



COVENANT & CONVERSATION

.....Family Edition.....

FINDING FAITH IN THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SACKS

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בראשית תש"ף
Bereishit 5780

The Genesis of Love

** KEY IDEA OF THE WEEK **

It is by loving people that we learn to love God and feel His love for us.



PARSHAT BEREISHIT IN A NUTSHELL

In this week's *parsha* we learn about the story of how the world was created, including all the animals and humans. God creates the world in six days and gives the world Shabbat, a day of holiness and rest, on the seventh day.

One of God's creations is Adam, the first human. God tells us that "It is not good for man to be alone," and so He then creates Eve. They live in the Garden of Eden and are allowed to eat from all the trees and plants, except from the Tree of Knowledge. The snake convinces them to sin by eating from it, so God punishes them by making them leave the perfect Garden of Eden.

The rest of the stories in our *parsha*, and continuing into next week's *parsha*, are tales of sadness and tragedy, and show how we can all make mistakes. For example, Cain, Adam and Eve's son, becomes the first person to kill another human being when he kills his brother, Abel. By the end of the *parsha*, God sees how wicked man can become.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. Why do you think humans make so many mistakes and what can God do to help stop this from happening?



THE CORE IDEA

There are two different versions of the story of creation. The first is in Genesis 1, the second in Genesis 2-3. There are many differences between the two accounts and I want to concentrate on one of these; the two different ways the first man gives a name to the first woman.

In the first, Adam calls woman *ishah* "for she was taken from man [*ish*]." In the second, Adam calls his wife Eve [*Chava*], "because she was the mother of all life."

In the first version, the man names not a person, but a class, a category. He uses a noun, not a name. The other person is, for him, simply "woman," a type, not an individual. In the second, he gives his wife a proper name. She has become, for him, a person in her own right.

Only *after* the man has given his wife a proper name do we find the Torah referring to God Himself by His proper name alone, namely *Hashem* (in Genesis 4). Until then He

has been described as either *Elokim* or *Hashem Elokim* – *Elokim* being the impersonal aspect of God: God as law, God as power, God as justice. In other words, *our relationship to God parallels our relationship to one another. Only when we respect and recognise the uniqueness of another person are we capable of respecting and recognising the uniqueness of God Himself.*

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. What is the difference between a noun and a proper name? Is it similar to being called by your first and last names?
2. When do we use the name "*Elokim*" for God and when "*Hashem*"?
3. What can we learn about our relationship with God from our human relationships?



IT ONCE HAPPENED...

Hello. My name is Rafi. You can call me Rafi. That is what my friends and family call me. Sometimes. Sometimes I have other names though. Sometimes my sisters call me Ruffles or Rufus. Sometimes my brother calls me the Rafmeister. Sometimes friends just call me Levy. I don't really like that too much. My name is Rafi. When I am called to the Torah, I am Raphael Eliyahu ben Aryeh Elisha. When I am ill, I am Raphael Eliyahu ben Miriam Tzofia.

My parents chose my names because my sister was ill when I was born, and Raphael means God who heals, and is the name of the angel who heals on behalf of God.

Eliyahu was my mother's grandfather, who died before I was born. He survived the Holocaust and came to Israel and fought in the War of Independence. It feels like an honour to be named after him.

But my name is Rafi. You can call me Rafi.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. How many different names does Rafi have? Why so many?
2. Why doesn't Rafi like to be called Levy? Why does he like to be called Rafi? What do you like to be called? Why?



THINKING MORE DEEPLY

Let us return to the two creation accounts, looking at what they can tell us about creation. In Genesis 1, God creates *things* – chemical elements, stars, planets, lifeforms, biological species. In Genesis 2-3, He creates *people*. In the first chapter, He creates systems, in the second chapter He creates relationships. It is fundamental to the Torah's view of reality that these things belong to different worlds, distinct narratives, separate stories, alternative ways of seeing reality.

There are differences in tone as well. In the first, creation involves no effort on the part of God. He simply speaks. He says, "Let there be," and there was. In the second, He is actively engaged. When it comes to the creation of the first human, He does not merely say, "Let us make man in our image according to our likeness." He performs the creation Himself, like sculptor fashioning an image out of clay: "Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

In Genesis 1, God effortlessly summons the universe into being. In Genesis 2, He becomes a gardener: "Now the Lord God planted a garden ..." We wonder why on earth God who has just created the entire universe, should become a gardener. The Torah gives us the answer, and it is very moving: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." God wanted to give man the dignity of work, of being a creator, not just a creation. And in case the man should view such labour as undignified, God became a gardener Himself to show that this work too is Divine, and in performing it, man becomes God's partner in the work of creation.

Then comes the extraordinarily poignant verse, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" God feels for the existential isolation of the first man. There was no such moment in the previous

chapter. There, God simply creates. Here, God empathises. He enters into the human mind. He feels what we feel. There is no such moment in any other ancient religious literature. What is radical about biblical monotheism is not just that there is only one God, not just that He is the source of all that exists, but that *God is closer to us than we are to ourselves*. God knew the loneliness of the first man before the first man knew it of himself.

That is what the second creation account is telling us. Creation of things is relatively easy; creation of relationships is hard. Look at the tender concern God shows for the first human beings in Genesis 2-3. He wants man to have the dignity of work. He wants man to know that work itself is Divine. He gives man the capacity to name the animals. He cares when He senses the onset of loneliness. He creates the first woman. He watches, in exasperation, as the first human couple commit the first sin. Finally, when the man gives his wife a proper name, recognising for the first time that she is different from him and that she can do something he will never do, He clothes them both so that they will not go naked into the world. That is the God, not of creation (*Elokim*) but of love (*Hashem*).

That is what makes the dual account of the naming of the first woman so significant a parallel to the dual account of God's creation of the universe. We have to create relationships before we encounter the God of relationship. We have to make space for the otherness of the human other to be able to make space for the otherness of the Divine other. We have to give love before we can receive love.

In Genesis 1, God creates the universe. Nothing vaster can be imagined, and we keep discovering that the universe is bigger than we thought. In 2016, a study based on three-dimensional modelling of images produced by the Hubble space telescope concluded that there were between 10 and 20

times as many galaxies as astronomers had previously thought. There are more than a hundred stars for every grain of sand on earth.

And yet, almost in the same breath as it speaks of the panoply of creation, the Torah tells us that God took time to breathe the breath of life into the first human, give him dignified work, enter his loneliness, make him a wife, and robe them both with garments of light when the time came for them to leave Eden and make their way in the world.

The Torah is telling us something very powerful. Never think of people as things. Never think of people as types: they are

individuals. Never be content with creating systems: care also about relationships.

I believe that relationships are where our humanity is born and grows, flowers and flourishes. It is by loving people that we learn to love God and feel the fullness of His love for us.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. What can you learn from the relationships in your life to develop your relationship with God?



FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

“God is not about power but relationships. Religion is not about control but about freedom. God is found less in nature than in human society, in the structures we make to honour His presence by honouring His image in other human beings.”

Radical Then, Radical Now, p. 74



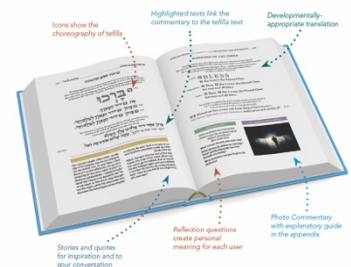
AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Why do you think there are two separate and contrasting descriptions of how God created humankind?
2. What is the danger represented by the first name (*Isha*) that Adam gave to his wife?
3. How can we learn to love God from loving the people in our life?



QUESTION TIME

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IN A NUTSHELL

1. The Torah says that humans are the only creation that was made in the image of God. So there is something clearly spiritually different from the rest of creation (although that is not to say that animals can't also have a spiritual dimension). Some of the practical differences that science can observe include language, power of abstract thought (including a sense of self, and an understanding of the future and the past), and the ability to live and work in large communities. These are some of the things that have explained the development and achievements of humankind. Most philosophers also believe humans have freewill to make choices, including between good and evil, right and wrong. This is why God can expect better from humans and is the basis of His relationship with them.
2. God expects us to exercise our freewill to do what is right and good, and make the world a better place (*Tikun Olam*). Judaism (and all religions) ultimately try to encourage humankind to create societies based on universally good values that combat the evil that also exists in the world and is also a result of man's freewill. Practical examples should be encouraged in this discussion.

THE CORE IDEA

1. Nouns are the words we use to refer to things, places, or people, in a non-personal way. A noun describes a "type". A proper name on the other hand, is a way to refer to someone specific, in a personal way, and suggests some kind of relationship (the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber spoke about I-It and I-Thou relationships. Nouns are used in I-it relationships, and proper names in I-thou relationships, which are more personal and intimate). When someone refers to you by your last name only it suggests a lack of personal relationship and intimacy. Although a family name is part of your proper name, it may feel like when you are called by your family name, the person who called you by your surname is demonstrating that they see you as part of a group or category (in this case your wider family) rather than seeing you as an individual in your own right.
2. *Elokim* is a more generic name for God (and in fact sometimes used to refer to other "gods" that were worshipped in biblical times). It is also often used to refer to God in the context of law and justice (i.e. less personal) rather than the four letter name of God (the *Tetragrammaton* – the name we do not read out loud, but rather read as *Hashem* – "The Name") which is a proper name for God, and suggests a more personal and intimate relationship.
3. Only when we respect and recognise the uniqueness of another person are we capable of respecting and recognising the uniqueness of God Himself. But we can also conclude that only when we see God as an "other" with whom we wish to form a relationship with (represented by the use of proper names) will we be able to develop a relationship with God. Just as with human relationships, a relationship with God takes thought and effort.

IT ONCE HAPPENED...

1. There are six names mentioned in the story for Rafi. We all have many names used by different people in our lives at different times. Each one appropriate for a specific aspect of our identity.
2. Rafi is the way he is called by those who love him the most, like his parents and close friends. Levy is his surname, and suggests that the person using it doesn't feel close to Rafi and is not interested in a close relationship. (It should be noted that this is not always true – sometimes children use last names without meaning to send this message, and sometimes those childhood friends become lifelong friends who still sometimes refer to you by your last name from habit or as a nickname).

THINKING MORE DEEPLY

1. Relationships take work, whether they be with family, friends, or God. Just as you cannot take for granted any relationship, even one that seems guaranteed (like a parent-child relationship, or in fact our relationship with God). Building and developing relationships with other humans, who are also created in the image of God (see *From the Thought of Rabbi Sacks*) can help us understand how to do the same with God.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. In describing the creation of Adam and Eve in two distinct and contrasting ways in the first two chapters of Genesis, the Torah is showing us two distinct aspects of what it means to be a human being. Rabbi Soloveitchik's thesis in his work *Lonely Man of Faith* is that both aspects of man (*Majestic Man* and *Covenantal Man*) exist within each of us, and both are sanctioned by God. The Torah is helping us to be aware of these aspects of our personalities, and help us to maintain a healthy balance between them.
2. One of the contrasts between the two versions describing the creation of humanity is the way Adam named his wife. We can learn about *Majestic Man* and *Covenantal Man* (and therefore ourselves) from the way Adam chose to name his wife. In the first instance he named her *Isha*, the generic name for the female human. This is because he saw her merely as a "type", a partner for developing and dominating the world. This is because Majestic man's priority is to create and build. But the danger is if Adam fails to see the humanity in Eve and cannot even find a proper name to call her, with which to build a relationship with her, then he risks devaluing her and mistreating her. Seeing other human beings as "things" can lead to devastatingly evil events as we have seen throughout history.
3. When we realise we must treat our fellow human beings as people in their own right, people created in the image of God, we can form relationships and come to love them. When we learn this lesson, we are then ready to embark on developing a mutual and intimate relationship with God.