

Declaring a Do Over

Unkelos translates Breishit as *B'Kadmin*, in the initial stage of creation that transpired a long time ago. Rashi disagrees with Unkelos and translates Breishit and the chapter describing creation alternatively as specifying an overall order of creation and how things were revealed. Tiferet Yisrael, in his work *Ohr Chaim*, supports Unkelos' interpretation saying that we exist as part of the fourth attempt at creation of the world/universe. Unkelos means that *B'Kadmin*, the origins of creation, being the raw creation materials of *Eretz* representing the physical material world and *Shamayim* representing the spiritual realm, were created long ago, before Astral creation described as occurring on a subsequent day of Creation. These basic materials were used to fashion multiple versions of a world/universe of which this is the fourth (or possibly later) attempt. Careful analysis of the Ramban on *Parshat Breishit* supports this idea. This idea is promulgated by the Kabbalists in the thesis of *Shevirat Kaylim* and *Tikkun* with the first several transient attempts at creation culminating in the *Tikkun* associated with the fourth (or seventh) vessel, which represents this world/universe. The underlying idea of the Kabbalists is the statement by Rabbi Abahu that Hashem created worlds and destroyed them until He created this world and made a covenant with the Jewish People (Breishit Rabbah 3:7). Rabbi Pinchas explained Rabbi Abahu's statement that Hashem said *Dayn Hanya Li*, this (world) pleases Me while the other, previous worlds did not, *Dayn Lo Hanya Li*.

While my intention is not to enter into a discussion of fundamental Kabbalah principles, I wish to simply underscore the concept that according to our tradition, there were prior attempts at creation that were destroyed and returned to their original state of nihility that was subsequently reformed into another attempt at creation, culminating ultimately with our world/universe. the Rav noted that while it may be readily understandable that a human being may require several iterations to perfect a project, why was it necessary for Hashem, the *Kol Yachol*, Omnipotent One, to build and destroy prior worlds till He arrived at this one? Could He not have built His notion of a perfect world the first time around?

Apparently the perseverance demonstrated in multiple attempts at creating an acceptable world is an example of an important characteristic of Hashem that man must emulate, based on the precept of *V'Halachta B'Drachav*. Just as Hashem is a *Yotzayr*, the ultimate Creator, man must strive to show creativity in his endeavors. Man's *Tzelem Elokim* drives him to create and build. We must use the materials Hashem provided to improve the human condition and appreciate His greatness through observing and interacting with His creation. We must perfect our minds so that we can understand and appreciate His Torah and commandments. Hashem taught us that in our lives we will come across challenges where things do not work out as well as expected. It takes courage and strength of character to admit failure and start again. Sometimes we may come to realize that the goal in which we invested so much effort is either unattainable or has become corrupted. The Torah tells us *Ki Yamuch Achicha*, should your brother descend into a state of destitution. This verse implies a sudden, rather than gradual, descent into poverty. It is not limited to financial destitution, it includes moral or character decline as well. A person may dedicate his entire life to a goal, be it personal, financial or communal, only to wake up one morning and realize that his efforts were in vain, that he is morally bankrupt. It is important that he demonstrates the fortitude to admit failure and start again. If Hashem can admit failure, *Kvayachol*, by His expressing *Dayn Lo Hanya Li*, I was not satisfied with this attempt and I will try again, man must do the same.

The Rav was always impressed by teachers of young children in their formative educational years. Whereas the older students arrived in his class with formed ideas, the younger students represented amorphous and malleable material, like the primordial building materials of *Tohu* and *Bohu* that Hashem fashioned into a functioning productive world. The young children beginning their education must be molded carefully into an inquisitive mind that will burst onto the world stage expressing his creativity and *Tzelem Elokim*. Such a teacher is *Boneh Olamot*, taking the physical and spiritual, Eretz and *Shamayim* and fusing them together effectively. A teacher who is incapable of, or unsuccessful at, molding his students is considered a *Mashchit*, a destroyer of worlds as the child will never reach his potential and will eventually require much *Tikkun* and correction to remold his basic intellectual and humanitarian composition.

We can apply this same idea to the Jewish People and their odyssey through history. We have experienced the heights of being close to Hashem at Sinai and with the Tabernacle that accompanied us in the desert. The heights of the Mishkan in Shiloh, the Temple twice built in Jerusalem, and the lows of their destruction. Yet after each devastating experience we picked ourselves up and rebuilt ourselves. Our worlds have been destroyed by many Holocausts that scorched the millennia since the destruction of the first Temple, from Beitar to the terrible Holocaust perpetrated on our people by the Nazis and their many willing collaborators, *Yimachu Sh'motam*, to the present day enemies of the Jewish People who seek to destroy us physically and religiously by any means possible. We are the same Jews who approached Rabbi Akiva after the destruction of the second Temple and despaired of attaining atonement on Yom Kippur without the service of the *Kohen Gadol* in the Holy of Holies. Yet Rabbi Akiva lifted their spirits and showed them there was still another path they can embrace to attain an atonement that was no less effective than that of the *Kohen Gadol*. When the same Rabbi Akiva lost 24,000 students in a short period, the cream of our people who represented the next link in the generational chain of the Mesorah, he did not despair. Instead he set himself to rebuild Torah to its former glory with a handful of students who survived and succeeded. Who taught Rabbi Akiva how to respond to these situations? He fulfilled *V'Halachta B'Drachav* and rebuilt a world that was destroyed.

While building from scratch is challenging, rebuilding something can be even more difficult. Perhaps we can apply this idea to assist us in appreciating the difficulty, power and importance of *Teshuva*. A person who repents must acknowledge his sin and express remorse at how bankrupt his life and actions are. He reaches the state of *Ki Yamuch Achicha*. The Teshuva process disassembles the sinful individual into his basic components, the raw physical and spiritual materials Hashem used to form him and reconstructs him. As Rambam says in *Hilchot Teshuva*, the repentant person standing before Hashem is a new individual, with a new name and relationship with Hashem. Man builds an initial world for himself (*Boneh Olam*), tears that world down when he realizes its foundations are faulty and riddled with sin (*Machrivan*) and rebuilds a new world (*Boneh Olam Acher*) through Teshuva. Where Hashem says to man's original world *Dayn Lo Hanya*, I am not satisfied with the original version, after destruction and reconstruction through Teshuva, Hashem exclaims "*Dayn Hanya Li!* I approve of this rebuilt version and accept you back".

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