of both 7 and 13, while the highest level, the Resurrection of the Dead is a multiple of 13 only.

Now, the final time period, "this World," is neither a multiple of 7 nor of 13.⁷

However, in a beautiful example of self-reference, the sum of the numerical values of all four time periods together:

$$\text{עוֹלָם הַהֵי עוֹלָם הַבָּא יְמוֹת הַמְּשִׁיחַ תַּחֲתֵי הַמַּתִּים} = 2482$$

$$2482 = 146 \cdot 17$$

146 is the numerical value of עוֹלָם, and 17 is the numerical value of הַהֵי.

So, we have that:

$$\text{עוֹלָם} \cdot \text{הַהֵי} = \text{עוֹלָם הַהֵי עוֹלָם הַבָּא יְמוֹת הַמְּשִׁיחַ תַּחֲתֵי הַמַּתִּים}$$

Meaning that the sum of all four time periods is equal to the two words that make up the first time period—"this World"—multiplied by one another. We can say therefore that all the "future" times are actually very much present in our current reality. All four stages are included in this world. You do not have to hope for some future time or go looking for "redemption" somewhere else—it is all present right here and now. Chassidut explains that for Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was always standing (even though he lived after it had been destroyed by the Romans). It is possible to touch upon and experience the future in the present. This gematria also beautifully illustrates that

the reason for creating all of the Worlds, and all their respective time periods is for God to have a dwelling place below, meaning, in the "here and now."

Four Types of Nullification

Let us now turn to the psychological and Chassidic aspect that lies within these four levels of nullification. We would like to explain what type of selflessness each one represents and how this can be felt in our everyday experience.

The first level reflects that nothing can measure up to God (אין ערוף לך), or in other words, that nothing can be considered present, in the sense of importance, wherever He is. The example that illustrates this feeling of selflessness and nullification is that if you are seated next to a tremendously wise and smart individual then if you have enough wisdom yourself, you will feel that your own wisdom and smarts are comparatively nothing and really do not measure up. But, if you were to leave the presence of this great sage, your feeling of being wise and smart yourself would return. In the analogies given by the sages of the Talmud, this is illustrated by the example of the light of a candle in mid-day (שרגא בטיהרא מאי מהני?).⁸ This is the type of nullification that is normally found and experienced in our present reality. Comparing our wisdom, our strength, our character, to the Almighty we find ourselves lacking and are willing to feel selfless and as naught for a moment. But, the moment that we take our minds of the Divine Presence, we jump back to feeling ourselves to be the measure of everything else.

The second level was described as "there is none besides You" (אין זולתך). In Chassidut this type of nullification is exemplified by the rays of light that emanate from our sun. According to Chassidut, and as proposed by the theory of relativity, light that has emanated from the sun (because it is traveling at the speed of light) never "feels" that it has left the sun. It is as if it has never left its source. The only physical difference that the light ray itself can "see," is that now it can illuminate something far away from the sun. Were the sun to cease to exist, this ray, from its own perspective, would disappear instantaneously; in other words, from the perspective of the light ray there is no time. From the perspective of someone looking at this light ray, the light ray seems to be something independent of the sun. This example indeed corresponds to the noun "heavens" in the first verse. From the perspective of our soul, we are still one and the same as the Almighty. It is as if we have never left our source in the Infinite. But, from our body's perspective (the perspective of our animal soul), the soul is the great luminary which has been severed from its source and is now independent of God. Both perspectives are real, but it is only the soul's

perspective that affords this type of self-nullification. Indeed, this might be a reason for why when someone passes away we say that their soul has "gone to heaven."

The third level of nullification described as "there is nothing but You" (אֵפֶס (בְּלִתֵּךְ). The analogy used to exemplify this type of selflessness was given by the Ba'al Shem Tov who explained that reality is not like light that has left the sun, but like light while it is still in the sun. There, it does not even have the possibility of being a reality, because it feels that it is essentially naught. At this level, all of reality feels itself to be essentially nothing. This level of selflessness corresponds to the times of Mashiach and to the Name *Elokim* in the first verse of the Torah. What is the connection? Elsewhere, when describing the creation of mankind, God says: "I said you are *Elokim*." God intended for mankind to take on the Name *Elokim*. How can this be? Indeed, when an individual feels like the ray of light as it is in the sun itself, when nullification is felt at such an essential level, then it is possible. This is the feeling that, "I have never left You, God. I have never come out of You." About such a person it is fitting to say that he is *Elokim*. Indeed, in Kabbalah this supernal image of man as *Elokim* is referred to as Primordial Man (אָדָם קְדָמוֹן, or in acronym: א"ק). The third level of nullification, the times of Mashiach, refers to the revelation of the image of man as Primordial Man (first and foremost as exemplified by the Mashiach himself, and eventually as characteristic of all of mankind). Following our chart above this places the image of Primordial Man as corresponding to the first letter *hei* of Havayah. Indeed, many times in Kabbalah, Primordial Man is referred to as the Man of the World of Creation—אָדָם דְּבְרִיאָה (which too corresponds to the first *hei* of *Havayah*).

Let us now return to our initial query regarding the nature of time: is time created or is it the tool by which God creates reality? In Kabbalah it is explained that the external and internal aspects of the ray of infinite light (קו) which descended into the void are the inner soul of Primordial Man and the Torah, respectively. As we have seen Primordial Man is the image of nullification at the third level. The external aspect of the ray of infinite light relates to Primordial man as soul relates to body. But the essence of the fourth level of nullification (the essence of the *yud* of *Havayah* that does not enter into the consciousness of the higher *hei*) is the Torah itself (which originates, in the terminology of Kabbalah, in the hidden beauty of God's infinite light, before the initial contraction). One of the most basic gematrias in Kabbalah is that "Torah" is equal to the value of "run and return," תּוֹרָה = רָצוּא וְשׁוּב. "Run and return" is the secret of time and thus an aspect of the Torah, the tool by which the sages say that God

created the world is time itself. Where the external aspect of the ray of infinite light was created, its internal aspect, the Torah, creates.⁹ Another way of saying this is that the ray of infinite light can be thought of as the arrow of time. From the perspective of its external aspect time is created and relative. From the perspective of its internal aspect (the Torah, the source of all processes of "run and return" in the world), time is the tool of creation. Thus, both answers are correct.¹⁰

What is the type of nullification experienced at this highest level, which is described as "there is none similar to You" (אין דומה לך). Just as the *yud* in *Havayah* represents a categorically higher reality than the other three letters, so this level of selflessness is categorically higher than the preceding three. Indeed, at this level of selflessness, one shares God's own perspective on oneself and on reality. At this level, attained only by Moses,¹¹ one sees reality from God's perspective. From God's perspective indeed all paradoxes are non-paradoxical and even questions about good and evil (mentioned above) are no longer perplexing. It is the wisdom (as explained above) inherent already in the very first word of the Torah that allows one to see the world from God's point of view. Indeed, the Torah is attributed by God to Moses himself: "Remember the Torah of my servant Moses."¹² Likewise, by becoming one with the Torah, to the point where the Torah can be called "your Torah," you grow closer to experiencing reality as God does.¹³

Notes:

1. The word "wisdom," in Hebrew (חכמה) is inherently connected to the first verse of the Torah. The numerical value of חכמה is 73. The value of the first verse in Hebrew, בראשית ברא, אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ is 2701, which is the sum of all the integers from 1 through 73!

2. Proverbs 3:19. Like the first verse in Genesis, this verse from Proverbs has 7 words. It too mentions the creation of the heavens and the earth.

3. Psalms 111:10.

4. For a treatment of this argument by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, see the first part of Tzvi Freeman's "Does Time Begin?" in the *B'Or Hatorah Journal* (2005), vol. 15.

5. As revealed by the Arizal, the experiential context of the Torah as we study it today is in the World of Creation. In the times of the Mashiach, the experiential context will shift to the higher World of Emanation.

6. Tanya chapters 6 and 24: "all the actions taken in this world are difficult and evil and the wicked surmount."

7. But the sum of the two time periods corresponding to "the heavens and the earth," i.e., "this World," and "the life of the World to Come," is 350, which is $7 \cdot 50$, a multiple of 7.

8. *Chulin* 60b.

9. The internal and external aspects of the ray of infinite light are called the ray and the thread (קו וחוט). Where the ray measures and gives reality its dimensionality, the thread is like a sewing thread and has the power to stitch things together. Particularly, as discussed above regarding the resurrection of the dead, the thread is the power of carrying paradox that can stitch together complete opposites.

10. Using the Rogachover's language, the Lubavitcher Rebbe denoted the internal and external aspects of time (and the ray) as the essence of time and time manifest, respectively.

11. The Torah describes Moses' prophetic vision in unique language: "he gazes at the picture of *Havayah*" (Numbers 12:8). Chassidic teachings (Rebbe Isaac of Homil's *Channah Ariel* to *Parashat Beha'alotcha*) explain that this means that Moses saw the same "picture" of reality that God sees.

12. Malachi 3:22.

13. Many sources explain that the *kav* (the ray of God's infinite light that permeates the vacuum that came into existence by means of the initial contraction) is the secret of Divine Providence. On the one hand this would seem to indicate that the Arizal's creation by contraction is not just an allegory, but that indeed God observes (and controls) reality from above (through the means of the *kav*). But, this is a misunderstanding based upon the awareness of the external dimension of the *kav* alone, i.e., its power of differentiation within created reality, which also seems to differentiate the Creator from His creation. Awareness of the internal dimension of the *kav*, its power of connection (even of absolute opposites), however, allows us to experience the way that God sees reality, through the eyes of the Torah, the blueprint of reality that is essentially one with Him. The Torah binds the Creator to His creation and reveals (by means of Divine Providence over all) that "God is all and all is God." As explained by Rabbi Isaac of Homil, this is the "run and return" of the Divine soul of Israel, "an actual part of God above."