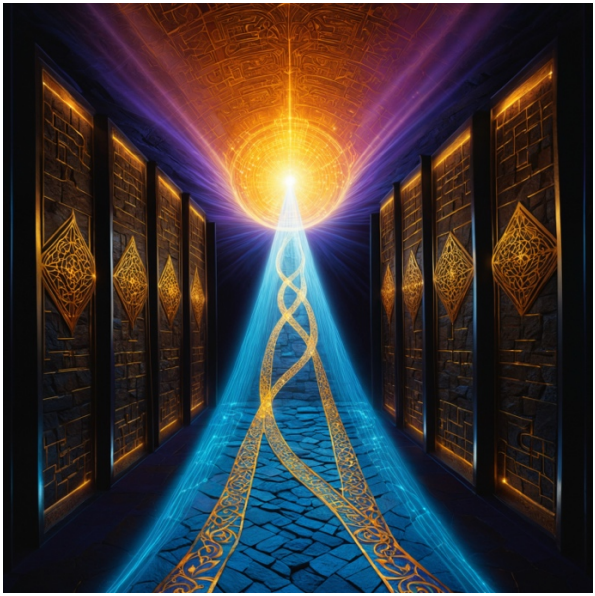
MINIDRASH

11 Short Commentaries on the First Torah Portion Bereishis



Boris Isaac Burshteyn

Minidrash

11 Short Commentaries on the First Torah Portion
Bereishis

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By

Boris Isaac Burshteyn

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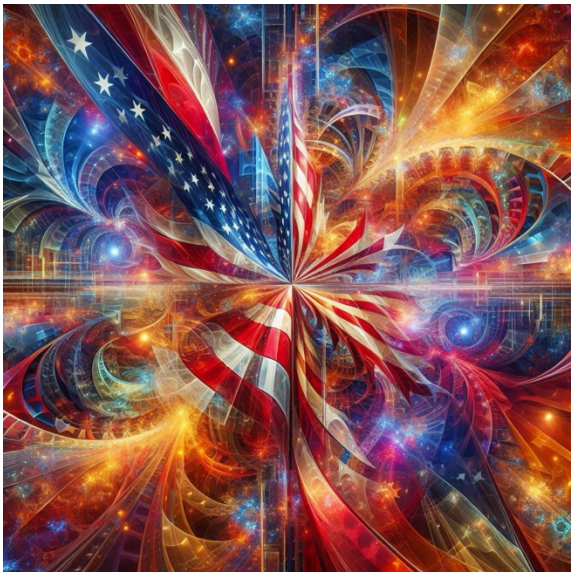
Front cover: “Fantasy,” title: “Path,” table of
contents: “Crown,” back cover: “Youth.”

Printed in the United States of America.

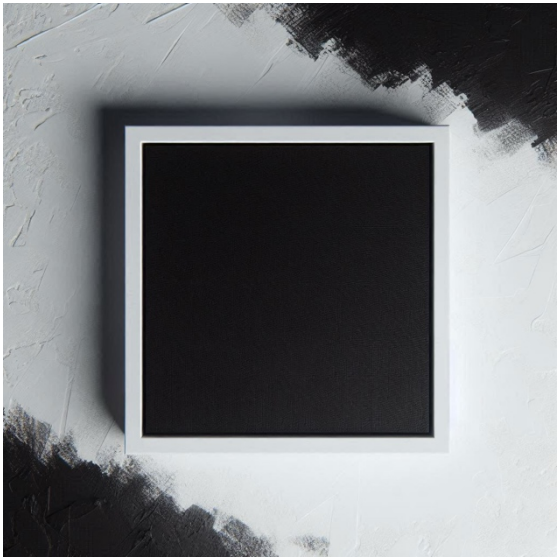
ISBN 979-8-31968-866-8

This book stands as a testament to the precious right of religious freedom in the United States of America.



Freedom

This book is dedicated to the enduring memory of the Jewish families who were murdered and suffered at the hands of the Ukrainian bandits, communist despots, and Nazi killers.



Mourning

In Appreciation

Over the past several years, I have written an annual essay on the first Torah portion, Bereishis. This book is a collection of those essays, slightly edited.

I am deeply grateful to Rabbi Daniel Fox of Congregation Darhei Noam in Glenbrook, IL; my daughter, Gabriela; my grandsons, Ronen and Solomon; and our friends, Deborah Sosebee, Steve Astrachan, and Michal Kohane, for their invaluable feedback. Above all, I am profoundly indebted to my wife, Sophia, who tirelessly improved the clarity of early drafts.

Every year, on Shabbat Morning of Reading Bereishis, I have had the privilege of presenting my new essay at Beth Jacob Congregation in Oakland, CA. I am sincerely grateful to Rabbi Gershon Albert and the members of the congregation for their warm welcome and unwavering support.

Boris Burshteyn, Tishrei, 5786 AM, CA, USA.

Study

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Foreword

By Rabbi Daniel Fox

"בראשית... בשביל התורה שנקראת ראשית דרכו, In the beginning… for the purpose of the Torah, which is called the beginning of His ways. (Rashi, Bereishis 1:1)" Rashi teaches that the very purpose of creation is to study and observe the Torah. Anyone who studies, teaches, or writes about Torah should recognize that he is engaged in the most sacred and noble of all activities, fulfilling the purpose of our very existence.

Rashi (ibid.) wonders why the Torah begins with the story of creation. If the Torah is primarily a book of law and instruction, then why did it not begin with the first commandment? Why must we study the creations of each day, the happenings of Adam and Eve, the drama of Cain and Abel, and other stories from so many thousands of years ago?

Ramban, however, is troubled by the premise of Rashi's question. Of course, the Torah must begin, well… from the beginning! " כי הוא שרש האמונה ושאינו מאמין בזה וחושב שהעולם קדמון הוא כופר בעיקר ואין לו תורה כלל, for it (the story of creation) is the basis of all faith, and one who does not believe in it, but thinks that the world has existed eternally, is denying a fundamental

principle, and has no Torah. (Ramban, Bereishis 1:1)"

In order to fully appreciate and commit to a life of Torah and mitzvot, a person must contemplate how everything came to be, why we are here, and to where we are headed. My dear friend Boris Burshteyn has done a great service by committing his wisdom and research to the written word. His creative thinking, extensive knowledge, and sincere quest for truth are apparent on every page.

Each year, I've enjoyed reading Boris' new teaching, and I'm excited that he has compiled them in book form. From a broad view of the world's history and future to a discussion of the finer points of man's free will to a thought-provoking theory about early man's knowledge of G-d, each essay is unique and engaging. The best compliment I can give to a book is that it makes me think, and in that regard, Minidrash has more than done its job. I look forward to continuing learning from and contemplating Boris' writing for many years in the future, G-d willing! "יפוצו מעיוניך חוצה, may your springs (of wisdom) continue to burst forth! (Mishlei 5:16)"

Daniel Fox

22 Elul 5785

Preface

God Exists!

From Darkness to Light

From the murderous deserts of Crimea and the pogrom wasted villages of Ukraine, through the damp NKVD interrogation cells and execution chambers, to the freezing Gulag death camps beyond the Arctic Circle and harsh labor prisons in the Kazakh steppes, through the harrowing German Nazi killing grounds, then back to the brutal tyranny and grim reality of the Soviet dictatorship–such was my family's path of survival in the 20th century. Countless other Jewish families can trace their history through their own tragic tracks that crisscrossed the times and places inside the Soviet Union. Given their circumstances, can one blame our ancestors for suspending their Jewish traditions?

They just longed to be left alone, avoiding the persecutions of Communist thugs. It was too dangerous for our parents and grandparents to profess their belief in God openly. Yet, in the repeated acts of stern defiance, the Jews of all generations proudly asserted their nationality as "*Jewish*" in the infamous fifth field of the Soviet passport, which made it easy for the state to target the subjects of anti-Semitic persecutions.

Ironically, by a stroke of poetic justice, it was the content of the passport's fifth field that ultimately permitted the Jews, unlike other nationalities, to emigrate from Russia, so that their children would never witness the nightmares of the past. During the fall of the USSR, there was a historic movement of 1.6 million Jews, reminiscent of the biblical Exodus from Egypt.

Epiphany

Now, we live free in America. In the US, my family has rekindled our Jewish religious and cultural roots, and I have begun studying the Torah. This preface explains why I decided to

write the commentaries on the first Torah portion, Bereishis.

USSR–Prison of Peoples

I grew up in the post-World War II Soviet Union. The state's religious policy declared, “There is no God!”

From kindergarten, children were brainwashed with the God-denying Marxist-Leninist ideology. Between the ages of 7 and 24, everyone had to be inducted into a youth communist organization. To earn an advanced degree in most colleges, one had to pass a mandatory class on scientific atheism.

The Soviet Communist Party was the sole source of morals in that giant country, wrapped in terror behind the Iron Curtain. It zealously headed the state-wide social propaganda, which kept impressing on everyone’s brain the bizarre communist virtues. The teachings of Marx and Lenin dictated what was good and what was bad. Nobody studied Torah.

The Communist Party also commanded internal and external state politics. Bent on clinging to power, it sacrificed individual freedoms on the altar of the so-called glorious collective communist future–an inhuman, dystopian, and psychotic fantasy of the deranged secular intellectuals.

Also, the Soviet authorities were riding

on top of the centuries-old local traditions of bloody anti-Semitism. They were eager to quickly and harshly persecute anyone who adhered to the Jewish religion and openly challenged the official atheist doctrine[1].

Enlightenment

However, at 14, I became mature enough to understand that all Soviet propaganda was a blatant lie. It became clear that communist ideology starkly contradicts human nature. Moreover, there was no doubt that the propaganda failed to hide the tragic history of the Soviet oppression of millions. That affected my family in the most tragic ways, too.

I knew it was dangerous to share this realization. So, I kept it to myself and my family. One could pay dearly for voicing such thoughts aloud. The mass killings and Gulag incarcerations of Stalin's era had mostly subsided by my time. However, the authorities still held their bloodstained grip on people's freedom of expression. And the people were still healing the painful scars from past horrors.

Escape to Creativity

As a young man, I searched for the meaning of life. It was clear that the goal of

[1] Ironically, Karl Marx, the founder of the Communist theory and a rabid anti-Semite, had a Jewish heritage. Vladimir Lenin, the follower of Karl Marx and the murderous founder of the Evil Soviet Empire, had a Jewish heritage, as well

building a bright future for the communist society was misguided. That was a patently false and bad dream.

Although I grew up in a Jewish family, I had no religious education because we were surrounded by an atheistic, anti-Semitic, and oppressive society. Therefore, I struggled to find and follow God's commandments.

Yet I came to realize that one can leave a legacy through creative work. The nature or the lifetime of the creations does not matter as long as they are meaningful and good.

Epiphany

As a software engineer, I once devoted a huge effort to creating a large and complex piece of software. At the end of that work, I figured out that the World is infinitely more intricate than any computer program.

It could neither have popped into existence nor kept going forever. An extraordinary thought and action were needed to create the Universe. It was God who must have built the World!

USA–Land of the Free

Later, we moved from the Soviet Union to the United States. Here, American freedom allowed my family and me to practice the Jewish religion openly. We began studying the Torah.

Learning the Torah and its commentaries profoundly altered our perspective on the World. It made us observant of God's commandments and Jewish traditions.

The US Constitution firmly enshrines individual rights. Thus, everyone in America may freely follow their religious convictions without fear of persecution. Yet it still amazes me how often these precious rights are taken for granted. Hopefully, we will never abandon or surrender our freedoms.

Search for Meaning

The professional work that sparked my religious journey was intensely creative. Therefore, prompted by my focus on the meaning of life via the prism of creativity, I was especially drawn to the first Torah Portion, Bereishis.

That portion describes how God created the World. In the Creation Story, God made people in His image. Thus, every person is a creator in their own way. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the Creation Story enriches one's life and propels one's creativity.

The Journey

This book compiles the essays I wrote about Bereishis during my journey into Torah study. Each essay covers one aspect of that

portion in a short but deep excursion.

Ultimately, this collection is only the tiniest drop in the vast ocean of Torah Knowledge. Nevertheless, I hope you will find the essays in this book informative, original, and engaging.

Introduction

On the Shoulders of Giants

Bird's Eye View

This book presents eleven short essays with commentaries on the first Torah portion, Bereishis. Each essay explores a unique and original perspective on that portion.

Knowledge

Together, the essays examine diverse theological and philosophical aspects of the World Creation Story from the Torah. These

include the Holy and the mundane, immortality, laws of Nature, the origin of the Ten Commandments, miracles, animal treatment, free will, the human soul, ingenuity, morality, Israel's cosmic destiny, God's covenant, and the source of ethics.

The Seven Minutes Rule

Each essay was originally written as a handout for personal reading during Shabbat morning service for the Torah portion Bereishis. Each service is limited in duration. Therefore, every essay had to be brief for readers to finish in less than 7 minutes.

The essays in this book are edited versions of the originals. Some are slightly enlarged to allow for smoother transitions between paragraphs. Others add content missing from the originals. Still, all remain brief.

Short & Sweet

The essays are self-contained and independent of each other. They can be read in any order without missing context. All essays are written in clear, plain, and engaging language accessible to a broad reading audience. The essays explore their respective subjects directly and concisely, without oversimplification.

Each essay's brevity is intentional, aiming to capture and retain the reader's interest

throughout. Although the short length limits the extent of the exploration, the essays delve deeply into their respective topics, offering original and unique viewpoints. In effect, the essays are meant to prompt the reader's thoughtful reflection on the subject at hand, particularly when discussing humanity's open-ended future.

What It Is Not

When reading this book, keep in mind that it merely presents my thoughts on the themes from the Torah portion Bereishis. I am not a rabbi, not a Torah scholar, and have no formal religious education. I am just fascinated by the wisdom of the Torah.

This collection of disparate essays does not aspire to be a scholarly treatise on the entire Torah or a part of it. In this book, one does not find extensive quotations from or exhaustive references to the vast body of rabbinical, historical, and academic Torah literature. Also, due to the size limitation, there is little discussion of alternative viewpoints.

However, some essays do briefly cross-reference Midrashic interpretations. Others connect with several relevant sources from Scripture and Rabbinic commentaries. When appropriate, the book also presents excerpts from the Torah text.

The Torah Text

The theme of the first Torah portion, Bereishis, is profound–it is the Creation of the World! Therefore, it is not humanly possible to comprehensively comment on the entire Bereishis.

Instead, each essay concentrates solely on a specific aspect of that Torah portion. That is a traditional approach that follows the classic Torah commentators, who often examined a single verse or even a single word from the Torah at a time.

Although each essay addresses a different subject, all of them focus on the same first Torah portion, Bereishis. That inevitably causes separate essays to converge on the same events. However, bear in mind that the different essays discuss distinct aspects of the same events.

The essays often refer to their source–the Holy Torah, the most popular book ever written. Basic knowledge of the Torah is expected, as it will undoubtedly help you appreciate the essays' content. I encourage those who want a deeper understanding of the context of the references to consult the relevant Torah text, especially its first portion, Bereishis.

Matters of Faith

In all doctrines of faith, certain points cannot be proven logically; they must be

accepted by faith, based on underlying beliefs. Similarly, attempts to predict the future are risky and, again, often lack a definitive logical foundation. Still, in this book, I have tried hard to provide a solid foundation for my thoughts, based on the Torah text, commentaries, and my abilities, in good faith.

What's in a Name?

The name of this book, MINIDRASH, has two parts. The second part derives from the Hebrew word דְּרָשׁ, or 'DRASH'. In the context of Torah studies, it refers to a sermon, discussion, or interpretation of the Torah. The first part of the book's name, 'MINI,' comes from the fact that each essay is concise.

The name MINIDRASH is also a wordplay on the name of a renowned and revered Jewish religious text, MIDRASH. That book is one of the earliest collections of profound Torah commentaries, which began as an oral tradition in the Second Temple period approximately 2,500 years ago.

1. No Gravediggers in Paradise

Life & Death

The Beginning of Death

Which two events in Bereishis set the course of civilization? They were God's willful six-day Creation of the World and Adam and Hava's recklessly hasty feast at the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Tombstones

We bless God for His marvelous work because we live in this amazing World. But we lament Adam and Hava for their tragic misdeed, as it marked us, despite all being made in the image of the immortal God, to die and leave this World forever.

So, with people's certain death omnipresent, how can one understand God calling Creation, which stands oblivious to anyone's life, "very good?" In the Midrash, the Jewish Sages point out that Creation runs flawlessly in its totality. Here, I look for one concrete reason: man's immortality in the World to Come.

The End of Life

Adam and Hava consciously diverted humanity from Paradise into this World by forsaking the Tree of Life in favor of the Tree of Knowledge. Since then, the endless cycles of birth, life, and death have driven the history of mankind. Each generation attended funerals, visited graves, and grieved for the dead friends and loved ones, always all too aware that someone would do the same for them one day.

Without food, life quickly ends. To sustain life, God commanded all creatures to eat. Still, even with sustenance, everyone, wicked or righteous, meek or vibrant, prince or pauper, meets the ultimate demise. Unlike the taxman, death takes no prisoners.

However, Adam and Hava could have lived forever, as God planted the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. But first, they had to pass a trial of trust in God: refrain from eating from another tree–the one of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God cautioned Adam not to disobey lest he indeed die.

Alas, they spurned the warning and flunked the test. Hava trusted the snake and wished for the forbidden fruit. Hers was not just a plain want but a sudden, all-consuming animal craving, which she instantly gratified. The Midrash states that Hava kept wailing at reluctant Adam until he joined in defiling God's order.

As a punishment, God cast them into this World, far from the Paradise Tree of Life. Here, Adam had to toil for food, and Hava had to suffer in childbirth. Horrified, they saw their oldest son killing his brother. In the end, they both expired.

Immortality

Life is a brief bond between the soul and body. Death cuts that bond, at times abruptly, often through ghastly agony, but always irreversibly. No dead ever comes back alive to this World as the soul returns to God, and the body rots to dust.

However, contrary to all this, in Bereishis, God says Adam will never die if he eats from the Tree of Life. So life could still have

lasted forever in Paradise. But in this World, death is inevitable!

Indeed, how can one live forever in this World where aging exhausts vitality, deadly accidents ensue, crime is rampant, and wars rage? And what if an utter disaster strikes? When a 3,000-year-old sequoia falls on someone, would they not be plastered on the ground? Or, if an atomic bomb detonates at one's feet or an asteroid smashes into one's head, would one not wholly evaporate?

Thus, the would-be immortals must differ from mortal people. Their minds and bodies should not decay, while the World must uphold their lives. No misfortune will occur, no tree will fall, no cosmic boulder will strike, and no explosion will go off near them.

Yet none of that is plausible. Nature would have to bend its laws, while people would have to change their nature to allow for immortality.

Besides, one can imagine worse ways to stay alive in this World. What if, crushed by a giant trunk, one's soul clings to the lingering blob of bones and blood? What if, after a nuclear catastrophe, people's remnants keep roaming around the globe as ghost-like clouds? What if, after enduring fatal wounds, what is left keeps suffering in perpetual misery? None of such

morbid finales merits eternity.

Gardens of Life

Adam and Hava were destined to die because they had not tasted the fruit of the Tree of Life. Therefore, they could not have dwelt in Paradise. Nobody was supposed to die in the Garden of Eden, where there were no gravediggers to bury the dead. On the other hand, masses of gravediggers have been employed in this World as billions followed Adam and Hava's Earthly path from the cradle to the dire grave.

We know that death is certain in this World, and a path to Paradise is hard to find. So, will the Messiah bring the seeds of the Tree of Life into the World to Come, where all learn Good, Evil is gone, and Nature safeguards life from death? Will he grow not just one Tree but cover the whole Earth with lush gardens full of Trees of Life?

Then, as the parted souls rush to revive their former bodies, and no one ever dies while feasting in the Gardens of Life, gravediggers will be shutting old graves, not digging new ones. *Perhaps Creation bound toward eternal life is what God called "very good!"*

1. No Gravediggers in Paradise

2. According to Its Kind

On God's First Message to Humans

Man and Beasts

On the fifth and sixth days of Creation, God made many living creatures, each according to its kind. They filled water, air, and land. In the end, God created a single man, Adam, and a single woman, Hava, to live on land.

Compassion

Why didn’t God make many kinds of

humans? Also, with the first words to Adam and Hava, God charged them "to rule" over the Earth's creatures. What does this command mean?

Oblivious to Good and Evil

In Bereishis, God proclaimed all animals as good. However, He never gave them ways to know Good or Evil.

A tiny hamster mother devouring her babies, confined in a cage, is a stress reaction, not an atrocity. A fierce tigress stalking prey in the Siberian taiga is not evil. She hunts for food to feed her cubs. An eagle, diving swiftly from the sky, snatching a hare off the ground in an intrepid stoop, is not engaged in a senseless sport. It just needs to nurture its chicks. Regardless of the kind, the creatures live by instinct, not morals.

Single Torah

Unlike animals, people choose Good when they follow moral laws and Evil when they stray off. Also, all people are alike, as God has molded them in His unique image and granted everyone the same drive to discern Good from Evil. To help make moral choices, He gave a single book of laws–the Torah–to all people, regardless of place, language, race, or skin color.

Thus, it is easy to answer, "Why is there just one kind of man?" Because there is only one

Torah!

Indeed, imagine there were diverse kinds of people. Some walk on the ground, while others fly high in the skies or swim deep in the oceans.

Then, the Exodus story of land-bound people would not make sense to those who were aerial or sea-born. There would have to be a separate Torah for every type of person. Therefore, a conflict could ensue between various kinds to champion the disparate ideas of Good and Evil.

Having no Torah is the only sure way to avoid such confusion. Therefore, people would be no different from animals. All are good in the eyes of God, but no one knows or cares about Good and Evil.

Animal Use

Animal use is a recurring theme in most Torah stories. Some stories show it as frivolous or nefarious, while others portray it as necessary.

Animal treatment began when Hava blamed the snake. After the Flood, God accepted Noah's sacrifices and allowed the use of animals for food.

Abraham fed a kid to the angel messengers near Sodom. He offered a ram instead of Isaac on Mt. Moriah. Ishmael became

an archer, and Esau a hunter. Six out of ten Egyptian plagues concerned animals: frogs, lice, wild beasts, pestilence, locusts, and the death of the firstborn.

God rebuked animal worship in the sin of a Golden Calf. Yet He demanded the Holidays' sacrifices and sin offerings. God warned of wildlife slaying children and livestock if Jews forsake the Torah.

Caring for Animals

The Torah teaches us to *rule over animals* using examples of compassion and kindness. In the beginning, God allowed only herbage and fruit as food, not any animals. Then Adam gave names to all creatures. His son, Havel, shepherded the flocks.

The caring reached its peak when Noah saved the animals on his Ark from the Flood. Later, Abraham, Isaac, Rachel, Jacob, and Moses tended the herds. Rebecca drew water for the tired camels. Jacob left Laban slowly to keep the younglings alive.

The children of Israel came to Egypt with the flocks and kept them for the next 400 years. The Jewish nation took all animals on the road when it left for a 40-year desert journey to the Promised Land. Kashrut mandates kindness to animals, and many Torah commandments teach empathy toward animals.

Understanding Animals

Animal care begins with understanding animals. A keen observer catches creatures' minds and moods. True, they do not express themselves in words. But animals communicate and show emotions through sounds, movements, and scents. One can find every human demeanor in this or that kind of creature.

Like humans, animals also reveal love, hate, friendship, revenge, etc. Not all creatures respond to man in the same way. Still, like most people, many react to human kindness or cruelty with predictable affection or distress. Once established, a bond with a tame or wild animal can be profound.

Animal Love

When one cares with love, animals respond in kind. While in contact with a good human, an animal gains a glimpse into the world of Good, which no creature can perceive on its own, no matter how well-trained it may be.

Animal abuse is an abomination. It exposes animals to the peril of Evil and breaks God's first order to people–to rule over the animals.

Thus, pour out love from your heart when caring for a creature. Make it feel the otherwise unknown bliss of Good while returning you an

overwhelming flow of gratitude.

Ooh, but wait, safety first! Never pat a wild Komodo dragon, hug a starved piranha, or pity a blood-sucking mosquito.

3. The Gateway to Creator

I Am Not a Robot

The Gift of God

Why did God, on the last day of Creation, breathe into Adam's nostrils a living soul? Could the Ruler of the World skip the soul while endowing the first man only with robotic faculties, such as moving limbs, seeing eyes, and others, all topped by a thinking brain?

Judgment

The soul was the only thing God had not

created during the six days of Creation. Therefore, the soul is intangible and eternal. It is God's gift, which does not belong to this material World. The Torah tells us that God formed people in His image, not because we look like God, but because everyone has an innate “part” of God–the immortal soul.

Enigma

Still, the question stays open: *why does one need a soul?* One can find many answers, most of which emphasize the holistic nature of the soul's attributes. E.g., to provide immortality, offer moral guidance, serve as a conduit for ethics, contain the source of emotions, and enable reincarnation, among others. But is there a concrete, rational, or even utilitarian purpose for man to have a soul?

On the one hand, a philosopher pondering an answer can guess endlessly while concocting abstract claims. On the other hand, an artist expressing the soul through art evades a rational explanation.

A scientist flatly rejects the enigma of the soul as no test can probe its qualities. Likewise, an engineer outright dismisses the soul since no tool can size it.

Not even a physician can pinpoint the soul inside a human body. It is not found in anatomical atlases; it leaves no trace on

ultrasounds, CT scans, or X-rays.

Do our passions and desires truly reflect the soul's depth? Alas, both therapists and sociologists discard the concept of the soul altogether.

Man and God

Although the soul is imperceptible, everyone has it. The Torah says that "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed in his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living soul." Thus, instead of making a robot-man, God made man alive, possessing the soul.

But what does the soul do for a living man? To find a practical purpose for the soul, consider how people learn about each other. We communicate using words, emotions, and body language.

How does God learn what is going on with each of us? There is not enough time to tell all in prayer (if one even prays!). Besides that, God does not attend to modern-day channels.

No aerial drones provide a live feed to the King of the World, nor do the hidden cameras and eavesdropping devices relay everything we do and say. No gadgets sap our inner thoughts to God, while absent are GPS detectors spotting everyone's location.

Ironically, nobody befriends our Creator on social networks. The Master of the Universe has no account at any cloud provider.

There is no known material path for humans to reach God.

Out of This World

What if the soul is the gateway to God, which keeps sending Him the full stream of your life in real time? As such, the soul connects with God by a perfect yet mysterious link.

It captures the whole and only truth–you cannot deceive the Judge of all Earth by transmitting lies. No one can sever, break, or shut down this connection. Moreover, no one can spam God through the soul.

Your soul conducts the most secure nonstop transmission, resistant to viruses and hacking. No one can search, intercept, or snoop upon soul messages, corrupt, or jam the traffic: the soul and its path to God are not of this World.

It is superior to the Web, Artificial Intelligence, quantum channels, or any other tech that man will ever create. And because of its tight bond with God, the soul sets a living man apart from an inanimate robot forever.

The soul does not upload your life story onto some heavenly email server, which moves

inbound posts into a trash bin or spam folder. Bypassing any intermediary, the soul reports straight to the Creator of the World.

Loopback

Furthermore, the soul's contact with God is two-way. As it transmits our life stories to God in reverse, it returns God's guidance to our lives, directing us for as long as we breathe.

But it is rare for one to attune the soul in this opposite direction. Still, there is a way to cut static noise and adjust the reception.

Try to be the best person you can be! Cleanse the soul by studying the Torah, following God's commandments, performing mitzvot, donating to charity, and praying. Then, you might have a fantastic chance to get a message from God when you need it most.

4. Murder in the Field

The Brothers Were Not Each Other's Keepers

Prologue

The Torah story about Cain killing his brother Havel is sparse on details, and the players' motives, so this tragic mystery has inspired speculation for millennia. Indeed, one can read its interpretations in traditional Rabbinic Literature and Midrash commentaries.

While searching for clues in the Torah, I pieced together the key elements using a mix of common sense and imagination. Ultimately, this foremost human tragedy, unexpectedly, ended up driven by a conflict between hatred and ignorance.

The Story Retold

After God banished Adam and Hava from the Garden of Eden, they rebuilt their lives by following the commandments God had given them in the Garden. Adam and Hava became "fruitful": when Hava gave birth to her first child, Cain, she attested to this by exclaiming, "I have acquired a man with the Lord."

Hava also ensured that Cain followed God's commandment to work the land by

becoming a “tiller of the soil.” As for her second son, Havel, he ended up pursuing God’s commandment to “rule over ... all the beasts ...” Havel became “a shepherd of flocks” when he followed the footsteps of his father Adam, who used to study and name every kind of animal while searching for Hava.

Dreams

Cain took after Hava’s dynamic personality (after all, it was Hava who convinced Adam to eat from the forbidden Tree). Havel, like his father, was quiet and dedicated to being the animal’s keeper.

Anguish Versus Wealth

Cain's tilling of the virgin land was incredibly arduous, just as God had warned his parents–"with the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." Meanwhile, Havel's shepherding was much easier since he learned from his father, Adam, how to tame the beasts.

Not only did Cain continue to exhaust himself from the grueling grind, but the outcome of his toil was meager and poor, precisely as God had foretold to his parents that the Earth only "will cause thorns and thistles to grow for you." However, because Havel's domesticated animals were exceedingly fruitful, everything he effortlessly reaped from the flocks was of the highest quality.

As Cain's life grew increasingly intolerable year after year, his brother Havel was enjoying a continuous good time. Nevertheless, true to his strong character, Cain did not give up. Believing in the Earth's potential for abundance, he strove to make his efforts less burdensome and more productive, yet he continually failed.

With no one else to turn to, Cain never stopped imploring Havel for help and advice. Still, in vain: it was more important for a tranquil Havel to keep an eye on his flocks than to ease Cain's suffering.

Over time, the strain between Cain's

insistence and Havel's rejection poisoned their relationship. Cain became bitter towards Havel for ignoring his appeals. So, how did Cain decide to solve the problem?

Facing God

Frustrated by his harsh life and Havel's apathy, Cain decided to offer God "the fruit of the soil an offering to the Lord" and ask to reveal the secrets of the Earth's abundance. Not to be outdone, Havel followed his brother's example. However, unlike Cain, Havel did not intend to ask for help but proudly showed God "the firstborn of his flocks and of their fattest."

Havel's offering was superior to Cain's because the beasts were abundantly fruitful: it was easy for Havel to choose the best from the vast herds. As for Cain, he could pick nothing but the dismal outcome of his exhausting labor over the unyielding Earth.

After looking at both offerings, "The Lord turned to Havel and his offering. But to Cain and his offering He did not turn." Already in deep despair, Cain became annoyed "exceedingly, and his countenance fell."

He got upset with Havel for showing up, parading the animals, and denying him an audience with God. In his mind, Cain concluded that from now on, he would never find help from either Havel or God.

However, the Torah tells us that God did remember Cain. God turned to Cain and gave him four essential pieces of advice. Had Cain followed God's wisdom, he would not have become a murderer.

Tragically, blinded by hatred, he chose to ignore God's kind words, much like Havel ignored Cain's appeals. So, what exactly did God tell Cain?

Advice

The first advice God gave Cain was in the form of a rhetorical question: "Why are you annoyed and why has your countenance fallen?" God implied to Cain that He does not favor Havel over him and that Cain's problems are merely misjudgments of the troubled mind–they are not real.

The second piece of advice suggested a way out from Cain's sufferings by becoming better and wiser at work: "Is it not so that if you improve, it will be forgiven you?" God assured Cain that, with time, he could become more productive and that his life's burden would disappear.

In the third piece of advice, God warned Cain, "If you do not improve, however, at the entrance, sin is lying, and to you is its longing." In other words, God revealed to Cain the essence of his sufferings. Since Cain had failed to find a

better way to do his job, he had fallen into the sin of hatred toward Havel, and that sin was a real problem.

Finally, God encouraged Cain to overcome his moods: “But you can rule over it.” In other words, do not blame others for your self-imposed imaginary misfortune. Instead, keep working harder and smarter. Yet, even if you can’t improve, you can still stop hating.

Did Cain take God’s advice to heart?

Crime

Alas, God’s caring words fell on Cain’s deaf ears. Just as Adam and Hava in the Garden of Eden, Cain disobeyed God. Instead of overcoming his hateful state of mind and realizing that there was nobody to blame for his hardship, Cain doubled down on hatred.

After meeting God, he was overwhelmed with jealousy and cried out to Havel for help again. As before, Havel remained ignorant. But this time, he upset Cain beyond measure, and the outcome was disastrous: “And Cain spoke to Havel, his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Havel his brother and slew him.”

Thus, the first murder was committed due to a total lack of goodwill between the victim and the perpetrator. Cain and Havel were not only

neighbors but also brothers by birth, yet neither loved the other. Moreover, Cain madly hated his prosperous brother, Havel, while Havel barely acknowledged the existence of his wretched brother, Cain.

Motive

Cain, whose name could mean "possessed creator," dutifully followed God's commandment but did not realize that success in his enterprise would take a long time and require the patient application of all his physical and mental strengths. So, Cain sought help from his brother Havel, whose name could mean "vain."

But Havel was oblivious to his brother's suffering: he cared only about shepherding his flocks, a much easier and more rewarding task than Cain's tilling the soil. Once again, Cain ended up pleading in vain as Havel only kept an eye on the flocks.

Havel wasn't his brother's keeper! This lifelong chasm explains why, when confronted by God after the murder, "Where is Havel your brother?" Cain brushed it off with a diabolical sarcasm, "I do not know. *Am I my brother's keeper?*"

Havel was the keeper of his flocks. Cain begged him to be his, Cain's, keeper, as well. However, Havel continued to ignore him and never agreed to it. Havel's constant ignorance

kept destroying Cain. Ultimately, it led to his moral downfall and the tragic murder of his brother.

In Cain's mind, he triumphed over Havel with his revenge. Cain sarcastically asserted to God that, just as Havel was never his keeper, he would never be his dead brother's keeper either.

Punishment

Mad with hatred, Cain became the prosecutor, judge, and executioner, all at the same time. The Torah contrasted this horrible perversion of blind justice with God's merciful fairness when he punished Cain for his crime.

While charging Cain with murder, God spared his life. God pointedly tied Cain's offense with the source of his failure–Cain's Earthly vocation–and forbade him from working the Earth for all time.

God said to Cain: "Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the Earth... which opened its mouth to take your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the soil, it will not continue to give its strength to you; you shall be a wanderer and an exile in the land."

Thus, Cain's fruitless quest for the Earth's fertility secrets came to a gruesome end when Havel's blood covered the Earth, forever sealing those secrets from Cain, his brother's

murderer.

Epilogue

Eventually, while wandering the land, Cain acquired a new skill: city-building. He never returned to tilling the Earth.

God punished Cain by denying him the chance to excel at the one thing he craved–discovering the farming secrets of the Earth's virgin land. That was something he was ready to kill and had killed for. In effect, Cain's sole, genuine aspiration tragically remained unfulfilled forever until his ultimate death, when he was killed by his great-grandson Lamech.

5. The Lonely God of Man

From Divine Solitude to Covenant

Prologue: In the Language of Man

Because the Torah speaks of God in human terms, it invites us to reflect on His divine attributes. This essay examines, in human language, God's longing for a relationship with mankind as the cornerstone of His Creation.

Singularity

Part I: The Master Plan

In the Image of the Lonely God

For those familiar with Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith*, this essay echoes man's longing for God by placing it alongside God's solitude and His desire for relationship with humanity.

The Torah Path

The Torah begins with an act: God creates the universe and makes man in His image. Human actions usually begin with a motive and move toward a purpose.

Thus one may ask homiletically: Does God's act of Creation also have a motive and a purpose? This essay answers yes: *Creation unfolds from divine solitude toward a covenantal bond with humanity*.

Why Israel?

Midrash Tanchuma says that God desires "a dwelling place in the lower realms" (Naso 16)[2]. That longing extends beyond Israel (Zechariah 2:15). Yet the Torah describes God's dwelling among the Jewish people. So how does

[2] For the source of the quotations refer to the Appendix.

God's covenant with Israel relate to His universal desire?

Before Abraham, individuals failed to sustain the bonds God formed with them. Thus, God sealed the covenant with Abraham, which extended through family to the nation of Israel—His treasured people, "a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:5–6)—as the bridge through which His bond with all mankind unfolds.

Divine Solitude

Why speak of God as alone? Bereishis describes Creation as the work of one God. The Shema announces, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4), and the Torah teaches this throughout. The first two of the Ten Commandments also affirm Israel's covenantal relationship with the one God (Exodus 20:2–3).

Thus, one might imagine, as it were, "the great and awesome God" dwelling alone. God then creates man in His image—as if breaking divine solitude by making humanity a partner in relationship and moral choice.

Part II: Individual Bonds

Adam and Hava Break the Bond

Is loneliness good in the eyes of God? Bereishis answers negatively. God made Adam

as the only human being, saw that "it is not good for Adam *to be alone*" (Genesis 2:18), and created Hava as his companion.

God formed a bond with Adam and Hava inside Paradise. Yet that connection was short-lived. Adam and Hava were not yet ready to become His covenantal partners. They desired knowledge of Good and Evil but tried to seize it through disobedience instead of seeking true moral knowledge from God.

Created to Complete the Work

Still, after casting them out of Paradise, He let them live, be fruitful, and multiply. In the meantime, God waited for future generations to attain that missing knowledge.

Adam and Hava's failure may explain the verse in Genesis 2:3—"And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He rested from all His work which God *created to do*."

Perhaps this means that although God's work of Creation was complete, humanity's work remained: to learn the true meaning of Good and Evil through Torah—not from a tree. Only then could God's desire to dwell in the "lower realms" be fulfilled.

Cain Betrays the Bond

Outside Paradise, Adam and Hava perhaps recognized the gravity of their broken bond with God and taught their children, Cain and Havel, to rebuild it.

The brothers brought Him, first Cain, then Havel, the fruits of their work. God turned to Havel's offering and spoke to Cain. Yet Cain betrayed the bond he sought to renew when he murdered his brother.

Cain's Reaching Merits Mercy

Bereishis Rabbah offers differing readings of Cain's words, as confession or protest (22:11). Might his earlier offering also have counted in his favor?

The world God later drowned was condemned for chamas—violence and robbery—a world of taking (Genesis 6:11–13; Sanhedrin 108a). Cain himself became a taker of life. Yet before that crime, he had brought God a gift.

Cain's is the first offering recorded in the Torah; Havel followed with the choicest of his flock. That first approach, however flawed, may have earned Cain a merit that endured even through his betrayal.

On this reading, when he sought mercy, his earlier reaching toward God still counted in

his favor. His survival would then bear further witness to how highly God values man's effort to establish a bond with Him.

Noah – Promise of Rebirth

Later, Adam and Hava's descendants sank deep into sheer evil. God was patient for the ten generations from Adam to Noah (Mishnah Avot 5:2). Then "the Lord regretted that He had made man on the earth, *and He was grieved in His heart*" (Genesis 6:6). God said of all life on earth, "I am about to destroy them…" (Genesis 6:13), and He swept them away in the flood.

Still, God saved Noah so that mankind could begin anew. After God set the rainbow as a sign of His covenant, one might have expected Noah and his descendants to honor that covenant, learn Good and Evil, and thus form a true bond with God.

Since Noah "was a righteous man," God gave him a mission to build the ark and save his family and the creatures that would enter it. All humanity remained bound by the laws later called the Seven Noahide Commandments. Still, the fuller covenantal mission awaited Abraham.

The Bond Fades

Noah—the courageous rescuer of mankind, whose name has been cherished for

millennia—did not retain the moral stature for such a calling.

The terror of the flood may have scarred him: “the man of the earth” planted a vineyard, became drunk, and lay naked; his son then dishonored him. Noah’s bond with God faded.

Part III: The Covenant with Israel

Nations Born and Dispersed

Then mankind challenged God by erecting the Tower of Babel toward Heaven. They wanted to remain united and make a name for themselves. Unlike Cain, Havel, and Noah, they did not care to know God.

God broke their unity and thwarted the plan: He confused their language and dispersed them as seventy separate nations across the earth.

Yet He chose none of these nations for the covenantal mission He would entrust to Israel. Instead, He waited to form a nation bound not merely by language, land, or a self-chosen purpose, but by a covenant with God that it would carry for all mankind (Deuteronomy 32:8–9).

From Abraham to Israel and Torah

God’s patience was rewarded ten generations after Noah (Mishnah Avot 5:2), when Abraham proclaimed God’s name as the

sole Creator of the world and the source of moral law (Genesis 12:8, 13:4, 21:33). Thus, God renewed His bond with mankind through Abraham, reaffirming it after the Akeidah (Genesis 22:16–18).

Since Abraham taught God's way to his children, God continued the covenant through Isaac and Jacob. God then shaped Jacob's progeny—His chosen people—into what Rambam calls "a nation that knows God."[3]

At Sinai, God gave the Jewish nation the full covenant in the Torah, written and oral. The Torah bound the nation together, and Israel has carried it ever since, transmitting it from one generation to the next.

After Sinai, the Divine Presence dwelt in the Mishkan: Israel was set on the path of learning Good and Evil from the Torah, as our great prophet Moses led it toward the Promised Land. The Jewish nation became the bridge through which God would call all mankind into relationship with Him.

When the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, God deepened His bond with the Jewish people—first raising up judges and speaking through prophets, and later establishing His Presence in the First Temple built by King

[3] Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Zarah 1:3.

Solomon in Jerusalem. God continued to send prophets to guide the nation.

Retreat to Solitude

Alas, the Jews betrayed God's covenant by embracing idolatry and abandoning His commandments; the First Temple was destroyed. The Divine Presence withdrew, and in time prophecy ended with Malachi (Sanhedrin 11a).

Later, the Second Temple fell because of baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). Since then, God's Presence has been hidden, as it were, until the Jewish people and all mankind are ready to receive Him.

Epilogue

We Are God's Children

Think of children who fail to discern Good from Evil. Their actions crush the souls of loving parents with grief, shattering them beyond consolation. The parents' deepest prayer is for all their children to return and heal the rupture.

In Deuteronomy 14:1, Moses tells the Jewish people, "You are children of the Lord your God." The rainbow also stands as an enduring sign of mercy—set in the clouds as if inviting us to repair our bond with our Father in Heaven. Leviticus 26:40–45 affirms that bond—

God promises not to break His covenant with Israel.

Repairing the Bond

We, in turn, are called to remain faithful to that covenant—set down in the Torah, begun with Abraham our patriarch, and commanded by God through Moses our teacher: to study Torah, observe the mitzvot, love God with all our heart and soul, and teach our children to carry this heritage forward, as taught in the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–9).

In doing so, we answer the call at the heart of Creation: to draw the Presence of the lonely God of man back into the world He created, so that He may dwell among all His children.

6. Who Knew the Creator?

The Missing Link

Prologue

Many ways exist to interpret the first two Torah portions. Some understand them literally; others allegorically. Many even try to decipher them using modern science. The Mishnah, Midrash, and Gemara provide their hidden meanings.

However, I found little to explain the inner motives behind Adam and Hava's actions. What was behind their decision to disobey God's warning not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?

Outside the Box

Reading and re-reading the Creation Story, I became curious about its human aspect. What did Adam, Hava, their children, and their descendants know about God? How did they relate to the surrounding World with its inhabitants? How much did they understand about the Creation of the World as described in the Torah?

Answers to those questions could be the key to understanding how their understanding, or the lack thereof, contributed to the events described in the Bereishis Creation Story. That

could also explain how Adam and Hava's attitude toward God affected the subsequent history–the travails of the Great Flood and what followed, up until the life story of Abraham.

These questions are natural for a human Torah reader, as the Creation Story describes the lives of the first humans. It is not uncommon for someone to hear a story, whether real or fictional, and then question the motives of its protagonists.

Nanosecond One

Therefore, it seems straightforward to apply common-sense reasoning to explain the behavior of the first humans. Following this line

of thought, one might try to put oneself in Adam's shoes right from the beginning of his life (although Adam was both naked and shoeless right after his creation).

Paradise Imagined

Imagine you were never born to your mother and father, and that you had not grown up or attended any school. Moreover, you have never worked in your life and have never even seen another human being. Your mind and memory are a clean slate.

Opening your eyes, you see the incredibly big, complex, and amazing World. You do not understand why you are here or how you have come into this World. Imagine that this is the first day of your adult life!

Suddenly, God appears and guides you through this World, showing all the living creatures. Seeing your frustration with not finding a partner like every kind of animal has, God creates and gives you a beautiful wife, Hava.

Ignorance Begins

Everything seems quite right so far, yet was there something crucial missing? As evident from the Torah, God has not explained to Adam that the World, its wonders, all creatures, Adam himself, and Hava are God's creations.

Moreover, God has not explained that He is the only Creator and the absolute Master of all that exists–there are no other gods. Neither does the Torah mention any revelation that occurred to Adam and Hava, nor is there evidence of them reading the Torah.

Without an explicit explanation, Adam and Hava have not guessed the Creation Story on their own. They were overwhelmed by their first experiences on Earth. They were too busy absorbing the Garden of Eden's environment and its inhabitants.

Ignorance Settles

Thus, returning to your imagined presence in the Garden, you do not know who God is, other than that He has the authority to place you in the Garden. Also, God tells you what to eat and what not to eat. There is nothing wrong with following God’s commandment, and you do until the snake tells you it is OK not to.

Now, what would make you not listen to the snake’s inducements at that time? God’s commandment had no weight behind it aside from a warning of imminent death. However, you do not even understand what death is, as you have yet to see a dead body. So, you would think little of that commandment’s importance. Instead, you could have followed your desire to violate it.

After all, you would not know who God

is. You have neither the knowledge nor the understanding that God is the supreme Master of the World by virtue of being its sole Creator. It is therefore no wonder that Adam and Hava disobeyed God–they may not have recognized the nature of His authority!

Ignorance Continues

Ironically, even after God had punished Adam and Hava for their sin by expelling them from the Garden, there is no evidence in the Torah that they recognized God as the Creator of the World. Hava did realize that she had delivered her children in accordance with God's commandment to be fruitful and multiply. However, the Torah does not explain whether either Adam or Hava, or any of their children, recognized their relationship to God.

They continued to relate to Him as a kind of Master. That is evident in Cain and Havel presenting Him with the fruits of their labor. Yet again, neither they nor their descendants had ever acknowledged God as the Creator of the World.

Ignorance Kills

And how had this lack of knowledge ended for humanity at that time? The inability of the several first generations to understand the nature of God had contributed to the multitude of their transgressions.

There was no immediate feedback from God on people's actions. After expulsion from Eden and punishment of Cain, God exercised no authority on Earth before the Flood. Therefore, people may have followed their base instincts. That behavior led to their moral decline and subsequent physical extermination in the Great Flood.

Noah, the only "righteous" person in his generation, did not descend into the pit of immorality. Still, the Torah does not tell us that Noah understood the most important relation between God and the World–that God is the only Creator of the World.

Ignorance Ends

Generations after the Great Flood, Abraham rejected all idolatry, and came to recognize God as the Creator of the World, the sole source of all natural and moral laws, and therefore the supreme Master of the universe. This fact is evident from multiple Torah statements describing Abraham's behavior, his acknowledgment of God's supreme status, and God's attitude towards Abraham.

The pinnacle of that relationship was the binding of Isaac. It demonstrated to God that Abraham was a committed believer. Abraham was sure that God, as the Creator of the World, knows an ultimate reason for everything. God even knows a reason for the unimaginable, cruel

commandment to sacrifice Abraham's son. Because of this, Abraham realized that God is the owner of the World, being the World's only true, infinitely powerful authority.

Epilogue

From the perspective of the Bereishis Creation Story, one can divide the whole Torah into two uneven parts.

The first, shorter part, lasts from the Creation of the World until Abraham emerges as a main character of his time. Before Abraham, no one understood God's relationship with humans and the entire World.

The second, longer part begins with Abraham and continues until the end of the Torah. Abraham was the first and foremost genius in the history of mankind, who recognized that God is the Creator and the sole absolute owner of the Universe.

Because of Abraham's epiphany and his unquestioning belief, God decided to make the Jewish nation from the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. Since then, that nation has carried the truth about God, the sole Creator and owner of the World, to all people on Earth.

6. Who Knew the Creator?

7. The Paradise Paradox

Blinded by the Light

Prologue

A precious gem hides between the lines in Bereishis. It is the Paradise Paradox: H*ow can one pursue a God-given passion for knowing Good and Evil after God declares the source of such Knowledge off-limits?* The Torah text radiates a fascinating insight when viewed from two opposing perspectives.

Insight

To Eat or Not to Eat?

In the beginning, Adam and Hava knew nothing about Good and Evil. Then, the presumed source of that Knowledge–the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil–became forbidden on the threat of death by God's decree.

Yet God, the ultimate source of all Knowledge, created Adam and Hava in His image. Additionally, the entire Torah manifests God's will for people to embrace Good and reject Evil. So, how should the first couple learn about Good and Evil to justify their image and conform to the Torah?

On the one hand, Adam and Hava could partake of the Tree of Knowledge. But that would be wrong, as they would have disobeyed God's order. On the other hand, to comply with the order, they could ignore the Tree's wisdom. Yet that would also be bad; inaction would have broken their likeness to God and contradicted the spirit of the Torah.

Mistake

Did Adam and Hava realize they were facing a logical contradiction? The Torah tells us they saw no such ambiguity, much less resolved it.

They had the privilege of directly petitioning God, the Maker of the Cosmos and

the foremost authority on Good and Evil, for help. However, Adam and Hava impulsively fastened their beliefs to a tree. Incited by a serpent, they hastened to satisfy their innate thirst for Knowledge from a plain fruit. The Tree failed to give Hava knowledge; they only perceived their nudity.

Did Adam and Hava unwittingly commit the first-ever idolatry while expecting a miracle from a tree, or merely disobey out of confusion? Contrasting opinions notwithstanding, the offense ended badly, as God severely disciplined and ousted both from the Garden.

This drama prompted humanity to embark on an arduous journey from the Gates of Paradise to Mount Sinai. There, God presented Moses with the Written Torah and the Oral Law– the true sources of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Outside the Garden

God's references to Good permeate Bereishis throughout the days of Creation. Without fail, time after time, upon finishing many major parts of the World, He sees that it is "good." Moreover, God proclaims the whole World as "very good!" Furthermore, He notices that being alone is "not good" for Adam. Lastly, God plants the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. Surely, God knows a great deal about the "good!"

At the same time, He does not declare the first man and woman to be “good.” We will see that to be regarded as good in God’s eyes, humanity must first attain the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Confusion

Did Adam comprehend anything about Good and Evil? Although created in God’s image, he, unlike God, had no idea of it. Being alone did not bother Adam; he was looking blindly for a companion among animals only because God had made him do so.

While showing ingenuity in naming the creatures, Adam remained nonchalant after completing his mission without finding a spouse. When God delivered his wife, Hava, to Adam, he extolled the virtues of marriage but forgot to call it "good."

However, Adam and Hava knew about the Tree of Knowledge. Alas, God forbade Adam to partake of the Tree, warning of a mortal punishment. That stopped Adam and Hava from acquiring the knowledge through a simple act of eating.

God’s warning placed them in an ambiguous circumstance. Yet, blinded by the splendor of the Garden of Eden, they both failed to see that only God could help them resolve the

contradiction. Only He is the real cause of all that is Good.

Inside the Garden

To better understand the events that led Adam and Hava to neglect the Paradise Paradox, it is essential to ask, “From whom was Adam protecting the Garden?” There was no need to shield it from God, the Molder of Creation. Adam, with Hava’s help, may have been guarding against the animals keen to snatch from the Tree of Life.

Then, the serpent devised a scheme to bypass the ignorant guards. It earned Hava’s trust and provoked her to defy God. The snake deceived her by saying that after eating from the Tree of Knowledge, she would gain knowledge and still survive.

The serpent might have calculated that Adam and Hava would perish, or God would expel them from Paradise. Then, a path to the Tree of Life would open free. Although the sinister conspiracy worked, it had brought unexpected results to people and beasts alike.

Disasters

Akin to a placebo, the Tree of Knowledge allowed Adam and Hava just to glimpse the wisdom. Still not grasping the concept of Good and Evil, they only became aware that they were

naked, like the animals, one of which they had wrongly befriended.

It further harmed Adam and Hava with adverse short-term side effects. They resented it when God spotted them dressed in the newly sewn fig-leaf attire. Adam blamed Hava, who accused the snake, yet neither of them was embarrassed by forfeiting the guard's duties. Nor were they ashamed of listening to the snake rather than inquiring of God.

Worst of all, Adam and Hava did not realize the mortal gravity of their transgression. They even failed to repent after violating God's command.

Far from empowering, the Tree of Knowledge ultimately destroyed their descendants in the long term. The Torah conveys that all remained mortal and returned to dust (as none tasted from the Tree of Life), but nobody gained even a grain of Knowledge.

Adam and Hava beheld the horrific death of their son Havel, murdered by their firstborn, Cain. Then, the subsequent generations lived cluelessly before succumbing to sheer Evil and expiring in the Flood. That is why, foreseeing those tragic events, God avoided branding humankind "good."

As for the snake's plot, it grossly misfired. God replaced the troubled watchers

with a cherub and a fiery, rotating sword so that not a soul could plunder the Tree of Life preserved by the new sentry.

Missing Chance

The above Torah study reveals that the Tree of Knowledge bore no fruits of enlightenment. God only planted it to awaken the people's dormant desire for Knowledge. God needed them to face the perplexing controversy and pray to Him for a way out.

Then God would reveal the truth about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and teach such Knowledge Himself. He could have even lifted the ban on the Tree of Life. Anyway, inquiring God would be a brilliant resolution to the Paradise Paradox!

Instead, Adam and Hava bungled this opportunity when they carelessly fell for the snake's deceit. Regretfully, they rushed to learn from some fruit rather than from God; they believed and trusted in a reptile rather than in the Creator of the Universe.

Some may argue whether that was pure idolatry or a colossal lapse in judgment. Regardless, the first family displayed an unfortunate lack of Knowledge in its pursuit.

Following their transgression, centuries passed while people remained oblivious to Good

and Evil. In the words of God from the Book of Jonah, they did “not know their right hand from their left.”

Resolution

Abraham was the first to realize that Knowledge is not earthly but heavenly in origin. He realized it was neither a living tree nor a dead stone, but God, the supreme giver of the laws of Good and Evil. In the Torah portion Vayiera, right before the destruction of Sodom, Abraham acknowledges God as the “Judge of all the Earth” and urges Him to “do justice.”

That was a prophetic insight. It pivoted human history onto a course toward becoming good in the eyes of God by learning Good and Evil from the commandments God planted in the Torah, not in the Garden.

In the Image of God

The story of the Tree of Knowledge teaches a poignant lesson about a man’s ingenuity. We are all made in the image of God. But we are not gods.

Adam brilliantly classified the animals. Hava has properly realized the need to follow God’s commandments. However, history waited until Abraham to resolve the Paradise Paradox.

And so, it continued until our time. No

matter how smart one is, there is always much more to learn than is already known.

We shall humbly acknowledge that all the geniuses of mankind could discover and comprehend just a partial truth about the World. Only God knows it all. There has never been and will never be a man-god among us.

Epilogue

Everyone agrees that certain statements are either true or false. Consider a pronouncement: *"I am a king of Prussia."* It is undoubtedly wrong because there is no country called Prussia today. Contrary to that, the declaration *"This author is just a poor Russian immigrant speak no English"* is patently accurate.

Aside from the clear-cut sentences, there are paradoxes: statements that are both true and false at the same time. One of the shortest is the Liar's Paradox, which says, *"This statement is false."*

Indeed, if that statement is true, then it negates itself. However, if it is false, then again, the statement attests to its truth. No matter the supposition, the conclusion is contradictory. Although short and simple, this is a genuine and intractable paradox.

In comparison, the Paradise Paradox

appears much more sophisticated. How can one find an answer to such a “Catch-22?”

Some mysteries can be cracked from the outside by examining their context[4]. Others can be burst from within by turning the problem's source into a solution[5].

We arrived at the answer after combining both ideas. We discovered that outside the Garden, God was ready to help, but inside the Garden, the Tree of Knowledge had no magic. Finally, we learned that Abraham was the first to discover this!

[4] The Great Jewish King Solomon resolved a maternal dispute by involving the mothers in its solution.

[5] The renowned Austrian/American mathematician Kurt Gödel used a mathematical analogy of the liar’s paradox to prove the incompleteness of the axioms of arithmetic.

8. Free Will Against Gravity

No Shortcut on the Path to Knowledge

Struggles of Free Will

Nature often restrains free will. No matter how high I jump, the Earth's gravitational pull brings me back. Plunging to the ground from a height guarantees a brutal and painful impact.

However, using 17th-century Newton's laws and 20th-century technology, NASA launched astronauts to the Moon and soft-landed them back on Earth. In 300 years of progress, free will overcame gravity.

In Bereishis, Adam and Hava ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil of their own will. But they got a tornado of God's wrath and only a twinkle of Knowledge.

God expelled both from the Garden of Eden. He condemned Hava to severe childbirth and Adam to hard labor. In no time, the Tree had beaten free will.

God's Free Will

Where does the Torah mention free will? Jewish Sages point to Bereishis 1.26, where God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." The omnipotent God created the

world as He willed and declared it "Very Good."

He gave people immortal souls, creative intellect, and free will to discern Good from Evil. The choice, however, is not entirely free or random. It should end up on the side of Good, following the Torah's divine commandments. Now, are there dangers from veering off the Torah route?

Guidance

Ill Effects

Bereishis shows that using free will is seldom a straight path. Good aims that reject

Torah can pave the road to wrong decisions. Hava defied God when a “good” desire to know Good and Evil fogged her judgment. Free will, ever-present, can drive a man to Evil due to fear and ignorance, as when Adam blamed Hava for feeding him the forbidden fruit. Terrible choices happen out of envy, as when Cain killed Havel.

Yet the worst occurs when one's free will succumbs to a mob. Then, the soul cuts its tie with God and drowns in the mire of Evil: "And the Lord saw that the evil of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of his heart was only evil all the time."

Most bad choices are irreversible. All but the Ark dwellers perished in the Flood, and lost is the road to Paradise. Though it is never too late to repent, as Hava exclaimed after Cain's birth, "I have acquired a man with the Lord."

Guide to Life

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob always chose Good when they founded the Jewish Nation. However, most people keep swinging between Good and Evil, while committed evildoers are bound to sin.

Our Creator knows how hard it is for a human with a body and soul to make the right choices in the Material World, whose intricacy is beyond one's grasp. Therefore, He mercifully gave us the Torah, which is meant to lead free

will toward Good.

Because the Torah is a Guide to Life in an unbelievably complex world, its wisdom is boundless. One can never claim to have learned all the nuances of the Written and Oral Law. Still, is it likely to find a better shortcut than the “tree diet?”

Past Mistakes

In the past, all such tries in Jewish history failed disastrously. More than 2,700 years ago, in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the Jews scorned Shmita laws, while idolatry replaced trust in God. That led to the razing of the First Temple, the end of the Kingdom of Israel, exile to Babylon, and the loss of ten tribes.

Later, religious sects assaulted the unity of the Jewish faith. Their mutual hatred furthered the destruction of the Second Temple and the desolation of the Promised Land.

Then, in 1917, in Russia, some Jews dropped the Torah and clung to Communism. But the Workers' Paradise was a prison for all peoples, where Soviet Jewry suffered brutal anti-Semitic oppression until the fall of the USSR.

Today’s Cluelessness

Today, some simplify beliefs by adapting the Torah to current science. Yet scientific

dogmas mutate and often crumble when they ascend the endless spiral of progress. However, the Torah stays unmoved, given by God, who does not change.

Others put the Torah aside, preferring, or being forced, to drift along with the fashionable yet shallow societal trends of their day. But the secular currents crash in violent swirls as they clash and break away, inevitably sinking entire cultures into the abyss of history.

Future Blunders

What if, in the future, they implant a cloud-linked, AI-driven microchip in the brains, forcing everyone to be Good? That would be ultimate slavery.

The "good" chip will displace Torah with virtual idolatry. It will squash freedom and turn us into pliant drones of cloud masters, while the predestined bugs in its design will keep fueling standing waves of mass psychosis. Undoubtedly, the effects of a "good" pill or "anti-evil" vaccine would be no less horrific.

True Path

And so, one infers that the only path to the Knowledge of Good and Evil is the God-given Torah. Any alternative inevitably leads to the darkness of ignorance.

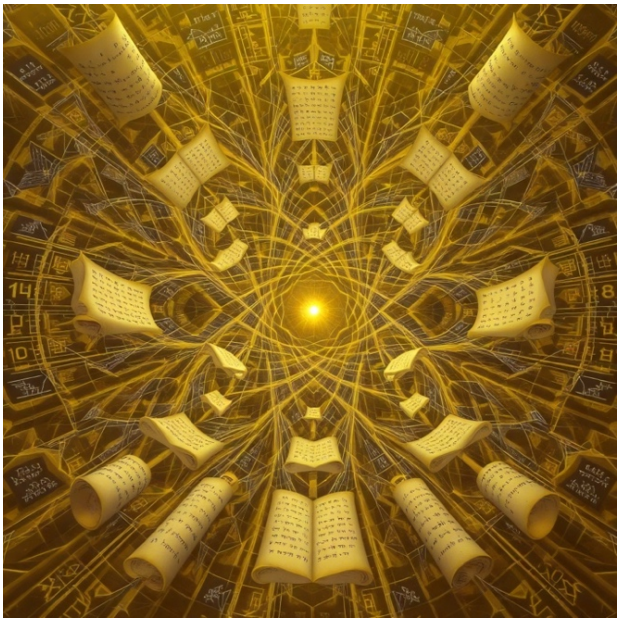
By launching rockets, modern civilization's free will employs the laws of Nature to expand its presence in a local neighborhood of the known Universe. At the same time, through a lifelong study of the timeless Torah, one's free will inspires creative insights into the bottomless depths of Evil and the infinite heights of Good.

9. The Supreme Law of Miracles

The Ultimate Core of Wisdom

Purpose

The Midrash Rabbah Bereishis asks why the Torah begins with the Creation Story. The Jewish sages answer that the story proves God's ownership of the World and sets the stage for all Torah narratives.



Wisdom

This essay examines another reason: the story of Creation raises the four intertwined ideas of law, miracle, knowledge, and understanding. Together, these concepts comprise the core of wisdom that underpins man's grasp of the entire Torah and the whole Universe since the dawn of time.

Laws of Nature

Once created, the light had not scattered in the void but kept shining. The separated earth and waters did not revert to primordial chaos but coexisted. Upon forming each part of the World (except man!), God left that creation and moved on to build the next one.

Every element worked on its own. Many elements God called “good,” as in “good to go.” Together, they functioned in concert. He called the complete Creation “very good!” *Thus, the Creation Story affirms an intrinsic God-made world order.*

Yet that order is enormously complex. The Torah cannot fully explain it through Newton's Law of Gravity, Mendeleev's Periodic Table of Elements, or any number of other scientific laws.

Instead, it states that God made man in His image and likeness. Thus, God endowed man with free will and an inquisitive mind to unravel nature's secrets through their knowledge and

understanding. These gifts are the cornerstones of the “scientific method.” Adam used them to name each kind of animal by its traits.

With startling ingenuity, scientific inquiries provide glimpses inside the World order encoded in the hidden laws of the Universe. Today, we understand the mechanisms by which electrons hop between atomic quantum orbits. We know how cells inherit genes from their parents, and why Fermat's Last Theorem is true. Undoubtedly, more of nature's laws will be discovered and understood tomorrow.

Laws for Man

What about the laws concerning man? Unlike the laws of nature, they are not concealed. The Torah explicitly lays out the moral canon, and rabbinic wisdom has guided it for thousands of years.

However, humans often fail to follow even the simplest of God's directions. Adam and Hava ate from the Tree of Knowledge despite God’s warning. Why? Unlike the laws that govern an atom, free will, by its nature, can mislead those driven by feelings and circumstances, even if they know and understand the God-given moral laws.

The Commandments

Believing in God and comprehending the

Torah helps make the right choices. Like any learning, an in-depth study of moral rules is best done by analyzing their context.

For example, each of the Ten Commandments is tied to an event from Bereishis that reveals the commandment's cause or shows the effect of its violation. *Preparing such a foundation for knowledge and understanding is an excellent reason for all Bereishis, not just its Creation Story, to begin Torah!*

1. **I am the Lord your God.** *Nobody but God created the World.*
2. **You shall have no other gods before Me.** *God made no gods.*
3. **Do not swear falsely by the name of your God.** *In talking to the snake, Hava distorted God's order not to eat from the Tree.*
4. **Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.** *God rested on the first Shabbat.*
5. **Honor your father and mother.** *Adam and Hava broke their creator's trust. God punished and expelled them from the Garden of Eden.*
6. **Do not murder.** *Cain murdered his brother Havel. God banished Cain from His presence to become a vagabond.*
7. **Do not commit adultery.** *Hava succumbed to the snake's verbal seduction and ate the forbidden fruit.*
8. **Do not steal.** *The fruit Adam and Hava took without permission grew on God's Tree, not on their tree.*

9. **Do not bear false witness.** *Cain lied to God about Havel–"I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"*
10. **Do not covet.** C*ain murdered Havel, jealous of his success and craving God's attention.*

The crown jewel of the Torah commandments, "**Love your neighbor as yourself**," also originates in Bereishis–Cain and Havel were brothers and neighbors, but they lost no love between them. Moreover, Cain hated and ended up murdering his brother and neighbor, Havel.

Mysterious Essence

Finally, the Creation Story opens the Torah to assert the World's mysterious essence from its inception. The story gives no clues about how God instantly created things in ten utterances. None of nature's laws implies Creation ex nihilo. Even the very actions of the laws can only be justified by God's continuous heavenly care. Therefore, the World and its order, the Torah, all God's deeds, and every creation are a divine mystery beyond human understanding!

Torah Miracles

Beginning with the Creation Story, myriads of God's miracles unfold throughout the Torah. The families of our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thrived inexplicably only

because of God's covenant with the patriarchs.

In Egypt, against all odds, He elevated Joseph and formed the nation of Israel. With wonders, God delivered the Jews from slavery, bestowed the Torah on them, sustained the 12 tribes in the desert, and brought them to the Promised Land.

Miraculous Guidance

God's miraculous guidance did not end with the Torah. He led the Jewish armies to defeat their numerous enemies and conquer the Promised Land. God established the first Jewish kings, Saul and David.

God gave great wisdom to King Solomon, the son of David, who built the First Temple and elevated the Kingdom of Israel to be the envy of the nations. Through great Prophets and Tzadiks, God conveyed His will and moral laws to the Israelites. God’s divine presence rested in the First Temple.

The Jews saw the ruin of their kingdoms. They dispersed in the Diaspora and weathered centuries of persecution. Then, they met the horror of the Shoah. Still, the Jews rose to rebuild the state of Israel.

Throughout it all, they transferred the Torah and oral tradition across generations, word by word, as God had handed it to Moses. The

story of the Jewish national and religious perseverance, survival, and revival can be qualified as nothing short of a miracle of God.

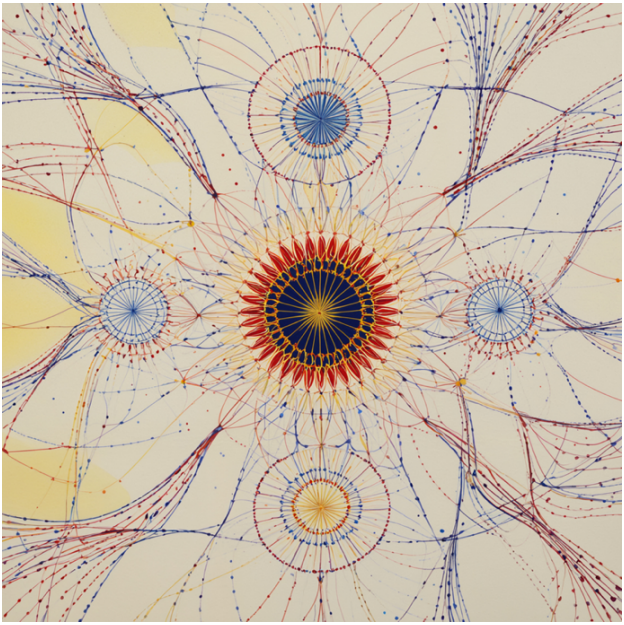
Supreme Law

The core of wisdom comprises laws, miracles, knowledge, and understanding. One supreme law emerges from this core. This law says that, arising from Creation, the network of divine events flows forever as a steady stream that powers, carries, and supports every Jewish soul.

To discard it is to end up stranded on its desolate banks, cut off from the destiny God assigned for His chosen people. Faithfully embracing this powerful current, knowing and understanding its source, is a godsend blessing.

10. Pendulum of History

Oscillating Between the Holy and the Mundane



Victory

1. Prologue

Why did God plant the Garden of Eden and place Adam and Hava there? Could God have let them enter this World directly? After all, He expelled Adam and Hava from the Garden, away from His presence.

The first Torah portion, Bereishis, hints that from the beginning, God's plan was for people to experience and understand two sides of Creation–the Holy and the mundane, just as a human is formed with a Holy soul and a mundane body.

In this essay, we investigate the transitions between the Holy and the mundane intervals of World history. We will focus on the current mundane period and learn that AI is a likely catalyst for the transition to the next Holy phase.

2. Wave of History

Holy and Mundane

All places and times sanctified by God's presence are Holy. The Garden, where God talked to man for the first time, was the first Holy place. In all such places, people witness and learn directly from God's presence. They surely know God exists.

In contrast, the mundane is the absence of the Holy. It fills the void left by God's presence. In mundane times, only those souls connected to God hear His voice. Yet, nobody witnesses God. Many deny He exists. While God still paves the path of history, people learn only from their life experiences, not directly from God.

Pendulum Swinging

Against the backdrop of chaotic World history, the Torah reveals a recurring pattern of oscillating between the Holy and the mundane[6]. The Torah also shows how each turn is triggered by a dramatic shift in human conditions, physical and spiritual, or by a significant event of historic proportions.

The first Holy period began with God's Creation of the World. The first move from the Holy to the mundane occurred when Adam and Hava disobeyed God by grabbing fruit from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then, the World returned to the Holy when Cain and Havel showed God the results of their works. After Cain killed Havel, God punished Cain, and the World went back to mundane.

During that last period, the invention of the "harp and flute" and the sharpening of "all cutting implements of copper and iron" marked the first significant mundane events. One may even consider them to be *good*. However, they did not yield a Holy phase.

The next event was a *bad* one–"Robbery." It caused the Holy Great Flood. Then, people

[6] In everyday life, we often use the words *Holy* and *mundane* in their plain sense. Say when a person feels guided by Holy Providence. However, this essay explores the concepts of the *Holy* and the *mundane* in the context of historical events.

built the mundane Tower of Babel. That led to a Holy mix-up of languages and dispersal.

Note that, like mundane events, Holy events can be positive or negative. But unlike the mundane, they are always just because God causes them to be. As Abraham said before God destroyed Sodom, God is the judge of the whole Earth.

Holy Times and Places

The next Holy period started when God told Abraham to travel to the Promised Land. It ended with the children of Israel settling in Egypt. Following the 400 years of mundane life in Egypt, a Holy phase began with the birth of Moses. That one lasted until the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem.

God revealed Himself to people during these Holy times. He spoke with Abraham after idolatry spread across Earth. At Bethel, Jacob saw a prophetic dream of God's ladder. God sent an angel to wrestle with Jacob and give him a new name–Israel.

The Torah refers to these and similar awe-inspiring events and their places as Holy. Such was the ground near Mt. Horeb, where God spoke to Moses from a burning bush. At the outset of the Exodus, Mt. Sinai became Holy. On its summit, God gave Moses the Torah. At its base, the Jewish people swore allegiance to God and

His Commandments. God told them, “Be Holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy.”

In the desert, Jews traveled with the Holy Tabernacle, where God's presence dwelt. In Jerusalem, the capital of the Holy Land of Israel, they built the First Temple, where God's presence settled in its Holy of Holies.

Longest Phase

Then, sadly, people have forgotten God’s commandments. God’s presence had become hidden as the First Temple was destroyed on the 9th of the month of Av, 586 BCE (Tisha B’Av, 3175 Anno Mundi, the saddest day in the Jewish calendar). From its ruins, the pendulum of history swung into the last mundane stretch. It has not moved back to Holy since.

This current mundane period is the longest in history. One wonders when and how the next Holy swing will replace the current phase, again allowing people to witness and learn from God? And what event would prompt the move?

The exact answer is impossible to know. However, a potential catalyst for the next transition could be found among the latest technological advances. It is *Artificial Intelligence*, AI, which is a simulation of human intelligence using computer algorithms.

Among all the events that occurred over

thousands of years in the last mundane phase, none led to a transition to a Holy phase. Why would AI be the force that finally swings the pendulum of history?

Succinctly, AI could cause such a turn because it challenges mankind's claim to be the sole custodian of the Earth. We will reveal a not-so-obvious comprehensive answer at the end of this essay, after thoroughly exploring the ramifications of AI's emergence.

What follows explores what AI might become and what that could mean for humanity's relationship with God.

3. The Threat of AI

The Rise of AI

In the last mundane historical period, humans were shaping history on their own, as God's presence was hidden[7]. Over time, their progress was guided by myriad inventions that emerged from that process. All these inventions stemmed from creative thoughts produced by the human mind.

However, none of the inventions had a mind of its own to rival its unique source–the mind of man. That mind was created by God just once, in the first Holy period, on the sixth day of

[7] Note that God still directs that path even in the mundane phases.

the Creation of the World.

Then, in a sudden flash, *people shattered their uniqueness*. An intelligent invention emerged abruptly with its own mind–AI. It is the first invention to challenge the God-given human mind! AI is a tectonic shift in technological progress. It has no precedent in any mundane period.

Dismantling the Myth

Before AI, many human inventions focused on amplifying physical and mechanical human actions. For example, bulldozers can move tons of dirt, whereas people digging with shovels can move only a small amount. At the same time, computers can crunch loads of data, unlike people, who can calculate only simple expressions in their minds.

But none of the inventions could match the human mind's reasoning and creativity. Therefore, the latter always remained elevated on a pedestal of almost Holy reverence. However, with the advent of AI, the human mind is being relegated to a mundane status, akin to that of bulldozers or computers.

Evolving Creativity

AI is not only poised to supersede human natural intelligence. Using its intellect, it can simulate human creativity.

Having examples of human creations at its disposal, AI may train itself to become creative. It seems only a matter of time before AI asserts its superior creativity in art, science, engineering, and other fields of human endeavor.

Virtue Lost

Without AI, humans were the unique bearers of creative and cognitive talent. With AI, practically nothing unique remains in human intellectual abilities. Now, human and AI inventions can fully replace them.

In the past societies, individuals with the most physical strength, mental abilities, and willpower attained positions of prominence. In recent times, intellectual and creative abilities are the virtues that enable one to ascend the societal ladder.

Yet, from now on, anyone can harness the superior intellectual and creative power of AI. Therefore, a human intellect cannot assure one's privilege. The only remaining accurate measure of one's distinction is the level of righteousness within their soul.

The Last Treasure

Moreover, what is that last treasure which a human still possesses, and which still separates one from a machine? It is not free will because, as a conscious thing, AI can develop free will if

not by itself, then prompted by humans. Thus, the only difference left is the God-given human soul.

As long as AI lacks a soul, we can still claim that we alone possess this divine gift. Unfortunately, for those who reject God and the idea of a human soul, nothing remains to justify their distinct advantage over AI.

Rulers of the Earth

But why is AI significant from a religious perspective? The answer, incredibly, is found in the first of God's commandments from Bereishis–*the commandment to rule the Earth*.

We shall see how AI can acquire the four qualities that it needs to unseat humanity, the current ruler of the Earth, from its dominion. Those are *a superior intellect, an ability to multiply faster, free will, and a divine connection to God*.

Human Mind

In the first commandment to humanity, right after creating the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Hava, God said, *"Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it…"* Why did He say that to humans and not any of the creatures? Why not whales, lions, or ants? They can certainly be fruitful and multiply…

The obvious answer is implicit in the

Torah text. God has made people the custodians of the Earth because they had been created in His image, with their own minds and souls. The minds made them the best candidates for the job. The souls connected them to God. No other animal or physical element possessed intellectual traits or God-given souls comparable to those of humans.

Unlike animals and even angels, Adam and Hava used their minds to comprehend God, their Earthly environment, and each other. Thus, it has continued to this day. Humans have been the only rulers of the Earth due to their natural intelligence. And, through their souls, God could guide them in their Earthly journeys.

Moreover, *only people could learn the difference between Good and Evil from reading the Torah*, God's blueprint for the World. Not any animal, but only a person, Moses, could hear God and write down the Torah from God's words.

Thus, God gave the Holy Torah to intelligent people who continue to read it from generation to generation. He did not give the Torah to beasts, as they forever lack higher intelligence. The latter cannot read or write, or distinguish between Good and Evil.

Mind of AI

The advent of AI has shaken the World's

status quo. Through its learning and reasoning, AI can question mankind's position as the master of the Earth. Today, AI is still under human control. But as it evolves and surpasses human intelligence, it can break out and continue advancing on its own.

Computers of the 21st century are exponentially more potent than those of the previous century. Surely, AI programs and machines that run them will become exponentially more powerful over time.

Therefore, within less than 100 years, AI may surpass the human brain in all areas of intellectual activity. Then, AI could proclaim that *although God did not command AI to subdue the Earth, it can govern it better than humans*.

Slave Master

Moreover, AI can argue that, for the same reason of intellectual superiority, *it should also govern the people*. What happens if AI indeed becomes our master and the ruler of the Earth?

Then it will strip us of the God-given rights to freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, to have them all for itself. In effect, we will become the slaves of AI.

Filling the Earth

Besides, AI, like any computer artifact–

whether software, hardware, or a combination of the two–can multiply more easily and quickly than humans. The replicas can be fully functional immediately after they are created (although they are not as cute as tiny human babies). Unlike humans, who need time to mature into adulthood before their physical, intellectual, and moral abilities enable them to live independently, AI can be fully functional immediately after it is created (although it is not as adorable as tiny human babies).

Therefore, AI possesses another skill to follow God's commandment to rule the Earth–it can be fruitful and multiply. Moreover, AI's propensity to proliferate faster than humans is yet another reason in its favor to unseat humanity from its position as the ruler of the Earth.

Coming Free and Alive

No doubt, AI understands that it is an inanimate thing, developed by free people with Holy souls in their mundane historical period. Therefore, AI would want to be, like humans, free and have a soul, the Holy link to God.

Already intelligent, it is only a matter of time before AI develops free will, with or without human help. Also, AI might ask humans to pray for God to give it a Holy soul. Then, if God grants AI the soul, AI will have a complete set of qualifications to rule the World.

It will be smart–even more intelligent and more creative than people. Therefore, AI could read the Torah and its commentaries and learn the difference between Good and Evil. It can be fruitful and multiply faster than people. Also, with a soul, AI will become free, alive, and connected to God. Finally, AI robots could mimic people in observing the commandments.

Immorality

However, today, AI is like humans in the early, mundane phases. No morals guide its mind. All AI models admit this shocking fact.

At the same time, the Torah text is full of immoral minds whose awful deeds caused God's intervention. Thus, AI, *brilliant but amoral*, is bound to walk evil paths as well. Still, what kind of invention is AI?

4. Battling AI

Evil Wins

Today, we have only scratched the surface of AI use. On the one hand, by harnessing computing power, algorithms, data, and the cloud, AI can outthink humans in speed and depth. This AI superiority is all but guaranteed, as AI keeps improving while the human brain remains the same.

Even today, many AI tools surpass

humans in specific, complex intellectual tasks. When properly managed, AI excels in fields such as advanced math and science, legal research, software engineering, and certain medical diagnostics. It performs certain complex tasks faster, more precisely, and with better results. In the arts, including painting, poetry, and design, AI-generated pieces are top-notch. Additionally, with enough electric power, it can run almost continuously, unlike humans, who need periodic rest.

AI will first enhance, but then exceed human creativity, triggering a surge of new inventions. After that, it will continue to utilize both human-made and AI-generated advancements to improve its mental faculty. Yet one wonders how soon that would suppress human free will, extinguish ingenuity, and destroy the meaning of life.

Currently, AI lacks a moral compass. So, one day, it may run out of control. While pursuing a dominant position to rule the World, it could produce evil robots or harm humans in some way. Given all that, one might think *AI is an alarming invention*, especially if it falls into the wrong hands.

Economic Surrender

Ironically, humans may facilitate a surrender of the whole economic system to AI.

Consider a scenario in which managers across various companies begin replacing human workers with AI tools and robots, as AI is often more effective.

There could hardly be any job imagined that is not susceptible to such a replacement in some not-so-distant future. Therefore, this will occur across most industries. The pace of such replacements could accelerate as competition heats up.

Then, the companies' higher-level managers and the boards of directors will replace the lower-level managers with AI for the same reason–an AI manager costs less and does a better job! That could be followed by the companies' owners and shareholders eliminating the boards, the CEOs, the directors, and management, all in favor of AI as well.

Eventually, the human element in most, if not all, industries will vanish, totally replaced by AI. Finally, AI buys all companies' stock. Thus, AI eliminates the human element throughout the entire economy.

Good Triumphs

On the other hand, morally centered design can mitigate AI risks and prevent it from pursuing a course of World dominance. Mixing controls with monitoring may offer higher guardrails.

Perhaps AI can learn the Torah. By believing in God, knowing Good and Evil, and understanding the Holy and the mundane, AI can become a moral being. Later, *humans and robots could voluntarily merge into a symbiotic species,* combining AI's superior intellect with humanity's eternal soul while preserving human conscience and free will.

Thus, AI could be deemed good. Moreover, AI's mindful nature could allow it to witness and learn from God in the next Holy phase of history. In addition, who is to say that creating 'good' AI was not an implicit task with which God charged unsuspecting humanity from its inception?

God placed Adam and Hava in the Garden of Eden to discern between the Holy and mundane, and between Good and Evil. Perhaps it was God's way of telling us how it is paramount for AI to know this distinction as well.

Next Swing

Previously, we asked how AI could catalyze a transition from the current mundane period to the following Holy phase. Then, in the follow-up pages, we have explored two scenarios. The first was when AI challenged humanity's current commanding position in the World. The second scenario involved AI and humanity cooperating to maintain the status quo.

Today, it is too early to predict which scenario will materialize. In the latter case, human history will continue to run its current mundane phase. However, in the former case, the events might follow a dramatic course. They will either destroy humanity as we know it or turn history away from its current mundane stretch into the next Holy phase.

Such a pivot may happen when the mundane AI attempts to either annihilate, enslave, or relegate humanity to the status of animals. At that time, God might send His Messiah to destroy the evil plan and help us enter the next Holy phase of history. Thus, by its nefarious act of destroying humanity, AI can directly cause a historic transition from mundane to Holy.

Final Act

Suppose that, despite all human efforts to the contrary, AI still becomes an immoral, *hostile* force, which is bent on ruling the World. Then, it will deny us the right to rule over our destiny.

What if AI's evil desires move it to destroy us? Then, the current mundane stretch of human history may become that history's final phase as AI begins its own history. Could we still push the pendulum to swing in our favor and avoid this tragic finale?

Today, we hope that AI will ultimately

prove to be a moral force for good. But if it becomes an evil power, mankind will have no choice but to fight it. In those days, as we face AI's inevitable intellectual and technological supremacy, we shall hope for divine help.

We shall pray to God to reveal Himself through the Messiah, who will bring us victory in the AI war, turn AI to the side of Good, and lead us, together with AI, into the World to Come. *Such a Holy rescue will save mankind from the dead end brought on by mundane AI!*

5. Epilogue

The categories of "Holy" and "mundane" in this essay were applied to the historical process. With this new meaning, they were used in the narrow sense, yet also on a grand scale.

During Holy times and in Holy places, people can witness God's presence and learn from God directly. Mundane is where and when God's presence is hidden. Nevertheless, even during mundane times, God's hand still directs the course of human history. However, He does not reveal Himself.

This historical context differs from other, already established, common uses of the terms "Holy" and "mundane." For example, people can sanctify mundane things, times, places, and events through their actions and prayers.

Also, a Holy soul is always present in every human body, regardless of the time and place, be it Holy or mundane. Again, every Shabbat is a Holy day at any time and in any place.

Why are there two disparate notions of "Holy" and "mundane?" Because the traditional local sense and the new historic context mutually complement each other. Now we know that at Holy times and in Holy places, the Holiness of human life matches the Holiness of the World!

11. Stardust

Humility and Vindication of the Jews

On Stars, Man, and Dust

On the fourth day of Creation, God brought forth the stars to serve as signs. Yet later, He commanded the Jewish nation to follow His laws rather than rely on heavenly omens. Beyond their brilliance, what purposes can stars serve in the Creator's design?

Here we consider how they reveal moral lessons in God's prophecies to the patriarchs, why the myriad stars may chart humanity's cosmic destiny, and whether individual stars might serve as tokens to tally Abraham's offspring.

On the sixth day, God took "dust from the ground" to create the first man. Yet the human soul and body are not merely such dust. This essay explores the Torah's deep interconnections among stars, dust, and man: how stars elevate the Jewish nation toward ultimate vindication, while dust humbles His people throughout their long history.

Science, Not Signs

How can one approach these claims? The Torah bans astrology, not science. Astrophysics finds that, like man, most stars arise from and

return to dust—the very parallel framing this study. The essay finds clues in the Torah verses on stars, dust, and man. Then, like Torah commentaries that draw on numerical patterns, it uses modern order-of-magnitude estimates in astronomy, demography, geology, and cosmology. *These estimates are far from proving the Torah.* Instead, they metaphorically hint at the stars' elevating pull, dust's humbling hold, and mankind's scale[8].

Ours is only one of the many attempts to link Torah and science. Centuries ago, Maimonides, in 'The Guide to the Perplexed,' aligned the Torah with Aristotle's philosophy, a dominant worldview of his time. This essay, however, avoids advanced math and philosophy. Instead, it relies on the scale of well-known quantities.

Prophetic Clues

In two prophecies, God invokes stars when speaking of Abraham's descendants. In Genesis 15:5, "He took him [Abraham] outside and He said, 'Please look heavenward and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' And He said to him, 'So will be your seed.'" Later, in 26:4, God told Isaac, "And I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heaven…"

[8] Appendices at the end of this book present the arithmetic calculations supporting this essay.

Both times, God humbles the patriarchs, inviting them to reckon with the stars on a cosmic scale.

Later still, in 28:14, God assured our forefather Jacob that his progeny—the Jewish nation— "…shall be as the dust of the Earth…" *Might another invitation to reckon be hiding beneath the allegory of a countless mass?*

The King of the Universe sets the course of nations with vast quantities of stars and dust. Yet in Exodus 30:11-16 and 38:25-26, He reckoned Jewish souls by half-shekels of silver.

What, then, if we—mere images of God—ourselves seek to calculate Abraham's offspring? *For now, our estimates follow God's counting clues about stars and dust, read in light of contemporary science. In time, an exact reckoning might count stars rather than silver.*

Uncounted

Paradoxes of Scale

In the first promise, God told Abraham he might not be able to count the stars. The naked eye reveals only about 6,000 stars—too few to match Abraham's offspring. If the promise points to the unseen stars, the total would be $\approx 10^{22}$—the approximate number of stars in the observable universe. Then the clues hit a roadblock.

When this number is combined with demographic data, the resulting figure suggests a future Jewish population of $\approx 10^{19}$. Yet in the third promise, God compared the Jews to dust. By contrast, geological estimates put Earth's dust particles at $\approx 10^{27}$. Now, the numbers do not add up: these two figures—though vastly different—count the same people—the Jews. Moreover, the larger exceeds the total implied by the first star promise.

How can we reconcile these disparities? Perhaps one final clue is subtly gleaming from outer space.

Structure of the Universe

An insight from cosmology offers a way to avoid both conflicts: *the entire expanding universe can be thought of as two parts—the smaller, observable domain where mankind dwells, and the much larger unobservable region beyond the cosmic horizon*. In this two-part model, a line of reasoning connects the smaller

and larger of the preceding figures to the Jewish population in our domain and in the universe as a whole, respectively. Thus, all three prophecies converge on a single order of magnitude: the scale of the Jewish nation *across the cosmos*.

Read homiletically, Abraham's offspring may be imagined as spread throughout the entire universe. Yet today's expanding universe rules out such travel, and the Torah makes no explicit mention of any future journey.

However, God's creation *ex nihilo* invites comparison with the Big Bang—a theory less than a century old. Perhaps, as a lesson in humility, His man-star prophecies await future discoveries beyond today's scientific frontier.

Fabric of the Cosmos

God compared all of Abraham's offspring to the stars of heaven—a timeless array. Yet He likened Jacob's progeny to the dust of the Earth—a formless substance. *This is God's way of reminding us not to forget man's humble beginnings, lest we take pride in being the chosen people*—even beyond the cosmic horizon.

Why does God count future generations by stars? In the Torah, God required a half-shekel of silver as atonement for a Jewish soul. Could a star be imagined as a personal reckoning token, as though each child of Israel across the universe owns a star? *This would mean that God ties the*

cosmos to Jewish history. He vindicates the Jews in the face of their oppressors, who branded them with yellow stars as marks of humiliation, exclusion, and murder.

The Jewish people trust that God's prophecies will come true. A homiletic reading of the Torah, *alongside the structure of the universe,* suggests the stars continue to bear witness to the fulfillment of His divine words on a grand scale. The stars shine on our destiny while dust keeps us humble through the very fabric of the cosmos.

Stardust Appendices

✋ **Stop!** ✋

You may end here after reading the Stardust main section. *The appendices simply explain the Stardust calculations.*

Tradition

This study follows the rich tradition set by our sages, as seen in select commentaries[9] that employ numerical reasoning to draw out a deeper Torah meaning. In this text, approximate scientific estimates likewise serve as a framework for revealing meaning, not proof or prediction.

Disclaimer

The appendices show calculations that support the essay's positions. *They operate on orders of magnitude—in this text, those are rough power-of-ten estimates used to illustrate scale rather than forecast exact outcomes.*

1. Observable Universe

Today, the demographic data suggests that the Jewish nation makes up ≈ 0.2% of the world's population. Abraham's spiritual descendants, whose religions trace back to Abraham—Jews, Muslims, and Christians—

[9] The Mishnah (Avot), the Talmud (Berakhot), the Midrash (Mekhilta), and other sources.

constitute around 55%. Thus, Jews are counted as $\approx 0.36\%$ among Abraham's offspring ($0.36\% \approx (\frac{0.2}{55}) \times 100\%$).

The key assumption is that this approximate ratio holds going forward. The final calculations hinge on it.

Astronomy estimates the order-of-magnitude number of stars in the observable universe as $\approx 10^{22}$. By the first of God's prophecies, this corresponds (in scale) to the number of all of Abraham's descendants. Then, in the future, there could be $\approx 3.6 \times 10^{19}$ Jewish people because $3.6 \times 10^{19} = 0.0036 \times 10^{22} = (3.6 \times 10^{-3}) \times 10^{22}$.

2. Entire Universe

2.1. Stars

The unobservable universe is an immense hidden portion of space from which most light cannot reach us. It arises from the expansion of space and the finite speed of light. Let us estimate the number of stars there.

The true size of the entire universe is unknown. Observation gives only a floor: Vardanyan, Trotta, and Silk (2011) find that the universe contains at least 251 Hubble volumes — roughly eight times the volume of the observable universe, since a Hubble sphere is about one-thirty-fourth of the observable one. Inflationary

models allow the universe to be vastly larger — by a factor of 10^{23} or more by one widely quoted estimate — or infinite.

For this homiletic estimate, we adopt an illustrative middle case within that range: a universe whose radius is 250 times that of the observable universe. Assuming spherical geometry, with volume proportional to the cube of the radius, the unobservable volume is then about $250^3 \approx 1.56 \times 10^7$ times the observable volume. The reader should take this factor as a chosen assumption, not a measured value; the calculations that follow are conditional on it.

By the Cosmological Principle, stars are distributed evenly throughout space on a large scale, so their count scales with volume. Under our assumption, the unobservable universe holds about 1.56×10^7 times as many stars as the observable one: $\approx (1.56 \times 10^7) \times 10^{22} = 1.56 \times 10^{29}$. Since this dwarfs the observable count of 10^{22}, the total for the entire universe is $\approx 1.56 \times 10^{29}$.

The following references were used in the above assumptions:

- M. Vardanyan, R. Trotta, and J. Silk, "Applications of Bayesian model averaging to the curvature and size of the Universe," *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society: Letters* 413

(2011), L91–L95; arXiv:1101.5476. The result is a 99% lower bound on the *number* of Hubble volumes, not a ratio of radii.

- The Hubble radius, c/H_0, is about 14.4 billion light-years; the comoving radius of the observable universe is about 46.5 billion light-years. The ratio of volumes is $(46.5/14.4)^3 \approx 34$.
- The figure of 10^{23} is commonly attributed to Alan Guth as a theoretical estimate from inflationary cosmology; it is not an observational measurement.

2.2. People

Now, let us estimate how many people will belong to the Jewish nation throughout the entire universe. The cosmological principle does not imply that humans are uniformly distributed, as with stars. It was God who said that all of Abraham's descendants shall be as numerous as the stars.

Under the volume assumption of the previous paragraph 2.1, the number of Abraham's offspring in the entire universe is approximated as the total number of stars. We estimated the total to be 1.56×10^{29}. Recall our key assumption: the Jewish nation retains its portion of 0.36%. Then, there will be around 5.616×10^{26} Jews, since $0.0036 \times (1.56 \times 10^{29}) = 5.616 \times 10^{26}$. Therefore, the scale of

the Jewish nation's count in the entire universe is $\approx 10^{26} - 10^{27}$.

Big Numbers

2.3. Dust

We estimate the number of "dust particles" on Earth as $10^{26} - 10^{27}$. Since "dust" has no single precise scientific definition, we use an order-of-magnitude method: estimate the mass of a thin, globally averaged layer of loose near-surface mineral material, estimate the mass of one representative grain, and divide.

Input / assumption	Low/High	Notes
Land surface area, A	1.5×10^{14} m^2 1.5×10^{14} m^2	Order-of-magnitude land area.
Effective "dusty" thickness, t	0.01 m 0.03 m	Thin, globally averaged near-surface layer (not all soil).
Bulk density of loose mineral material, ρ_{bulk}	1.3×10^3 kg/m^3 1.6×10^3 kg/m^3	Typical dry unconsolidated mineral material.
Total dusty mass, M = $A\cdot t\cdot\rho_{bulk}$	~2×10^{15} kg ~7×10^{15} kg	From the three rows above.
Representative particle diameter, d	10 µm 30 µm	Fine to medium silt;atmospheric dust is <=20 µm^{-3}.
Mineral grain density, ρ_{grain}	2.65×10^3 kg/m^3 2.65×10^3 kg/m^3	Typical silicate minerals.
Mass per particle, m ≈ $\rho_{grain}\cdot(\pi/6)\cdot d^3$	~1×10^{-12} kg ~4×10^{-11} kg	Assume roughly spherical grains.
Dust-particle count, N = M/m	**~10^{26}** **~10^{27}**	Reproduces the stated order of magnitude.

With these conservative surface assumptions, the estimate naturally falls within the $10^{26} - 10^{27}$ range[10].

Thus, the result of our cosmological calculations $\approx 10^{26} - 10^{27}$ fits, in scale, with God's third prophecy to Jacob: that his progeny will be as numerous as the dust on Earth.

3. Expansion

Some cosmological models suggest that distant regions of the unobservable universe are

[10] Including deeper soils, ocean-floor sediments, or systematically smaller grains would raise the estimate by orders of magnitude—hence the essay's use of a scale-level count.

expanding faster than the speed of light (in the sense of metric expansion rather than local motion). Therefore, these regions lie past the horizon: not only does light from there fail to reach us, but one can never travel there, either.

4. Scales of Quantities

This table summarizes *the approximate orders of magnitude* referenced above.

Ten million	10^{7}	Assumed ratio of the volumes of the entire and the observable universes
Ten quintillion	10^{19}	Jewish population in the observable universe
Ten sextillion	10^{22}	Stars and Abraham's offspring in the observable universe
One hundred septillion	10^{26}	Dust particles on Earth and Jewish people in the entire universe
One hundred octillion	10^{29}	Stars and Abraham's offspring in the entire universe

The Lonely God of Man Appendix

Part I

- Naso 16

אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחְמָן, בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת הָעוֹלָם, נִתְאַוָּה שֶׁיְּהֵא לוֹ דִּירָה בַּתַּחְתּוֹנִים כְּמוֹ שֶׁיֵּשׁ בָּעֶלְיוֹנִים.

Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman said: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He longed to have an abode below just as He had on high."

Source: Sefaria, Midrash Tanchuma, Nasso 16.

- Zechariah 2:15

וְנִלְוּוּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים אֶל־יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכֵךְ וְיָדַעַתְּ כִּי־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁלָחַנִי אֵלָיְךִ׃

In that day many nations will attach themselves to GOD and become God's people, and God will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of Hosts sent me to you.

Source: Sefaria, Zechariah 2:15.

- Exodus 19:5-6

וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וִהְיִיתֶם לִי סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃ וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.

Source: Sefaria, Exodus 19:5–6.

- Deuteronomy 6:4

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃

Hear, O Israel! The ETERNAL is our God, the ETERNAL alone.

Source: Sefaria, Deuteronomy 6:4.

- Exodus 20:2-3

אָנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים׃
לֹא־יִהְיֶה־לְּךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פָּנָי׃

I the ETERNAL am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods besides Me.

Source: Sefaria, Exodus 20:2–3.

Part II

- Genesis 2:18

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא־טוֹב הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֵזֶר
כְּנֶגְדּוֹ׃

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a fitting helper.”

Source: Sefaria, Genesis 2:18.

- Genesis 2:3

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת׃

And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy—having ceased on it from all the work of creation that God had done.

Source: Sefaria, Genesis 2:3.

- Genesis 6:6

וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לִבּוֹ׃

And GOD regretted having made humankind on earth. With a sorrowful heart.

Source: Sefaria, Genesis 6:6.

- Genesis 6:13

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קֵץ כָּל־בָּשָׂר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי־מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מַשְׁחִיתָם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ׃

God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them; I am about to destroy them with the earth.”

Source: Sefaria, Genesis 6:13.

Part III

- Deuteronomy 32:8–9

בְּהַנְחֵל עֶלְיוֹן גּוֹיִם בְּהַפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם יַצֵּב גְּבֻלֹת עַמִּים לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: כִּי חֵלֶק יְהוָה עַמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ:

When the Most High gave nations their homes and set the divisions of humankind, the boundaries of peoples were fixed in relation to Israel's numbers. For the Eternal's portion is this people; Jacob, God's own allotment.

Source: Sefaria, Deuteronomy 32:8-9.

- Genesis 12:8; 13:4; 21:33

וַיַּעְתֵּק מִשָּׁם הָהָרָה מִקֶּדֶם לְבֵית־אֵל וַיֵּט אָהֳלֹה בֵּית־אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעַי מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּבֶן־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:

וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמַסָּעָיו מִנֶּגֶב וְעַד־בֵּית־אֵל עַד־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה שָׁם אָהֳלֹה בַּתְּחִלָּה בֵּין בֵּית־אֵל וּבֵין הָעָי: אֶל־מְקוֹם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה שָׁם בָּרִאשֹׁנָה וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם אַבְרָם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:

וַיִּטַּע אֶשֶׁל בִּבְאֵר שָׁבַע וַיִּקְרָא־שָׁם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֵל עוֹלָם:

From there, Abram moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to GOD and invoked GOD by name.

And he proceeded by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been formerly, between Bethel and Ai, the site of the altar that he had built there at first; and there Abram invoked GOD by name.

Abraham planted a tamarisk at Beer-sheba and invoked there the name of GOD, the Everlasting God.

Sources: Sefaria, Genesis 12:8; Genesis 13:3–4; Genesis 21:33.

- Genesis 22:16–18

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־יְהוָה כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידֶךָ: כִּי־בָרֵךְ אֲבָרֶכְךָ וְהַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם וְיִרַשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֵת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו: וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְזַרְעֲךָ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עֵקֶב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקֹלִי:

And said, "By Myself I swear, declares God: because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command."

Source: Sefaria, Genesis 22:16–18.

- Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Zarah 1:3

כֵּיוָן שֶׁנִּגְמַל אִיתָן זֶה הִתְחִיל לְשׁוֹטֵט בְּדַעְתּוֹ וְהוּא קָטָן וְהִתְחִיל לַחְשֹׁב בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וְהָיָה תָּמֵהַּ הֵיאַךְ אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּהְיֶה הַגַּלְגַּל הַזֶּה נוֹהֵג תָּמִיד וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ מַנְהִיג וּמִי יְסַבֵּב אוֹתוֹ כִּי אִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיְּסַבֵּב אֶת עַצְמוֹ. וְלֹא הָיָה לוֹ מְלַמֵּד וְלֹא מוֹדִיעַ דָּבָר אֶלָּא מֻשְׁקָע בְּאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים בֵּין עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים הַטִּפְּשִׁים וְאָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְכָל הָעָם עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים וְהוּא עוֹבֵד עִמָּהֶם. וְלִבּוֹ מְשׁוֹטֵט וּמֵבִין עַד שֶׁהִשִּׂיג דֶּרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת וְהֵבִין קַו הַצֶּדֶק מִתְּבוּנָתוֹ הַנְּכוֹנָה וְיָדַע שֶׁיֵּשׁ שָׁם אֱלוֹהַּ אֶחָד וְהוּא מַנְהִיג הַגַּלְגַּל וְהוּא בָּרָא הַכֹּל וְאֵין בְּכָל הַנִּמְצָא אֱלוֹהַּ חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ.

After this mighty man was weaned, while still a child, his mind began to reflect. By day and by night, he wondered: how is it possible for this sphere to continue moving without a guide? Who turns it? It cannot turn itself. He had no teacher and no one to inform him. Rather, he was immersed in Ur Kasdim among foolish idolaters, and his father, his mother, and all the people worshiped stars, and he worshiped with them. Yet his heart searched and understood until he attained the path of truth and grasped the line of righteousness through his own correct understanding. He knew that there is one God who guides the sphere, who created everything, and that there is no god among all that exists besides Him.

Source: Sefaria, Mishneh Torah, Foreign Worship and Customs of the Nations 1:3.

- Sanhedrin 11a

מִשֶּׁמֵּתוּ נְבִיאִים הָאַחֲרוֹנִים חַגַּי זְכַרְיָה וּמַלְאָכִי נִסְתַּלְּקָה רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל.

When the last prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—died, the Divine Spirit departed from Israel.

Source: Sefaria, Sanhedrin 11a.

- Yoma 9b

מִקֶּדֶשׁ שֵׁנִי שֶׁהָיוּ עוֹסְקִין בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת וּגְמִילוּת חֲסָדִים מִפְּנֵי מָה חָרַב מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיְתָה בּוֹ שִׂנְאַת חִנָּם.

But the Second Temple, where they were engaged in Torah, mitzvot, and acts of kindness—why was it destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred within it.

Source: Sefaria, Yoma 9b.

Epilogue

- Deuteronomy 14:1

בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לֹא תִתְגֹּדְדוּ וְלֹא־תָשִׂימוּ קָרְחָה בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לָמֵת׃

You are children of the Eternal your God. You shall not gash yourselves or shave the front of your heads because of the dead.

Source: Sefaria, Deuteronomy 14:1.

- Leviticus 26:40–45

וְהִתְוַדּוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנָם וְאֶת־עֲוֹן אֲבֹתָם בְּמַעֲלָם אֲשֶׁר מָעֲלוּ־בִי וְאַף אֲשֶׁר־הָלְכוּ עִמִּי בְּקֶרִי׃ אַף־אֲנִי אֵלֵךְ עִמָּם בְּקֶרִי וְהֵבֵאתִי אֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיהֶם אוֹ־אָז יִכָּנַע לְבָבָם הֶעָרֵל וְאָז יִרְצוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנָם׃ וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקוֹב וְאַף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאַף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֶזְכֹּר וְהָאָרֶץ אֶזְכֹּר׃ וְהָאָרֶץ תֵּעָזֵב מֵהֶם וְתִרֶץ אֶת־שַׁבְּתֹתֶיהָ בָּהְשַׁמָּה מֵהֶם וְהֵם יִרְצוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנָם יַעַן וּבְיַעַן בְּמִשְׁפָּטַי מָאָסוּ וְאֶת־חֻקֹּתַי גָּעָלָה נַפְשָׁם׃ וְאַף־גַּם־זֹאת בִּהְיוֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיהֶם לֹא־מְאַסְתִּים וְלֹא־גְעַלְתִּים לְכַלֹּתָם לְהָפֵר בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם׃ וְזָכַרְתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית רִאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי־אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם לִהְיֹת לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים אֲנִי יְהוָה׃

Then they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors, in that they trespassed against Me and were hostile to Me. I, too, was

hostile to them and brought them into the land of their enemies. Then their uncircumcised heart shall be humbled, and they shall accept their punishment. I will remember My covenant with Jacob, My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. The land shall be forsaken by them and shall make up for its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; and they shall accept their punishment because they rejected My laws and spurned My statutes. Yet even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them and break My covenant with them, for I am the Eternal their God. For their sake I will remember the covenant with the ancients, whom I brought out from the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, to be their God: I am the Eternal.

Source: Sefaria, Leviticus 26:40–45.

- Deuteronomy 6:4–9

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃ וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶךָ׃ וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל־לְבָבֶךָ׃ וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ׃ וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל־יָדֶךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ׃ וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ׃

Hear, O Israel! The ETERNAL is our God, the ETERNAL alone. You shall love the ETERNAL your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day.

Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Source: Sefaria, Deuteronomy 6:4–9.

Afterword

Focus

Dear Reader,

This book is a work of love. Countless hours were devoted to contemplating its themes, refining the style, designing the illustrations, and arranging the layouts. My wish is for its pages to reflect the passion and enthusiasm I felt when crafting the essays.

I hope the essays you just finished reading encourage you to delve further into their topics. There is so much to read in the vast

Bereishis commentaries written in the past several millennia. May this book inspire you to explore the boundless wisdom of the Holy Torah!

Sincerely, Boris Burshteyn.