



COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Family Edition

בראשית תשע"ט
Bereishit 5779

The Three Stages of Creation

WELCOME TO COVENANT & CONVERSATION 5779 FAMILY EDITION

Covenant & Conversation: Family Edition is a new and exciting initiative from The Office of Rabbi Sacks for 5779. Written as an accompaniment to Rabbi Sacks' weekly *Covenant & Conversation* essay, the *Family Edition* is aimed at connecting older children and teenagers with his ideas and thoughts on the *parsha*. Each element of the *Family Edition* is progressively more advanced; *The Core Idea* is appropriate for all ages and the final element, *From The Thought of Rabbi Sacks*, is the most advanced section. Each section includes *Questions to Ponder*, aimed at encouraging discussion between family members in a way most appropriate to them. We have also included a section called *Around the Shabbat Table* with a few further questions on the *parsha* to think about. The final section is an *Educational Companion* which includes suggested talking points in response to the questions found throughout the *Family Edition*.



PARSHAT BEREISHIT IN A NUTSHELL

The book of books starts with the beginning of beginnings: the creation of the world and the beginnings of life. The story is told twice, from two different viewpoints. The first time the Torah focuses on the creation of the world itself, and the second time it focuses more on the creation of humanity.

The first story describes the world as a place of harmony and order. God creates the universe in six days and dedicates the seventh as a day of holiness and rest, the Shabbat. In the second telling of the story the Torah focuses on what it means to be a human, and how we can have relationships with God and each other. God creates Adam and sees that "It is not good for the man to be

alone," and so He then creates Eve. The snake leads them astray and convinces them to sin by eating from the Tree of Knowledge and God then punishes them by expelling them from the perfect Garden of Eden.

The rest of the stories in our *parsha*, and continuing into the next, are tales of sadness and tragedy, and represent the potential we all have to make mistakes. Cain murders his brother, Abel. By the end of the *parsha*, God sees "how great man's wickedness on the earth had become" and "regrets that He had made man on earth." God creates a world of order, and man creates chaos. Will the story of humanity have a happy ending?



THE CORE IDEA

At the beginning of our *parsha*, we learn how God created mankind. He did this by creating man "in His image, after His likeness." This is a difficult idea to understand because we believe that God *has no image*. "Image," then, must refer to something quite different than physical form and likeness. The Torah here is telling us we can be like God in the way we act.

Our *parsha* is the first in the Torah, so we haven't seen or learned much about God yet. What have we seen God do so far? The God we are reading about is the One who creates. The Torah here is telling us that we can be like

God and imitate Him, by becoming creators. Just as God is creative, so we should try to be creative.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. How does God act? How can we copy that in our lives?
2. What did you create this week? What did you achieve that you are proud of?
3. Why does God want us to become creators like Him? Why is creating things good for us and good for the world?



IT ONCE HAPPENED...

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook was the first Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine. When World War I erupted he found himself stuck in London where he remained for the duration of the war until he could return to the land of Israel. Rabbi Kook spoke about how during his time in London he would often visit the National Gallery to admire the art there. His favourite artist was Rembrandt, who he described as a *tzadik*, a righteous person.

When he examined Rembrandt's paintings it reminded him of the rabbinic statement about the light created on the first day of creation – “*When God created the light [on the first day], it was so strong and luminous that it was possible to see from one end of the world to the other. And God feared that the wicked would make use of it [for destructive purposes]. What did He do? He hid it for the righteous in world to come. But from time to time there are great men whom God blesses with a vision of that hidden light.*” Rabbi Kook believed that Rembrandt was one of those great men

who could perceive the *Or Ganuz* (hidden light), and he presented that light in his paintings.

What is equally puzzling and wonderful about Rembrandt's paintings, is that he makes no attempt to beautify or idealise his subjects. Yet the light radiating from the ordinary people in his paintings. Rembrandt's brilliance is his ability to convey the beauty of ordinary people. The light that shines from them is, simply, their humanity. Their *Tzelem Elokim* (image of God).

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. What do you think Rembrandt was trying to say in his paintings when he chose to have ordinary people radiating with a spiritual light?
2. If all people are created in the image of God, do you think we can say there is beauty in all people? How do we find that beauty?



THINKING MORE DEEPLY

Three Stages of Creation: “And God said, let there be... And there was... and God saw that it was good.”

In the first chapter of Bereishit, God creates man “in His image, after His likeness.” We believe that God has no physical form, so being created in “His image” must refer to some other likeness between humanity and God. The Torah tells us we have the potential to be like God in our actions, and we do that by imitating Him. This could mean many things, but the primary role we see God playing in the first chapter of Bereishit is as Creator. Just as God is creative, so we should try to be creative.

Bereishit teaches us how to be creative – in three stages. The first stage is saying “*Let there be.*” The second is “*and there was.*” The third stage is seeing “*that it is good.*”

What makes humans unique among other animals is our ability to speak. *Targum Onkelos* translates the last phrase of Genesis 2:7, “*God formed man out of dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living creature,*” as “and man became *ruah memallelah*, a speaking spirit.” Because we can speak, we can think, and therefore imagine a world different from the one that currently exists. Creation begins with the creative word, the idea, the vision, the dream. Language – and with it the ability to remember a distant past and think about a distant future – lies at the heart of our uniqueness as the image of God. Just as

God makes the physical world by words (“**And God said let there be ...**”) so we make our human world by words, which is why Judaism takes words so seriously: “*Life and death are in the power of the tongue,*” says the book of Proverbs (18:21). This is the first stage of creation.

The second stage of creation (“*And God said let there be... and there was*”) is for us the most difficult to achieve. It is one thing to have an idea, another to make it happen. It is so often too easy to give up after failure, and to conclude that it is impossible to accomplish.

If the first stage in creation is imagination, the second is will. The sanctity of the human will is one of the most distinctive features of the Torah. There have been many philosophies that believe that humans do not have freewill. This is called determinism – that we are determined by other factors – like genetics, or economic or social forces. Judaism is a protest against these ideas. We are not pre-programmed machines; we are persons, who have freewill. Just as God is free, so we are free, and the entire Torah is a call to humanity to exercise responsible freedom in creating a social world which honours the freedom of others. Freewill is the bridge from “*Let there be*” to “*and there was.*”

The third stage (“**And God saw that it was good**”) is the hardest of the three stages to understand. What does it mean to say that “*God saw that it was good*”? What does God make

that is not good? Here the challenge is to see the good that is sometimes hidden.

In the course of my work, I have visited prisons and centres for young offenders. Many of the people I met there were potentially good. They, like you and me, had dreams, hopes, ambitions, aspirations. They did not want to become criminals. Their tragedy was that often they came from difficult backgrounds. No one took the time to care for them, support them, teach them how to negotiate the world, how to achieve what they wanted through hard work rather than violence and lawbreaking. They lacked a basic self-respect, a sense of their own worth. No one ever told them that they

were good. To see that someone is good and to say so is a creative act itself. To see the good in others and let them see themselves the way we see them is to help someone grow to become the best they can be. “Greater,” says the Talmud, “is one who causes others to do good than one who does good himself.” To help others become what they can be is to give birth to creativity in someone else’s soul.

“And God saw that it was good” – this too is part of the work of creation, the subtlest and most beautiful of all. When we recognise the goodness in someone, we do more than create it, we help it to become creative. This is what God does for us, and what He calls on us to do for others.



FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

Judaism is a critique of empire and the rule of the strong. In the first chapter of Genesis we are told that every human being is in the image and likeness of God. This is not an abstract metaphysical proposition. It is a political statement of potentially explosive force. The kings and pharaohs of the ancient world were seen as gods, the children of the gods, or the sole intermediary of the gods. They presided over hierarchical societies in which there was an absolute, ontological differences between rulers and ruled.

By stating that not just the king, but everyone, is in the image of God, the Bible was opposing the entire political universe of the ancient world. Every individual is sacrosanct. Every life is sacred. The human person as such has inalienable dignity. Here is the birth of the biblical revolution, which did not materialize in the West until the seventeenth century with the articulation of the concept of human rights, meaning the rights we bear simply because

we are human. Babel is the symbol of the sacrifice of the individual to the state. Abraham, by contrast, is to become the symbol of all individuals in search of worth as individuals. **The Hebrew Bible is a sustained protest against empire, hierarchy, ruling elites and the enslavement of the masses.**

Future Tense, p. 77-78

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. What does it mean for society if we believe that everyone is created in the “Image of God” not just the king or the elite?
2. In *Covenant & Conversation*, Rabbi Sacks challenges us to see the good in creation (the third stage of creation). How does the belief in all people being created in the “Image of God” help us to do that?



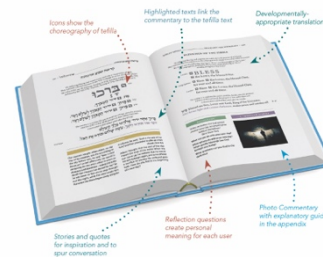
AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. If God is incorporeal (has no physical form) how can we be created in the “Image of God”? What then do you think it means to be created “in the image of God”?
2. From the description in the Torah of man’s creation, “Image of God” seems to be the key element of what makes us human. What are the things that make humans unique in the world, and do you think these are because we are created in God’s image?
3. What does the power of speech allow us to do that God’s other creations cannot?
4. Rabbi Sacks’ third stage of creation (and creativity) is to see the good in all things and all people. Is there good in everything and everyone? How do we find it?
5. According to Rabbi Sacks, seeing the good in someone is a creative act because it helps that person to be creative themselves. What do you think he means by this?



QUESTION TIME

Do you want to win a **Koren Aviv Weekday Siddur**? This siddur has been designed to help young people explore their relationship to their God, and the values, history and religion of their people. Email CCFamilyEdition@rabbisacks.org with your name, age, city and your best question or observation about the *parsha* from the *Covenant & Conversation Family Edition*. Each month we will select two of the best entries, and the individuals will each be sent a siddur inscribed by Rabbi Sacks! Thank you to Koren Publishers for kindly donating these wonderful siddurim.



EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS

THE CORE IDEA

1. We believe that God is the ultimate source of goodness in the world and therefore always acts with goodness. This can take the form of many of the characteristics we attribute to Him, such as compassion, mercy, kindness, and justice. We can and should copy these characteristics in the way we live our lives, and some believe that is the basis for the *mitzvot*, to help us to do this. However, the God that we encounter in the first chapter of Genesis is primarily the Creator. So perhaps being created in God's image here means we are created in order to be creators ourselves.
2. Encourage children to understand that being creative is not just physically creative with our hands but can also mean lots of other ways we improve the world and society around us. Making a person smile or feel loved is also a creative act!
3. God has created a world for us to benefit from and to improve. In fact, Rabbi Sacks believes our primary destiny in the world is to achieve *tikkun olam* – the perfecting of the world. According to him the ultimate fulfillment of Judaism is to heal the fractures in the world and we do that by being creative, physically, spiritually and emotionally.

IT ONCE HAPPENED...

1. All humans are created in the image of God, which means they all have spiritual worth and spiritual beauty. This is not necessarily talking about physical beauty, although it can also be argued that all of God's creations have physical beauty, if we only look for it. The spiritual beauty of being created in the image of God is that it can be found in all human beings, irrespective of gender, race, colour, creed or culture.
2. According to this line of thought, there is spiritual beauty in all human beings, if we are just open to seeing it. Instead of judging a person's beauty by superficial external factors, we have to delve into their souls, by getting to know them, to see their true beauty and spiritual worth.

FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

1. In ancient times (and even more recently than that) society was more hierarchical. Only the elite who had power because of their wealth or status, were seen as being divine and worthwhile. There are still some societies in the world like this. Judaism and the Torah brought a radical idea into the world that is the basis of western liberal democratic societies today – that all people are created equal and have the same rights because of that. This is because every human being is created in the image of God.
2. Once we see the image of God in each human being, we can see the goodness in them. This means we can also see the goodness in everything they do and create. There is so much good in creation. Some of it is from the Creator, and some of it is from His creations who have created in their own right.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Being created in the image of God does not mean humans have a physical likeness to God, but rather a spiritual likeness.
2. It could mean many different things. On some level, it is whatever distinguishes us from the animal world. Animals are not created in the image of God. So what makes humans unique from animals? Here are some suggestions: speech (communication); the power of abstract thought; free choice (and the power to be good and selfless); a divine soul (a higher soul as compared to the lower animal soul) and therefore the ability to connect to the Divine.
3. The power of speech allows mankind to organise themselves in larger societies, collaborating and working in unison for the greater good of the group and society as a whole. This allows us to develop as a species and build a better world for all of us, fulfilling the divine command of being creative, and of *tikkun olam* (perfecting the world).
4. Some people believe there is good or potential good, in all people and all things. Others see evil in the world and believe that some people and some things can be all evil and unredeemable. Ask the people around your table what they believe. Most Jewish thinkers and sources seem to believe the former.
5. Human beings need love to function fully and be healthy. To see the good in someone, and base your relationship on that, allows that person to thrive and be healthy, and therefore be creative in their own right.