

***Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's  
Lectures on Genesis, VI through IX***

*Based upon Rabbi Robert Blau's notes taken at Bernard Revel Graduate School in the late 1940s. This is the second of a three-part series covering thirteen lectures.*

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**Introduction to Lecture VI**

In this lecture, the Rav contrasts the two types of interpretation of the first verse in Genesis which were presented in Lecture V.

**Lecture VI**

The first interpretation of **בראשית** meaning “In the beginning,” is important philosophically because the Torah is telling us that the greatest of all miracles is *yesh me-ayin, creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing.<sup>1</sup>

The Torah was written for man, to fulfil his needs: not only for man's curiosity of the Being (i.e., the beginning to existence)—but to gain insight beyond the Being. Parmenides said that you cannot speak of

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<sup>1</sup> In Lecture V the Rav presented three interpretations of the word *Bereshit*, **בראשית**:

- 1 In the beginning, firstly (interpretations 1 and 2).
- 2 When God created the world, the world was... (interpretation 3).
- 3 With *reshit* **ראשית** God created the world (interpretation 4).

What distinguishes the first interpretation from the other two is that the first postulates a “beginning” to the existence, which the Rav refers to in this lecture as “the Being,” whereas the other two assume the existence of “something” at the time of creation. As a consequence, the first interpretation describes a world created out of nothing, *creatio ex nihilo*, whereas the other two assume a concurrent, even eternal, Being out of which or with which the world was created. *Creatio ex nihilo*, however, cannot be adduced from the latter two interpretations.

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non-Being, because there is no “object.” When you say, for example, that “this table is non-existent,” you are starting with the premise of an existing table, but to start with non-Being is nonsensical.<sup>2</sup>

However, the Torah, speaking of *yesh me-ayin*, creation out of nothing, enables man to speak of non-Being. Nihilism was turned into Being. Non-Being is then a subject matter for the Jews as opposed to Parmenides, who could not understand non-Being; from the viewpoint of logic you cannot speak of non-Being. The Torah, however, went against this logical principle to fulfil man’s curiosity to inquire beyond the Being.

Secondly, *ex nihilo* was a part of each phase of creation. Each stage was not caused by the previous stage of Being, but called forth by the “will of God.” There is one difference, however, between the first creation and the succeeding stages. That of the first day is a logical problem: you have to say “nihilism turned into Being.” This is logically incorrect. If you say “nihilism is,” you assume then that there is some being to nihilism, and that is logically incorrect. However, on the other days logically the creation is correct but dynamically or physically it is incorrect. “Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed.” This sentence is logically correct but dynamically it is incorrect because of the transition from ארץ to אש.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Rav’s point here is that the statement “this table is non-existent” makes rational sense, for it is a statement about an object (a table) which can hypothetically exist. However, to make a statement about non-Being is nonsensical, for any statement which posits a certain property P about an object X must assume the possible existence of that object X. Since the object non-Being by definition does not exist, the statement “X has property P” makes no sense. Stated more formally, the statement “X has property P” can be broken down into the two statements: “there exists an X, and X has property P.” However, non-Being can never replace the letter X in the first statement.

<sup>3</sup> The Rav’s usage of the term “dynamically incorrect” means that the transition from earth to vegetation cannot be predicted a priori on the basis of the fundamental constituents of earth but is a phenomenon referred to as emergence whereby a simple state develops into a state of greater complexity. This is in contradiction to reduction which looks at states in terms of their basic constituents, placing limits on their changes, and thereby unable to account for the addition of new constituents. There is no rigorous scientific description for processes of emergence. See p. 4 where the Rav refers to this as the “mechanistic principle” which he describes as “God’s will embedded in nature.” There is a discussion of this in *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, p. 4, and 14 fn. 8.

The Rav is reiterating the point he made above in lecture V: the account of Creation in the first six days was not a continuous deterministic process, but rather a series of discrete Divine commands which brought forth specific natural beings into existence. This means that each of these creations was not a sci-

There is another problem. All the days of creation begin with <sup>4</sup>ויאמר—God said—except the first day where the narrative omits the word of ויאמר in the creation of the first matter. In *Tehillim* (33), however, it says: בדבר ה' שמים נעשו (תהילים ל"ג), “By the word of God the heavens were created,” the same as on the other days of creation. The reason the Torah omitted it is because logically it is incorrect. How can God say ויאמר? To whom should He address Himself when all was nihility? We therefore cannot understand it. Causality is a dynamic problem;<sup>5</sup> to address oneself to nihility is a logical problem. This mystery is inexpressible. Therefore the Torah omits the word ויאמר and speaks only of the fait accompli, the “creation” but not of the “*nihilo*.”<sup>6</sup> To Nahmanides, however, the word בראשית is punctuated [with *tagen*] on

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entific event which mechanistically emerged from a previous state, but was a Divine act which, through the Will of God, was brought independently into nature. As a result, these creations too can be termed *ex nihilo*. However, they are to be distinguished from the first act of creation, which created Being from nihility. The other acts created spontaneously one form of being into another form of Being. However, as discussed above in note 2, the statement “nihility turned into Being” poses a logical difficulty, for the statement, when broken down into its logical components says:

“There exists a nihility, such that this nihility was turned into Being.” Of course, as mentioned above, the statement “there exists a nihility” cannot be logically true; for nihility, by definition, does not exist. However, the statement, “Being A was turned into Being B,” while resisting any scientific description, nonetheless makes logical sense.

<sup>4</sup> The Rav is referring here to the statement of R' Yochanan in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah* (32a) which states that the world was created with ten utterances (of God). The Gemara then points out that there were only nine utterances in Creation, and solves this apparent inconsistency by stating that *Beresbit* בראשית is also an utterance. This means to say that the first verse, בראשית ברא א-לקים, while seemingly stating a fact, is also an utterance; as it says, “With the word of God the heavens were created (*Tehillim* 33). The Rav now explains the significance of this statement of the Gemara.

<sup>5</sup> Causality is a scientific problem which can be solved by the intervention of God. Nihility is a logical problem which cannot be expressed in language, and thereby in the Divine text.

<sup>6</sup> The Rav's point here is that while one may talk about creation *ex-nihilo*, one cannot use logical verbal terminology to describe it, for ultimately *nihilo* cannot be described. Therefore the Torah could not have expressed the very first creation in the manner in which it described the others, for by quoting an utterance of God, i.e., “let there be heavens and earth from nothing,” one is, in fact, describing the very act of *creatio ex nihilo*, which is a logical absurdity.

top in the Bible scroll to indicate *yesh me-ayin*,<sup>7</sup> a hidden meaning beyond, as Ramban calls it, *Keter be-Keter*, which in Kabbalah signifies *yesh me-ayin*.

How did Rashi interpret בראשית? During Rashi's time the Jew was a *halakbivist*, a Halakhic Jew, a *Shulhan Arukh*-conforming Jew. During the Second Commonwealth, the time of Rabbi Akiva and the Pardes group, there were mystics interested in what was the beyond-reality, a world full of mysteries. However, to Rashi, the Bible was a practical book. He developed a certain metaphysical naïveté. Therefore, to Rashi, the word בראשית in the first sentence did not make any sense.<sup>8</sup> He felt it was futile to inquire into the mystery of creation and so בראשית became an adverbial phrase.

In the phrase והארץ היתה תהו ובהו, the ו (*vav*) of והארץ is silent (i.e., not implying “and”) to remove the problem of addressing the nihility, and to begin with Being, תהו ובהו. The word בראשית then modifies not the verb ברא but the phrase והארץ היתה וגו'.<sup>9</sup> The question to

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<sup>7</sup> The Ramban writes in his commentary to the Torah on the first verse: If you will merit and understand the [Kabbalistic] secret of the word “*Bereshit*” and why the Torah did not state “*Elokim bara Bereshit*” (God created *Bereshit*), for in truth the Scripture speaks about terrestrial things but alludes to metaphysical things. The word *Bereshit* alludes to the [first *Sefirah*] *Sefirah* which is the beginning of all beginnings... and the word is crowned with a crown on the *beit*.

The Rav is claiming that this “crown,” literally called “*Keter*,” refers to the *Sefirah* “*Keter*” which is often referred to as *ayin*, nothingness, and it alludes to the non-Being from which the world was created *yesh me-ayin*.

<sup>8</sup> Rashi, commentating on the first verse, writes that the verse itself says “interpret me homiletically,” meaning that it is very difficult to understand the “simple” meaning of the text. This is due to the fact that the conjugation of the first word *Bereshit* indicates that it is not an adverb or an adverbial predicate, but is, instead, conjunctive, for the word literally means “in the beginning of” and cannot be understood as an adverb modifying the verb “create” but is coming to modify the noun “creation” itself. The Rav is claiming here that Rashi's motivations are not only grammatical, but epistemological. That is, to translate “*Bereshit*” to mean “in the beginning” is to discuss a metaphysical mystery which is beyond man's capacity to comprehend.

<sup>9</sup> That is, according to Rashi, the word *Bereshit* means “in the beginning of...” Consequently, the first two verses are translated: “In the beginning of the creation of the heavens and the earth, the earth was in a state of chaos...” What the Rav means by the *vav* of “the earth” (והארץ) being silent is that the conjunction “and” (*vav*) is not significant. The phrase “in the beginning” encompasses the entire first verse to read, “In the beginning of the creation of the heaven and earth” and hence tells us when the earth was in chaos, i.e., it modifies the word הארץ and not the verb ברא “create.” As a result, Rashi's reading

Rashi is not Being but the [con]version of Being into a cosmos which in Greek means "Order." הארץ היתה תהו ובהו, Being was in a chaotic state, and God created order. Our mind inquires not into the before, the ante facto, but the post facto. Rashi's [understanding] is that בראשית [means] מלפנים, once upon a time, the ארץ was תהו ובהו, the world was chaotic. Rashi was more scientific than all of them, simply because any scientific cosmogony would begin with the second phrase and not the first. Science, no matter how it will progress in the future, when it explains the growth of the universe, will always begin with הארץ, the land, because בראשית is logically unthinkable to science. Science will always remain arrested within the bounds of הארץ, remaining with some form of cosmic dust.<sup>10</sup> Science has two methods:

- 1) Descriptive, e.g., Biology.
- 2) Explanatory, e.g., Physics, which searches for a certain mathematical link between two different stages of development.

Science will venture to explain how separate units of the cosmos function, but it will not venture to explain how the cosmos as a whole functions, because it would need to exceed the cosmic bound which is no longer science.

What does Rashi think about the transition from one phase to another? The movement was initiated by the Divine will, but this very emergence was a part of Being. המחדש בטובו בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית, "Who in his goodness renews the creation everyday continually."<sup>11</sup> There is a צירה every day, the act of creation being a continuous one. כאמור לעושה אורים גדולים כי לעולם חסדו, "As it is said: To him that makes great lights, for his lovingkindness endures forever."<sup>12</sup> This phrase being the proof [text] that His Grace, חסד, is manifested throughout [time]. Creation, לעושה, being in the present, [is coupled with] כי לעולם חסדו, connoting the present continuing, [both] being of the same tempo.<sup>13</sup>

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of the *pasuk* skirts the issue of *creatio ex nihilo* by describing the state of the already-existent world at the time when God first created light.

<sup>10</sup> *Creatio ex nihilo* rejects the very notion of an eternal world.

<sup>11</sup> Part of the blessing said before the recitation of the *Shema* in the morning service.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> In other words, the statement in the prayer (composed by the Men of the Great Assembly, אנשי כנסת הגדולה, "Who in His goodness recreates the creation every day continually" is supported scripturally in the same prayer by the verse "To Him that makes the great light for His lovingkindness endures forever."

I cannot say, for example, “I did him a favor because I am good forever,” but “because I was good to him.”<sup>14</sup> **שׁמַחֲדָשׁ** refers to the second stage, that creation was continuous from [the time of] Being.<sup>15</sup>

The word **שׁמַחֲדָשׁ** was employed, not **הַבְּרָא**. Causality then was the Divine will imbedded in organic and inorganic matter and this is *hidush*, which repeats itself continually. Science calls it a monotonous pattern which never changes. Even to science today it is a mystery how organic matter springs from inorganic matter. This causal principle is the imbedded will of God. In the very beginning, the six stages of creation, God’s will, *ratzon ha-Kadmon*, had to drive one stage to another, inorganic to organic, and then remained as an internal part of matter which is the principle of causality. Today, in science, it is called the mechanistic principle.<sup>16</sup> The will of God then is implanted in matter. Once God retreats from nature it would revert back to chaos. Regularity is Divine will. The will is inalterable and continues constantly.

The Deists also claim that the Divine will shapes matter but is extraneous to it. As a carpenter that shapes a table, so long as he is shaping the table he is in control of it, but once he abandons it, they become mutually exclusive.

## Introduction to Lecture VII

In this lecture, the Rav discusses Maimonides’ interpretation of the first verse of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Maimonides understands the phrase “in the beginning” (*Beresbit*) as a description of *creatio ex nihilo*. He compares the Hebrew letter “*beit*”

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This is because the tense in the scriptural verse of the clause “To Him that makes the great lights” (**לַעֲשֹׂהָ**) is in the present tense, and corresponds to the clause “for his lovingkindness endures forever,” which makes sense only for an action that perpetuates itself in the continual present.

<sup>14</sup> In other words, the phrase “Because I am good forever” cannot refer to a past act of goodness but only to an act of goodness which is constantly in present tense.

<sup>15</sup> The description **מַחֲדָשׁ** in the prayer therefore does not refer to the first act of creation, but rather to the continual state of the world after the initial act of *creatio ex nihilo*.

<sup>16</sup> The Rav is using the term “mechanistic principle” to what scientists refer to as emergence. See p. 2 above and fn. 3. Since there isn’t a cohesive scientific theory of emergence, as opposed to reduction, he invokes the concept of the Divine will imbedded in nature.

(ב) which prefixes the word *reishit* (ראשית) to the letter “beit” of a utensil (בי"ת הכלי). The Rav presents two interpretations of Maimonides.

## Lecture VII

Now we come to Maimonides, the first who did not interpret בראשית as “Beginning.” In the *Moreh Nevukhim*, Bk II, Ch. 30, Maimonides refers to Aristotle’s concept of time.<sup>17</sup> There are two propositions which Maimonides discusses.<sup>18</sup> Had he accepted both points, he would have denied creation.<sup>19</sup> Had he rejected both, he would have explained it as “in the Beginning.”<sup>20</sup> But by accepting one and rejecting the other, he created a new metaphysics which is still of great value today with certain modifications and is the greatest contribution of the *Moreh Nevukhim*.<sup>21</sup> Aristotelian propositions: theory of time.

1) Time devoid of matter is an absurdity. Time is always the form of something and time is filled with content. Time is bound up with motion. We measure time through motion. Change in general is motion, according to Aristotle (as a [tree] growing). Motion is qualitative time but quantitative time is not the typical representative of motion. Time is motion, [which] it pass[es] on, based on the movement of the planets. By motion Aristotle understood not only locomotion but change in matter too. Time then depends on cosmic motion. The agent which is responsible for change in nature is the motion of the spheres.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Rambam in the *Guide* II:30 writes that “time is a created object since it is a (physical) property of the motion of the spheres which are themselves created objects.” This is also discussed in II:13 at length where he discusses the Aristotelian theory of eternity.

<sup>18</sup> These propositions are the past eternity of the world and the future eternity of the world.

<sup>19</sup> To maintain the past eternity of the world is to deny *creatio ex nihilo*.

<sup>20</sup> For to maintain that time has an absolute end is to maintain that it also has an absolute beginning.

<sup>21</sup> The Rav understands that by asserting the eternity of future time but maintaining a beginning to time, i.e., *creatio ex nihilo*, the Rambam created a new metaphysics. This will be explained in this lecture.

<sup>22</sup> The Rambam includes this Aristotelian principle in his introduction to the second volume of the *Guide*.

The fifteenth axiom is that time is a property caused by motion and dependent on it. One cannot exist without the other. Motion is not possible without time. Similarly, the intellect cannot comprehend time independent of motion.

2) Time is endless, infinite. Therefore, the cosmos is also endless. This implies co-eternity of matter with God, denying creation.<sup>23</sup>

Maimonides accepted the first proposition of Aristotle.<sup>24</sup> By compromising [with Aristotle], Maimonides eliminates eschatology, *aharit ha-yamim* (end of days).<sup>25</sup> The miracle of *olam ha-ba* (the world to come) was only another phase of the historical cycle. To him, *olam ha-ba* is *hash'arat ha-nefesh* (the existence of the soul after death), not a metaphysical kingdom on earth.<sup>26</sup> Concrete life must have death. *Tebiyat ha-metim* (resurrection of the dead) is a miracle which will happen [only once] but the world will continue to exist as it did before and men will die again. Because if motion is endless, then change is endless. Then death is endless. So you cannot eliminate death.

For *Hazal* (Sages of the Talmud) and the *Ba'alei ha-Kabbalah* (kabbalists) the world is just an episode.<sup>27</sup> God tolerates the coexistence of a world. Therefore, the world is going to be destroyed. But Maimonides, who believed in the endlessness of time, claims that the laws of nature will go on forever and ever. Therefore, for Maimonides, time is endless in progression, not in retrogression, because he rejected the second principle.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, for Maimonides, time and the world were created at the same time.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, God first created a principle, and through this principle He created the world.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The Rav is referring to the past eternity of time. If time has always existed, so has the world. See the *Guide*, section II chapter 13.

<sup>24</sup> That is, he accepted the Aristotelian proposition that time is a property of the motion of physical objects and therefore not independent of the physically created world.

<sup>25</sup> That is, he accepted the proposition of the future eternity of the world, see *Guide* II:27. This proposition implies that the natural order is eternal and not subject to change. Hence, eschatology—the undoing of the natural order and the emergence of an entirely new one—is inconceivable.

<sup>26</sup> See Rambam *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, Chap. 8 Halakhah 2 where he writes that that World to Come, *olam ha-ba*, is a world of only souls and intellects divorced of all physicality.

See Rambam's *Treatise on the Resurrection* and the commentary *Yad Ramah* on *Sanhedrin* in the beginning of the tenth chapter for an extended discussion.

<sup>27</sup> That is to say, the natural order of the world is a passing phenomenon which will come to an end sometime in the future.

<sup>28</sup> The Rambam rejects the past eternity of time. Time therefore has a beginning; the world was created *ex nihilo*.

<sup>29</sup> That is to say, the creation of time and *creatio ex nihilo* are the same event.

<sup>30</sup> Since the world, according to Rambam, once it is already created, operates on the basis of the principles of natural law, this implies that the world was creat-

Through an instrument God created heaven and earth. *Bereshit* is this principle.<sup>31</sup> Via creating a principle, God created those above and below. This principle is *Hochmah*.<sup>32</sup> By employing wisdom God created heaven and earth.

The beginning of all things is wisdom. When you speak of reality you deal with epistemological idealism.<sup>33</sup> We cannot speak of existence abstracted from thought. If there is no mind you cannot speak of reality, the coordinator of thinghood and thought. The atheists have trouble with this idea, because they have to postulate a universal mind. You cannot limit reality to my mind or yours. And a universal mind for an atheist postulates some supernatural being. But for the religious philosopher this concept is excellent.<sup>34</sup>

Berkeley, the English philosopher, said that he cannot visualize a world without an apprehending mind. If you remove our senses, then nothing is left. The world [to man] depends on our sub-psychic apprehension of the world. However, if you abstract reality from us, it still exists because of a universal mind [God].

Hume [countered] that there is no world without our minds, [while] for Berkeley, you have to equate reality with a universal mind. Solipsism equates [reality] (it) with the individual mind: "I close my eyes and the world disappears." The only solution is the religious answer, that when

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ed based upon this principle before creation. This principle was conceived by God. The *bet* of *Bereshit* is interpreted to mean "with," *reishit* is defined as "principle," and, on this basis, the first verse of Genesis is interpreted as, "With [the principles of ] *reishit*, God created heaven and earth."

<sup>31</sup> Strictly speaking, the principle is *reishit*. The  $\beth$  is translated to mean "with."

<sup>32</sup> The Rav bases this idea on the Zohar, quoted by the Ramban, which translated the phrase "*Bereshit bara Elokim*" to mean, "With wisdom (*hochmah*), God created." See also note 20.

<sup>33</sup> That is to say, man's perception of reality is based upon the mind's conception of things. Without this apprehension, the world would be dense and unintelligible to man. The Rav here is drawing upon a central theme in Kant's philosophy which distinguishes between the transcendental and empirical reality. Man has no direct knowledge [of an] external world which Kant called the thing-in-itself but rather accesses it through the structure of his thinking which he calls the transcendental. See footnotes 8 and 9 of lecture I above for a discussion of the influence of Kant's thought on the Rav's philosophy of the halakhah.

<sup>34</sup> The existence of a reality which is universally apprehended by man attests to the existence of a Divine Mind which was involved in its creation. That is to say, man's common ability to idealize the world is made possible by the a priori Divine Thought with which God created the world.

you speak of reality you must postulate a universal mind such as God. Through God's thinking, reality exists.<sup>35</sup>

This is Maimonides. Reality for him was existence by God. Reality is encompassed by Divine thought. When God thinks of it, there is reality. Maimonides is one of the leading epistemological idealists. In *Moreh Nevukhim*, Bk I, ch. 68<sup>36</sup> [he writes of] the unity of the “intellectus, the intelligens, and the intelligible.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The idea that the removal of individual minds removes the world is absurd, according to the Rav. The objective existence of a world independent of any individual demands the existence of a universal mind, which is the Mind of God.

<sup>36</sup> As this section is a rather difficult one, I will attempt to explain its context and then focus on the Rav's interpretation.

In the *Guide*, the Rambam explains how separate intellects, which have their origin in God's thought, emanate from Him to create the world. He writes:

Hence the action of the separate intellect is always designated as an overflow, likened to a source of water which overflows in all directions and does not have one particular direction from which it draws while giving its bounty to others. For it springs forth from nearby and afar. Similarly, the intellect in question may not be from a certain distance... for its action is constant so long as something has been prepared so that it is receptive of the permanently existing action, which has been interpreted as an overflow. Similarly, with regard to the Creator, may His Name be sublime, inasmuch as it has been demonstrated that He is not a body and has been established that the universe is an act of His and that He is the efficient cause—as we have explained and shall explain—it has been said that the world derives from the overflow of God and that He has caused to overflow it to everything in it that is produced in time. In the same way it is said that He caused his knowledge to overflow to the prophets. The meaning of all this is that these actions are the action of One Who is not a body and it is His action that is called ‘overflow.’ (section II chapter 12).

This excerpt highlights the opinion of the Rambam that the creation of the world results from a series of intellectual emanations which originate with God's thinking. This is the source of the Rav's assertion that creation begins first with God's thoughts and, that the word *בראשית* means “with *reishit*,” i.e., “with wisdom.” In the next paragraph, The Rav identifies two stages of this process of Creation:

God's initial thought, in which He thinks only of Himself, for at this stage there is nothing external to God.

Once God has thought a thought, this thought of Himself is a created intellect, in and of itself, and therefore becomes a thought external to God. From this thought, the world is conceived and the way is paved for its creation.

It is interesting to note that this understanding of creation as the process of intellectual emanations is similar to Plato's theory of creation, upon which the Rav originally planned to write his doctoral thesis at the University of Berlin.

*Bereshit*— [all] began with the thought of the world. God thinks in a two-fold manner:

- 1) God can think of Himself and then there is nothing else, for God is infinity and there is no place for finitude. For if you try to add up finitude with infinity, you end up with infinity.
- 2) Then God can think of external thought and reality is created. God thinks not only of Himself but of an outside too. It is the paradox of finitude coexisting with infinity.

*Bereshit* is then the thinking, or the part of God, away from Himself. First the logic of the world was created and then the world. This is what the *Ba'alei ha-Kabbalah* called *zimzum*.<sup>38</sup> *Bereshit* then is the thought of an

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Instead he wrote it on the Neo-Kantian philosophy of Hermann Cohen, which has its source in Platonic philosophy.

<sup>37</sup> See *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 2:10:

בי הקדוש ברוך הוא מכיר אמיתו, ויודע אותה כמות שהיא. ואינו יודע בדעה שהיא חוץ ממנו כמו שאנו יודעין, שאין אנו ודעתנו אחד. אבל הבורא--הוא ודעתו וחיי אחד, מכל צד ומכל פינה: שאלמלא היה חי בחיים ויודע בדעה, היו שם אלוהות הרבה--הוא וחיי ודעתו; ואין הדבר כן, אלא אחד מכל צד ומכל פינה ובכל דרך ייחוד.

נמצאת אומר: הוא היודע, והוא הידוע, והוא הדעה עצמה--הכול אחד. ודבר זה--אין כוח בפה לאומרו ולא באוזן לשומעו ולא בלב האדם להכירו, על בוריו. ולפיכך אומרין "חי פרעה" (בראשית מב,טו; בראשית מב,טז) ו"חי נפשך" (שמואל א א,כו; ועוד הרבה, בצירה), ואין אומרין חי ה' אלא "חי ה'" (שופטים ח,יט; ועוד הרבה, בפתח)--שאין הבורא וחיי שניים כמו חיי הגופות החיים, או כחיי המלאכים.

לפיכך אינו מכיר הברואים ויודעם מחמת הברואים, כמות שאנו יודעים אותם, אלא מחמת עצמו ידעם; לפיכך מפני שהוא יודע עצמו, ידע הכול--שהכול נסמך בהווייתו לו.

In both the *Guide* (section 1 chapter 68) and the *Yad* (*Yesodei Ha-Torah* 2:10 and *Teshuvah* 5) Maimonides writes that when we speak of God's knowledge we cannot separate the knowing subject, the object of knowledge, and the activity of knowing. As a result, we can describe the creation of the world by God in a non-corporeal way, thereby not violating the tenets of Maimonides' negative theology.

<sup>38</sup> The Rav is dealing here with the paradox of creation: How can Being be created from non-Being? In the previous paragraph, the Rav explained it from the standpoint of God's thoughts. Although God possesses the attribute of thought which is not separate from Him, His act of thinking can produce thoughts of things external to Him, resulting in creation.

The AriZal's concept of *zimzum* also deals with a paradox which is, according to the Rav, equivalent to the one mentioned above. If I begin with God and God is all there is, then by definition He encompasses and defines all that there is. If so, how can God possibly create something which is "outside" of Himself?

The Rav's explanation mentioned earlier in this lecture epistemologically posits the existence of the idea of an object before the object exists, especially with

object, [an] order of things. This is not a sequence in time but, rather, a sequence in logic. You cannot speak of *Beresbit* as “first,” but rather, as “beginning.” As in the logical order of a syllogism, e.g. all men are mortal. Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal. “All men are mortal” does not mean it came first in time, but it is the first principle logically. “Socrates is a man” is not second in time, but second in a logical sequence. The same with *Beresbit*: first came God’s thinking of a logic in the world, then logically the real world followed.

Nevertheless, all histories of philosophy, when discussing Maimonides’ contribution, never once mentioned this, his greatest contribution. They speak of him only as a man who rejected certain Aristotelian principles.<sup>39</sup> All this was Shem Tov’s explanation of Maimonides.<sup>40</sup>

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regard to an object endowed with the logic of natural law. God’s thought which precedes the natural world is therefore a logical necessity [בראשית translated as “with wisdom”], and not necessarily a temporal process [בראשית translated as “in the beginning”]. Following this train of thought, the neo-Platonic theory of creation referred to in *Moreh Nevukhim* is a necessary sequence of logic based upon the assumption that the world is based upon rational natural order.

The Rav understands the AriZal’s theory of *zimzum* in a similar fashion. *Zimzum* is not a process of literal Divine contraction, but rather a contraction of God’s thought or will. God’s unlimited Will does not allow for the existence of a world which contains independent creations. Hence, God has to contract His Will and allow for a conception of the world which is suited to finite creations. Hence, the concept of *zimzum*, which the Rav is referring to, is similar to the logic of the world which precedes its creation.

The Kabbalistic origins of the Rav’s interpretation of *zimzum* can be found in the philosophical understanding of the *zimzum* in the writings of the Ramhal, the Vilna Gaon, and the Leshem, who understand that the act of *zimzum* takes place within the Will of God.

רמח"ל קל"ח פתחי חכמה פתח כ"ד, גר"א ליקוטים בסוף ספר ספרא דצניעותא, לשם שבו ואהלמה חידושים וביאורים דף א

<sup>39</sup> That is, the Rambam rejected Aristotle’s theory of the eternity of the universe in favor of *creatio ex nihilo*. However, according to the Rav, no one is aware of the fact that Rambam gave impetus to an alternative understanding of Creation, as elaborated above.

<sup>40</sup> Shem Tov, as well as Crescas and Afudi, to whom the Rav refers in the next paragraph, all offer an explanation of Rambam’s statement in the *Moreh* 2:30: The world was not created at a specific point in time, as we have already explained, for time itself is part of the creation. It is for this reason that the text (of the Chumash) says “*Beresbit*” (בראשית), and the letter “*beit*” (ב) is like the “*beit* of a utensil” (כביית הכלי). The verse therefore is to be interpreted as “In-

Crescas<sup>41</sup> and Afudi, also commentaries on the *Moreh Nevukhim*, introduced a new interpretation to the sentence:

והבי"ת [של בראשית] כבי"ת (ה)כלי - ופירוש זה הפסוק האמתי - כן  
בתחלה ברא האלוק העליונים והתחתונים: זהו הפירוש המסכים לחדוש  
העולם.<sup>42</sup>

According to Shem Tov, בראשית answers the question “How?”<sup>43</sup> For him [when Rambam calls it *beit ha-keli* he means] the ב' was העוזר, an instrument. For Crescas [and Afudi] ב' הכלי [means within, and] answers [the question of] “When.” They speak of עתה, which means [the] present.<sup>44</sup>

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side the beginning God created the higher and lower creations.” This interpretation is therefore consistent with the position of *creatio ex nihilo*.

The commentator Shem Tov writes:

[When the Rambam says that] the “*beit*” is like the “*beit* of a utensil” he means that it has a similar meaning to the letter “*beit*” in the phrase “with a hatchet a man made this house,” namely that with the utensil called a hatchet the house was made. It should be interpreted that he made the house within a hatchet. This is because the letter “*beit*” of the word *Bereshit* is a reason [for the creation] as I have already explained. The Rambam says like the “*beit* of a utensil” to indicate that the world was not created with a physical utensil but rather with [Divine] wisdom. This is in accordance with the *Targum Yerushalmi*'s interpretation of the verse “with wisdom God made the heavens and the earth...” (Section II, chapter 30)

This interpretation of Rambam is in contrast to that of Crescas which will be cited below.

<sup>41</sup> עין בפירוש קרשקש סק"ה (דף נ"ה).

<sup>42</sup> *Moreh Nevukhim* section II chapter 30.

<sup>43</sup> In other words, according to Shem Tov, quoted in footnote 24, the *beit* indicates with which instrument God created the world. Shem Tov identified this instrument as wisdom (*hochmah*).

<sup>44</sup> Crescas writes: According to scholars of grammar, the [Hebrew] letter “*beit*” can have two usages which are referred to as “the *beit* of the utensil” (בי"ת) (הכלי) and the “*beit* of service” (בי"ת העוזר). The “*beit* of a utensil” describes the situation where one object is contained within another object. The second object acts as a container for the first, just as a barrel contains wine.

The Sage [Rambam] is saying that the letter “*beit*” which prefixes the word “*Bereshit*” is like the “*beit* of a utensil” which means that the world was not created at the beginning of time, but was created in the “*atal*” (עתה – literally present) which is the beginning before time and not part of time itself. This is like the beginning point of a line which itself is not part of the line, but is nonetheless the beginning before the line. This is the meaning of the verse “in the beginning He created the higher and lower things”—within the “*atal*” which is the beginning before time, God created everything. For just as several physical

The problem for them was, how can a dimensional line emerge from indimension.<sup>45</sup> This was Zeno's problem.<sup>46</sup> Modern calculus answers it by saying that a line is continuity. They said that sometimes we may speak of [a] beginning to something, but not meaning a part of something, because a part must have the same dimensions as the whole.<sup>47</sup>

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forms can temporally co-exist within "*atab*"—that is one form does not come temporally before another, so too the major sphere and everything in it were created simultaneously.(Chapter 2: 30)

These words of Crescas are quite difficult. The Rav continues this lecture with an explanation of Crescas's idea.

<sup>45</sup> Afudi and Crescas asked, how can a one-dimensional line emerge from a point which has no dimension?

<sup>46</sup> Zeno of Elea was a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher of Magna Graecia and a member of the Eleatic School founded by Parmenides. Aristotle called him the inventor of the dialectic.

<sup>47</sup> The Rav now presents an exposition of Crescas's ideas with an analogy from the philosophy of the calculus which resolved a famous paradox known as Zeno's paradox. According to Zeno, if we think of a line as an endless series of individual points, then we end up with a paradox: If one thinks of a line as being no more than a series of points, then, as an object moves, one can construct a model of movement which never allows the object to reach its end. For example, if each movement of the object is halfway towards the final goal, then the object will move an infinite number of times, each time cutting the remaining time in half, but never reaching the final goal, which obviously contradicts reality, for many things do indeed reach their destinations.

The idea of the calculus is that a line should not be viewed as comprising an infinite set of points, but as a one-dimensional continuum. As one moves along the continuum one can come arbitrarily close to a beginning point without actually reaching it. Hence, the beginning point can be viewed as the beginning of the continuum but distinct from it. A consequence of this is that the continuum which constitutes the line can be said to have higher dimensionality than the beginning point itself (in the case of an actual line the line is of dimension 1 and the point is of dimension 0). The Rav is claiming that Crescas's resolution of the paradox of *creatio ex nihilo* is analogous to the calculus's resolution of Zeno's paradox. The beginning point is defined as the infinite limit of a series (continuum) which comes arbitrarily close to it but never reaches it. Therefore, paradoxically, while the beginning point can be viewed as the beginning of the series, it remains, by definition, distinct from it. When applied to time the beginning point is likened to the concept of a moment in the present which is the beginning of the future but distinct from it. This is the meaning of the word "*atab*" used by Crescas and constitutes, according to the Rav, a state of temporal non-Being which precedes the Being of time. This was Crescas's concept of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Not the beginning “of a line,” which implies a part of it, but [a] beginning “to a line,” implying the origin of it—the same [as] *atab*, which is both *takhlit le-avar* (the end of the past), and also *hatalah le-atid* (the beginning of the future). But not being a part of this past or the future but, rather, the origins of the future. *Bereshit*, then, would mean the “beginning to reality,” but not, the “beginning of reality,” not *bereshit ha-olam*, but *bereshit le-olam*.

The great problem for Maimonides is where is the bridge between nihility and reality. Science answers it by seeing the world as a continuum without a beginning. However, for Judaism [where there is a beginning to the world] it is a problem.

*Hathalat ha-zeman* (the beginning to time) meant to Crescas: “position,” which precedes the beginning. We can demonstrate from the classical example of [a] “point,” which is not a part of time but a position from which to view time in retrospect and anticipation. In regard to our problem, there is no bridge between nihility and Being. God did not convert nihility into Being, but conditioned nihility into non-Being, gaining a position for nihility and then negating it.

God introduced the system of a continuum. The transformation was not made in an instantaneous leap but by conditioning.<sup>48</sup> Nihility be-

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Beyond this point of zero-dimension, which the Rav terms “nihility,” one cannot speak. But non-Being, which is the point of zero-dimension, while separate from the one-dimensionality of the line, can be described as part of the continuum of the line, according to the calculus. Hence, in the act of creation, God transformed nihility into a point of one-dimensionality, which the Rav calls non-Being. That non-Being, while separate from the temporal line, can be now incorporated into time via the calculus of the continuum. This act is called by the Rav the positioning of nihility into non-Being.

The three steps of creation are:

- 1) the positioning of nihility into non-being. This is the establishment of the boundary point, and is what the word *Bereshit* refers to, according to Crescas.
- 2) *heyuli*, potentiality. This Greek idea is a description of non-Being insofar as it can be incorporated into a continuum.
- 3) Formation of matter, the act of actually incorporating the point into a boundary value of the continuum, represents the state of actual creation.

The transition from step 1 to step 2 is called *yesh me-ayin, creatio ex nihilo*. This is the transition from non-being to being, which is the idea of creation in potential. The transition from step 2 to step 3 represents the process of going from the potential idea—which is the beginning itself—to its physical manifestation. This is called *yezirah*.

<sup>48</sup> The Rav refers to the steps taken in reaching a certain endpoint as “instantaneous leaps.” The endpoint which remains distinct from these steps which can

came positioned into non-Being, which is [with]in the boundary of Being. Non-Being is the boundary condition of Being. The point is the boundary position of a line. Non-Being is not beyond Being but a boundary condition of Being and following a continuum.<sup>49</sup> In non-Being there is the positionality of Being, as in rest—there is the positionality of motion (Newton). Boundary condition means that there is no instantaneous leap. As in calculus, we go from the infinitesimal to the circle in a slow continuum little by little.

This is the basis of Newton's differential equation which Zeno could not understand. Rest and motion are not two separate situations as Zeno thought, and, therefore he could not understand the leap from one to the other. But Newton solved it by saying that it followed in a slow continuum.

That is what Maimonides did with non-Being and Being. Via the principle of *Bereshit*, God created heaven and earth, meaning that there is a continuum from infinity to finitude. *Bereshit* is not Beginning but positionality of nihility into non-Being delineating the boundary line leading into Being.

You may ask how God gained the first position, but this is beyond our comprehension. The Torah conveys only that which is logical to us. How the *Bereshit* was gained, the leap between nihility and non-Being, is not part of the Biblical narrative. But we begin with the position of nihility which is *Bereshit*, non-Being.

- 1) The first step is then non-Being or positionality—the boundary line of Being, *Bereshit*.
- 2) Unformed matter, the *homer beyuli*, or potentiality, the Greek idea.
- 3) Formation or fashioning or actualization of matter.

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be defined rigorously by the calculus as that point in which one can always find a step arbitrarily close. This method of definition which represented the philosophical solution to Zeno's paradox is what the Rav refers to as "conditioning." Using this methodology Crescas allows one to speak about the process by which non-Being becomes being. An analogy to this is the temporal concept of the "present" in contradistinction to the past and the future. The past can be measured in units of time such as instantaneous leaps and the future can also be thought of as measured in units of time. The present while defined as the limiting point of both past and future is a concept which can be understood and incorporated in language.

<sup>49</sup> The term "boundary condition" used by the Rav refers to the endpoint of a line, which is a special case of the boundary of any geometrical object.

From one to two is *Bara—yesh me-ayin*. From two to three is *Yezirah*, or *yesh [me-yesh] (me-ayin)*. Beyond one—no one knows because it is illogical. This explanation of Crescas is in complete agreement with modern thinking.<sup>50</sup>

### Introduction to Lecture VIII

In this lecture, the Rav makes a transition from the medieval rationalist conception of *creatio ex nihilo* to the Kabbalistic one. While both seek to describe a conceptual transition from non-Being to Being, the chief differences between them lie in: a) their different uses of language and paradigms, and b) the nature of the starting point which precedes, or, to use the Rav's terminology, "positions" Being.

### Lecture VIII

#### Afudi and Crescas on Maimonides:

The Torah begins with *Beresbit*, which is non-Being, the "position" to Being. This eliminates the illogical leap from nihility to Being, by creating a continuum in the form of Being, however, negated, but within the boundary.<sup>51</sup> However, the Torah does not relate to us the leap from nihility to non-Being, because it is illogical and we cannot understand it. [Here the concept of] "preceding" is not one in time but in logic, as in the three steps of a syllogism which is a logical continuity, not the principles preceding each other in time. Non-Being was positionality; Being was potentiality; then *heyuli* or unformed matter, *shamayim ve-arez*<sup>52</sup> and last, formation of matter into form.

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<sup>50</sup> The Rav means that Crescas's explanation is in agreement with modern calculus and its resolution of Zeno's paradox as explained above in footnote 28.

<sup>51</sup> In other words, time as a continuum must necessarily be conceived as a geometrical object with a boundary. This boundary, while not part of time, makes the concept of time possible. Hence, it logically precedes time. The creation of this boundary, however, is beyond man's conceptual ability. This boundary is denoted by the Rav as non-Being, the "positioning" of Being. That which precedes this boundary is called nihility. The transition from nihility to non-Being is hidden from us. The transition from non-Being to Being is logically—but not temporally—ordered.

<sup>52</sup> This usage of *shamayim ve-arez* refers to the state of earth and heaven in their formless state, which the Greeks called *heyuli*, and to which the second verse of the Torah refers as *והו ובהו*.

### **Shem Tov:**

There is no valid argument for reality except religion. And since Kant, no valid explanation of God has been given.<sup>53</sup> Kant claimed that you cannot measure things beyond space and time because you must measure them within space of time; reality can only emerge through epistemological idealism, where God's thinking as a universal mind, as Himself, as all-inclusive, includes an outside world, whereas before creation God thought of Himself only as all-exclusive, thus excluding any outside world.<sup>54</sup>

Maimonides was not interested in Kabbalah. However, in the final analysis, both the Kabbalah and Maimonides agree. The difference is only that one employs philosophical terms while the other employs picturesque, metaphysical terms.<sup>55</sup>

The Kabbalah was intrigued by the problems of *yezirah*.<sup>56</sup> They saw God as *ein sof*, beyond, and inaccessible. They therefore employed the negative term of *ein sof*. For Maimonides and the Kabbalah there were two revelations, the prophetic and, through nature, existence itself. The *Sefirot* are media where God reveals Himself in terms accessible to many minds. To Kabbalah, the emergence was not that of absolute nihility, as in Maimonides, in the leap from nihility to Being, but, rather, the transi-

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<sup>53</sup> The Rav is referring to Kant's refutation of the Cosmological argument for the existence of God which is also presented in Maimonides in Chapter 1 of Section 2. Kant's argument is in his Critique of Pure Reason in section 5 in the section The Idea of Pure Reason (p. 405 in the Anchor edition translation by F. Max Muller) and is titled, "Of the Impossibility of a Cosmological Proof of the Existence of God."

<sup>54</sup> The Rav is pointing out that since Kant, man cannot claim any true knowledge of the world in and of itself, but only conceptualize it within the laws and constraints of the human mind. This idea can only be explained by the fact that the world emerges, from the thought of a universal mind, which is the thought of God Himself. This "epistemological idealism" has its source in Shem Tov's interpretation of Rambam which locates the source of creation in God's thoughts of the world.

<sup>55</sup> The Rav here is contrasting the language of Rambam and that of Kabbalah. A second important distinction is discussed below.

<sup>56</sup> *Yezirah* does not describe the emergence of Being from nothingness, or non-Being, but rather the emergence of Being from Being. In the case of the Kabbalah, as the Rav points out, creation consists of a process by which finitude and intelligibility emerge from infinity and therefore non-intelligibility. The problem is how to go from an infinite God Who excludes the possibility of anything "other" than Himself to a wholly other separate relative Being. This is answered by the Ari's concept of *zimzum*.

tion from Divine exclusiveness to finite unity—how to create a world which is null and is not the true Being, but only a relative being, from the “True Being”—a regression from the True Being to relative or half-Being.

It is just the opposite problem of Maimonides. To them you cannot speak of a pre-nothingness, because there was more before than now. The pre-Creation mystery asserts itself in inquiry, not in nihility. The problem of Being must be reformulated for the Kabbalah. How could such finitude, with all its inclusiveness, emerge from infinity? Let us see the *Zohar* express this problem (Genesis 15a).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The Rav's translation of this passage in the *Zohar* is taken from Soncino translation of the *Zohar* (Sperling and Simon: London, 1931). The Rav quotes a passage in the *Zohar* which describes the creation of the world. In discussing it, the Rav uses some of the language of the Kabbalah of the Ari. Because of this, I present a translation-commentary of the passage which utilizes the interpretation of the Ari in order to facilitate what I believe is the Rav's understanding. The commentary is based upon the *מחוק מדבך*:

In the beginning when God “willed” the creation of the world within his dominion (that is, when He willed the creation of worlds which would be directed in accordance with His dominion), He inscribed an area (within which would be created all of the worlds) in the supernal light (the light of the *Ein Sof*, the infinite light, which is of the *zimzum*, Divine contraction. This contraction makes possible all emanations until *Atik*, which is the highest of the worlds of *Azilut*; the worlds of pure spirituality. This source is called) the bright candle (a powerful primal emanation) from which emerges a hidden and unintelligible emanation from the secret of the infinite light *Ein Sof* (that is, an infinite light emerges from the highest world *Atik* to the lower worlds of *Azilut*. This light is encloded in the world (*parzuf*) of wisdom (called *Mocha Stimaab* of *Arikel*) which in turn clothes itself in the world of *Abba ve-Ima*, which in turn clothe themselves in *Zeir Anpin* and *Nukvah*. This infinite light of the strong candle which is enclosed in all enclosures is like a pillar of smoke which is formless (bearing no intelligible structures. That light is) enclosed deeply in a casing (it is enclosed in all of the worlds, and therefore totally hidden and unintelligible) but is at the same time the source of Divine Providence and revelation), neither white (one cannot recognize within it the *Sefirah* of *Hesed*) nor black (one cannot recognize within it the *Sefirah* of *Malkhut*) nor red (one cannot recognize within it the *Sefirah* of *Gevurah*) nor green (one cannot recognize within it the *Sefirah* of *Tiferet*) nor any other colors (for nothing can be recognized within this hidden light). When it (the strong candle) made its measurements (which give form and structure to the metaphysical worlds) it created colors (in the lower world, which would direct the creation. In the beginning) from the candle inside (the world of wisdom) emerged an emanation (and encloded itself in the next world [*Imma*]) from which was contracted the worlds (of *zeir anpin* and *nukvah*) which would direct the creation. The most

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרִישׁ (נ"א בראשית בחכמתא דמלכא גליף וכו) הוֹרְמְנוּתָא דְמִלְכָא,  
 גְּלִיף גְּלוּפִי (נ"א גליפו) בְּטְהִירוֹ עֲלָאָה בּוֹצִינָא דְקַרְדִּינוּתָא, וְנִפְיָק גּוֹ סְתִיִּם  
 דְסְתִימוֹ מְרִישָׁא (נ"א מרזא) דְאִי"ן סו"ף קוּטְרָא (פִירוּשׁ עֶשֶׂן) בְּגוּלְמָא, נְעִיץ  
 בְּעִזָּא לָא חוֹר וְלָא אוּכְם וְלָא סוּמְק וְלָא יְרוּק וְלָא גְנוֹן כְּלָל, כַּד (נ"א הדר)  
 מְדִיד מְשִׁיחָא עֵבִיד גְנוֹנִין לְאִנְהָרָא לְגוֹ בְּגוֹ בּוֹצִינָא נְפִיָק (נ"א ונפיק) חַד נְבִיעוֹ  
 דְמִנְיָה אֶצְטְבְּעוֹ גְנוֹנִין לְתַתָּא. סְתִיִּם גּוֹ סְתִימִין דְרִזָּא דְאִי"ן סו"ף בְּקַע וְלָא  
 בְּקַע אֲוִירָא דִילִיָּה לָא אֲתִיִּדַע כְּלָל, עַד דְמַגּוֹ דְחִיקוֹ דְבְקִיעוּתִיָּה נְהִיר (כ' א)  
 נְקוּדָה חַדָּא סְתִימָא עֲלָאָה, כְּתֵר הֵהִיא נְקוּדָה לָא אֲתִיִּדַע כְּלָל, וּבְגִין כּוֹד אַקְרִי  
 רֵאשִׁית מְאָמֵר קְדָמָאָה דְכָלָא

At the outset the decision of the King made a tracing in the supernal effulgence, a lamp of scintillation (darkness-measurement), and there issued within the impenetrable recesses of the mysterious limitless (*Ein Sof*) a shapeless nucleus (vapor), enclosed in a ring, neither white nor black nor red nor green, nor of any color at all. When he took measurements, he fashioned colors to show within, and within the lamp there issued a certain effluence from which colors were imprinted below. The most mysterious powers enshrouded in the limitless (*Ein Sof*) cleaving as it were, without cleaving its void, remaining wholly unknowable. Until now the force of the stroke there shone forth a supernal and mysterious point. Beyond that point there is no knowable and therefore it is called *Reishbit* (beginning), the creative utterance which is the starting point of all.

In the *Zohar* you have both interpretations of Maimonides: *Reishbit* as a boundary point<sup>58</sup> and also as the *Sefirah* of *Hochmah*<sup>59</sup> [as the *Zohar*

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hidden light, which is the infinite light *Ein Sof* (and en clothed within the *Keter* of *Arieh*) emerged from (the highest world of *Azylut*, *Atik*) but was still hidden (that is, its emergence from *atik* was still hidden) and unintelligible (for it was encased within the next world *Arieh*) but through contraction illuminated the point (that is, the letter *yud*, which is like a point—compact and unintelligible—and en clothed with the world of *Abba*) but above it, all is hidden (above the *yud* of *Abba*, all is hidden, for the higher worlds of *Arieh* and *Atik* are beyond conception), but because it (in *Abba*) is within the scope of human conception, it (*Abba*) is called *Reishbit* (wisdom), the first Divine utterance (of creation) of the ten utterances with which God created the world.

<sup>58</sup> This refers Crescas's interpretation of the Rambam (see Lecture 7). As matching the Rav's explanation with the Soncino translation is difficult, I am matching it with the translation I provided in footnote 7. At the advice of the *Hakirab* editors, we will also try to match it with the Soncino and more literal translation. The last line describes *reishbit* "which is the starting point for all" also referred to as "a supernal and mysterious point."

opens] “In the beginning when the will of the King began to realize itself”—is *Keter*, the *Sefirah* before *Hochmah*. The “breaking forth of the flames”<sup>60</sup> is the transition from *Keter* to *Hochmah*.<sup>61</sup> You cannot explore beyond *Hochmah*.

The same as in Maimonides, the *Zohar* speaks only of *Reishit*, the boundary line of Being, but beyond that [it] is futile [to ask]. The *Zohar* also says that beyond *Hochmah* it is non-logical.<sup>62</sup> However, the more the *Zohar* said not to explore beyond, the mystic fuel of curiosity tried to go beyond, since metaphysical curiosity is unlimited.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> I believe The Rav is basing himself on “The most hidden light which is the infinite light *Ein Sof* emerged but was still hidden and unintelligible, but through contraction (which is the letter *yud*, which is like a point-compact and unintelligible) is enclosed within the world of *Abba*, but above it, all is hidden. But because it (*Abba*) is within the scope of human conception, it (*Abba*) is called *Reishit* (wisdom).” The term *Abba* means, in the Kabbalah of the Ari, Wisdom (*Hochmah*). The *Zohar* is saying that at the boundary point there is a transformation from unintelligibility to intelligibility. The *Zohar* denotes this by the term “enclosurement.” This means the unintelligible and infinite is enclosed by the intelligible and finite. (Alternatively The Rav sees Shem Tov’s explanation in the opening words “In the beginning when the will of the King began to realize itself” which he translates from *בריש הרמנא דמלכא* unlike the translation of Soncino that was apparently used in class. Our text has an alternate *girsā* of *בהרכמתא* which the Rav probably is alluding to, but apparently does not accept as the correct text. He sees the first line in the *Zohar* as referring to *Keter*.)

<sup>60</sup> Perhaps this is how the Rav translates *בְּרִישׁתָּא נְפִיק (נ"א ונפיק) קַד נְבִיעוּ... בְּקַע וְלֹא בְּקַע אֲוִירָא דִּילִיָּהּ לֹא אֲתִיִּידַע כְּלָל*.

<sup>61</sup> This is the infinite light *Ein Sof* which emerges from the highest of the worlds *Atik* and descends to *Hochmah*, as described by the *Zohar*.

Following my translation, the passage in the *Zohar* says, “The source is called the bright candle from which emerges a hidden and unintelligible emanation from the secret of the infinite light *Ein Sof* (that is, an infinite light emerges from the highest world *Atik*. This light is enclosed in the world of wisdom.”

In the Kabbalah of the Ari, the term *Atik* refers to the *sefirah* of *Keter*. The “breaking forth of the flames” of the *Zohar* quoted in the text refers, then, to the transition from *Keter* to *Hochmah*. In addition, *Keter* refers to the Will of God.

<sup>62</sup> According to my translation this is referred to in “but above it (wisdom), all is hidden.”

<sup>63</sup> The Rav is referring here to the *Sefirah* of *Keter* which in the Ari and *Zohar* is called *Atik*. In the Ari, there is considerable discussion of *Atik*.

The “will” is primary<sup>64</sup> and the “logic” is secondary,<sup>65</sup> the point of departure is infinity, not nihility.<sup>66</sup> *Reishit* is a Divine act within the Divine aura.<sup>67</sup> The critical step and crisis for Maimonides was gaining the positionality from nihility, to non-Being. For the *Zohar* the crisis of creation is a Divine tragedy, the *Bereshit* performance had its start within infinity. “When the will of the king began to realize” a Divine stirring toward a turn away from Himself, from the all-exclusiveness of God—a will not directed upon Himself, but away from Himself, from introspective infinity, a certain change in Divine perspective. This is the great crisis, as God turns from introspective repose to out-looking.<sup>68</sup> (You cannot speak of outside [but only of outward looking] because there was none.) The positionality was gained. Creation itself is the greatest of sacrifices [*korban*].

*Korban* is a transcendental concept. The world began as an intruder on God’s aloneness. *Zimzum* was a concept initiated by the Ari Ha-Kadosh. The *Zohar* did not know of it. “He” began to engrave signs “in the Divine aura,”<sup>69</sup> which means the externalization of the will, [and tolerating] an aspect which does not tolerate existence; tolerating something which is absurd and contradictory to God’s own being, since infinity and finitude always adds up to infinity and the world infringes on God’s all-exclusiveness. *Melekh Ha-Olamim* was always absurd to the Kabbalah. God contracted His Own Being by creating the world. *Keter* is termed by all mystics as being *ayin*, which is also *ani*, or *anokhi* (via the *ani* you come to *anokhi*), and to use the term *anokhi*<sup>70</sup> you need a Thou.

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<sup>64</sup> The *Zohar* describes the beginning of creation as “When God willed.” Hence, God’s Will is the primal concept, *Keter*.

<sup>65</sup> After God’s will, the *Zohar* describes the process of illumination from the successive worlds of wisdom, which is what the Rav refers to as “logic.” *hokhmah=bereshit*

<sup>66</sup> For one begins with the infinite God out of which an area of finitude must be constructed.

<sup>67</sup> That is, *reishit* represents the establishment of a finite area of intelligibility carved out of unintelligible Divine infinity.

<sup>68</sup> This means that as a consequence of God’s turning introspectively into Himself, and at the same time away from Himself, He can now look outside of Himself and create the world. The Ari writes in his commentary to the *Zohar*, referring to the worlds of *Keter*-will, that these worlds refer to the will of the heart which is more delicate than wisdom.

<sup>69</sup> This is the translation of גְּלִיף גְּלִיפִי (נ"א גליפו) בְּטְהִירוֹ עֲלֵאָה unlike the Soncino translation.

<sup>70</sup> As in אַנְכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

Therefore, the *ani* was not [possible] before creation. To make creation possible, God had to turn away from Himself.<sup>71</sup>

For Plotinus, in his pantheism, there was a gap between the world and God. God slowly [immersed] Himself into the lower matter. However, for the Jews such a pantheism is impossible. There is always a gap. By turning away God made possible an existence outside Himself, which was nihilistic, and nihility was made into creation.<sup>72</sup>

The first part of creation is not the constituency of something but of depositing a void, which is the withdrawal of infinity to leave space on a void (*Ari*). And infinity in all its properties, of all-inclusiveness and all-exclusiveness, made room for a void with the possibility for finitude: a primeval space to make room for existence. The great crisis was crossing the abyss of nothingness. Positionality for the *Zohar* is turning away. This passage is outside the Biblical narrative. However, the *Keter*, or void, is not the logical continuum. The second position is *Hochmah* and the beginning of the continuum. (*Chabad*) However, for the classical Kabbalists like the Ramban,<sup>73</sup> the *Keter* or void was not absolute void, but already a condition for *Hochmah*.

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<sup>71</sup> For Kabbalah, the act of creation is an act of *zimzum*, contraction, by which God turns away from His “all-encompassing self” which does not tolerate any Being other than God to a state where something “other” than God emerges—a Thou to God’s newly created Ani, or “I.” The words Ani (אני) and Ayin (אין) are comprised of identical letters arranged in different orders. The word *ayin* means “nothingness” and corresponds to the *Sefirah* of *Keter*.

<sup>72</sup> Plotinus, a third century thinker, understood the Deity as an absolute One Who emanates from within Himself and enters into the physical world. Emanation, for Plotinus, is therefore an outward movement and imbues the physical world with Divinity, and is hence paganistic in its conception of reality; the physical world from this standpoint is imbued with divine content. Judaism, however, understands God’s movement to be inward, turning away from the world; thus maintaining the gap between the Divine and the material world; thereby preserving a monotheistic conception of God.

<sup>73</sup> The Rav is distinguishing between the Ari and the classical Kabbalists. Whereas for the Ari, Creation is an act of withdrawal, the classical Kabbalists view Creation as a movement forward, not unlike the rationalists. The difference between Rationalist philosophy and classical Kabbalah is that Rational Philosophy views *creatio ex nihilo* as a logical process, whereas classical Kabbalah views Creation as an act of revelation. For the Ramban, the first act of revelation was the *Sefirah* of *Hochmah*. The Ari, however, understands the act of Creation as a negative process, creating a void within the Infinite Divine Presence. The Rav refers here to Ramban’s commentary on the first verse of the Torah, in which he states that the words *bereshit bara Elokim* mean that God created the world with *hokhmah* (see Lecture VI) whereas classical Kabbalah views

## Introduction to Lecture IX

Up to this point, the Rav has discussed the concept of God as creator. In this lecture he commences his discussion of the concept of the personal God, *Deus Persona*. The idea of man relating to God in a personal way is to be found both in rationalist thought such as that of Maimonides, and in kabbalistic thought. For Maimonides knowledge of God's personal attributes comes about through observing the ethical content of His acts in the natural world. For the Kabbalah the personal God is made more explicit. Through the Divine contraction, *zimzum*, God reveals Himself directly to man, thereby establishing an I-Thou relationship.

## Lecture IX

When we compare the commentaries of Crescas and Shem Tov, we find that Shem Tov adapted the Kabbalistic *Sefirah* of *Hokhmah*,<sup>74</sup> whilst Crescas employed the *Sefirah* of *Keter* in explaining the Maimonidean notion of *Bereshit*.<sup>75</sup> *Keter* was the primeval space of the *adam ha-kadmon*<sup>76</sup>

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Creation as an act of revelation. For the Ramban, the first act of revelation was the *Sefirah* of *Hokhmah*. The Ari, however, understands the act of Creation as a negative process, creating a void within the Infinite Divine Presence.

<sup>74</sup> Shem Tov says (Lecture VII above, footnote 23): "When the Rav [Rambam] says the  $\beth$  of *bereshit* is like the  $\beth$  of a vessel he means to say that the world was not created with a physical utensil but with wisdom and understanding (*hokhmah ve-da'at*); as the *Targum Yerushalmi* renders it, "Be-*hochmata bara Elokim*," "With wisdom God created the world."

<sup>75</sup> In lecture 8 above, the Rav contrasted Maimonides' understanding of creation as a "leap from nihility to Being" with the Kabbalah's understanding of creation as "a transition from Divine exclusiveness (infinity) to a finite unity." Furthermore, the Rav noted that the *Zohar* contains both the Maimonidean conception of creation which it calls "*Reishit*" which is the *Sefirah* of *Hochmah* and the conception of creation commencing with the *Sefirah* of *Keter* which is called "the will of the king." What distinguishes these two conceptions is that *Hokhmah* is directed outward towards the logos of the world whereas *Keter* is directed towards God as what he calls "a turning away from Himself, from his all exclusiveness." This is what the Ari called the process of *zimzum*. Finally, the Rav notes that the word used to describe *Keter*, *ayin*, is also the word Ani and *Anokhi*, through which God becomes a personality, a "Thou."

In chapter 7 footnote 31 above I noted that Crescas's *atab* likened the concept of non-Being to "the concept of a moment in the present which is distinct from the Future." The very concept of a present distinct from past and future is the root of self-awareness for once it is realized it has already passed. Hence,

and *I Hochmah* was the thought of Creation that made Creation possible.<sup>77</sup> The transition from infinity to finitude leads through the depths of nothingness [in creating a void for the world to exist].

Maimonides has three stages of Creation:

- 1) The emergence of a plan of creation.
  - a) Either as a logos (Shem Tov).<sup>78</sup>
  - b) Or as a positionality (Crescas).<sup>79</sup> This was *Bereshit*.<sup>80</sup>
- 2) Then the appearance of the *heyuli*—or potential matter.<sup>81</sup> This is **את השמים ואת הארץ**. Two principles of potentiality: this was *bara*.<sup>82</sup>
- 3) Then the fastening or forming of the *heyuli*.<sup>83</sup> This was *yezirah*. To Kabbalah, creation is revelation.<sup>84</sup>

God to Kabbalah is the *Ein Sof*, Infinite, employing a term which best implies the lack of comprehension or description on the part of man. What [then] do we mean when we say that God is a Deus Persona?<sup>85</sup>

For Maimonides, it meant the absence of any morphological or corporeal forms or any form in regard to God. And also, the two main attributes that imply a personality: that of thought and will, which is essential to a Deus Persona, or Personal God, or God Personality.

Now, to the *Zohar*, *ein sof* also meant that not only can you not attribute the routine forms to God, but also the essential attribute of a personality, of thought and will. For *ein sof* is beyond recognition and

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Crescas's *Atah* can be identified with the Divine *Anokhi* which is God's **כִּבְיָכָל** self-awareness which leads Him to turn away from His exclusiveness becoming a Thou. This is the connection the Rav is making between Crescas and *Keter*.

<sup>76</sup> This means that *Keter* was the primeval space defined by the “boundary” of Being, according to the Rav’s interpretation of Crescas.

<sup>77</sup> That is, Shem Tov’s notion of the thought which precedes creation.

<sup>78</sup> This refers to God’s wisdom with which the world is created.

<sup>79</sup> This refers to the establishment of a boundary from which Being can emerge.

<sup>80</sup> That is, the two interpretations of Shem Tov and Crescas of the word *Bereshit*.

<sup>81</sup> That is, the *heyuli* is formless matter which has the potential to receive form.

<sup>82</sup> The Rav intends to say that *shamayim* and *arez* are two principles of potentiality, and are included in the word “*bara*.” This means that there is a potential state, *heyuli*, for *arez*, and a separate potential state, *heyuli*, for *shamayim*. This is found in Ramban.

<sup>83</sup> This refers to giving the *heyuli* form.

<sup>84</sup> In other words, in medieval philosophy, such as that of the Rambam, creation goes from nothingness to Being. In Kabbalah, God as *Ein Sof* already exists, but His infinity makes him unintelligible to man. Through the *zimzum*, God can now reveal Himself to man in a finite, intelligible way.

<sup>85</sup> The term means “personal God.”

comprehension and so [God] cannot be a Deus Persona. You cannot apply any logical judgment to God; hence, you cannot predicate anything about God. There is no logical relation between God and man.

Then what is revelation? How can we speak of God as a Deus Persona?<sup>86</sup>

Maimonides answers that through His actions we know God. Therefore, whatever we predicate about God is not in regard to His essence but as He appears to us through His actions, which are manifested in the cosmos.<sup>87</sup> It is necessary to speak of God as a Deus Persona in order to grant us knowledge for a relationship between man and God.

For the *Zohar*, revelation or creation is when God reveals Himself as a Deus Persona. Parallel to this is the creation of a Thou. For in order to speak of an *anokhi* (I) you must have a Thou; revelation requires the encounter of someone else, then there is the revelation of a persona or an *anokhi*. Because God reveals Himself, therefore there is a world to make revelation possible. Creation is the *atab* to the Divine *anokhi*, a cosmic response to God's revelation. Therefore, whenever the Bible mentions "*Ani Hashem*," (I am Hashem, God) it must conclude with "*Elokeikhem*" (Your *Elokim*, Lord) to make possible an address to a Thou. Where the Torah mentions only *Ani Hashem*, it is just an abbreviation.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The Rav is raising the following question: Given the unknowability of God from the standpoint of the rationalist philosophy found in the Rambam, as well as the standpoint of the Kabbalah, how is it philosophically possible for man to have a direct relationship with God, which is, of course, the basis of Judaism?

<sup>87</sup> In *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:32, Rambam writes that one may describe God through His actions. Just as one might say "Reuven is the one who crafted this door" or "built this wall" or "wove this garment," so, too, may one speak of God. Rambam writes, "This class of attributes is far from God's Essence and therefore one may describe Him in this manner." Moreover, in 1:53 of the *Moreh*, Rambam asserts that "all attributes of God in Divine Scriptures are descriptions of His actions but not of His Self."

<sup>88</sup> That is, an abbreviation of "*Ani Hashem Elokeikhem*," "I am Hashem, your Elokim." The concept of God as a Deus Persona is based upon the concept of a "*parzuf*" which was, like *zimzum*, a central concept introduced explicitly in the Ari. The classical Kabbalah speaks about *Sefirot* which are descriptions of God's acts and therefore closer to Maimonides' philosophy. With the concept of *parzuf*, God reveals Himself in a direct I-Thou relationship with man which establishes, in the Kabbalah of the Ari, the basis of the kabbalistic intentions of prayer.

In the Kabbalah of the Ari, the *parzufim* corresponding to the *Sefirah* of *Keter*, will, are called *Atik-Arieh*, which the Rav defines as God's relation to His Will.

שמות ל"ג י"א) ודבר ה' אל משה פנים את פנים “And God spoke to Moshe face to face” (Exodus 33: 11), does not mean literally “face to face,” but God addressing Himself to someone: a logical encounter, not a physical encounter; the *anokhi* speaking to the Thou. In this analysis, the Kabbalah even outdid Maimonides by formulating it better, except employing metaphysical terms.<sup>89</sup>

How did the *Zohar* understand this revelation? We answered as a Deus Persona. However, there are four stages to this revelation:

- 1) *Keter*—The will to reveal Himself. The will expresses itself in “limitation,” or, as the Ari called it, *zimzum*, meaning the existence of something else. In [rationalistic] creation, the contrast of *Keter* would be nihility or a void.<sup>90</sup>
- 2) *Hokhmah*—The emergence of wisdom. God understands Himself. Self-knowledge—the intellect can think of a thou, an outside, or introspectively of the self so that the I and Thou are one. This was *Hokhmah*. If God sees Himself, then the concept of object emerges. The object is within God himself, but this gives the possibility for an outside object. Because by introspection God finds an object.<sup>91</sup>

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The *parzufim* of *Abba* and *Imma* correspond to the *Sefirot* of *Hokhmah* and *Binah* which the Rav will describe as God's relationship to his thought. The *parzuf* of *Zeir Anpin* corresponds to the *Sefirot* of *Hessed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, *Nezah*, *Hod*, *Yesod* which the Rav will identify with God's relationship to His emotions and aesthetics. Finally, the *parzuf* of *Nukvah* corresponds to the *Sefirah* of *Malkhut* which the Rav will identify with God's turning out to the external world.

In footnote 7 of [chapter 8] an interpretation of the passage of the *Zohar* discussed by the Rav in terms of *parzufim* is presented which is at the basis of these lectures.

<sup>89</sup> In other words, according to Rambam, man encounters God through witnessing His creation. According to the Kabbalah, man encounters Him through direct revelation. When the Rav says that the Kabbalah “outdid Maimonides” (As noted in fn. 91, these are the *parzufim* of the Ari.) He means that the Kabbalah introduced a notion of the Personal God, while the Rambam only formulated a philosophical concept of the God of Creation.

<sup>90</sup> Just as in the rationalist concept of creation, creation is preceded by a void or nihility, in Kabbalah creation is preceded by *zimzum*, limitation. While *zimzum* in and of itself does not reveal anything, it prepares the possibility of revelation, and is therefore an expression of God's Will to reveal Himself. This corresponds to the *parzufim* of *Atik-Arikh*.

<sup>91</sup> *Hokhmah* is God's thought of Himself which thereby makes God the “object” of His thought. On the basis of this, God then thinks of objects “other” than

3) *Binah*—Instinctive knowledge.<sup>92</sup>

Through these three stages, a Thou is born [though] within Himself, this was called an *olam ne'elam*, a “hidden world,” before externalization took place. As Maimonides said in the *Mishneh Torah (Hilkehot Tesbuwah 5: 5)* (הלכות תשובה ה: ה) “שהקב"ה אינו יודע בדעה שהיא חוץ ממנו (ה) “God does not know with a knowledge that is separate from Him.”<sup>93</sup>

This all took place within infinity without any external world.<sup>94</sup> In classic philosophy the personality was divided into three stages:

- 1) Will
- 2) Thought
- 3) Feeling

In the *Sefirot*, *Keter*, *Hokhmah*, and *Binah* compose the first two of will and thought. The other *Sefirot* such as *Hesed* and *Gevurah* compose the last: feeling. This subject-object relationship that we mentioned before is not only in regard to will and thought but also to the aesthetic affected personalism<sup>95</sup> of feeling, love, grace, etc. God not only sees Himself and

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Himself. This then is the first step in revelation, which is the Kabbalistic analogy to creation. This corresponds to the *parzuf* of *Abba*.

<sup>92</sup> This refers to a type of self-knowledge other than *Hokhmah*.

<sup>93</sup> יג הקדוש ברוך הוא מכיר אמיתו, ויודע אותה כמות שהיא. ואינו יודע בדעה שהיא חוץ ממנו כמו שאנו יודעין, שאין אנו ודעתנו אחד. אבל הבורא--הוא ודעתו וחיי אחד, מכל צד ומכל פינה: שאלמלא היה חי בהיים ויודע בדעה, היו שם אלוהות הרבה--הוא וחיי ודעתו; ואין הדבר כן, אלא אחד מכל צד ומכל פינה ובכל דרך ייחוד.

יד נמצאת אומר: הוא היודע, והוא הדעה עצמה--הכול אחד. ודבר זה--אין כוח בפה לאומרו ולא באוזן לשומעו ולא בלב האדם להכירו, על בורייו לפיכך אינו מכיר הברואים ויודעם מחמת הברואים, כמות שאנו יודעים אותם, אלא מחמת עצמו ידעם; לפיכך (הל' יסה"ת פרק ב.) מפני שהוא יודע עצמו, ידע הכול--שהכול נסמך בהווייתו לו

<sup>94</sup> In other words, the first three *Sefirot*—*Keter*, *Hokhmah* and *Binah*—represent the Will and thoughts of God as directed to Himself. Hence God, at this stage has revealed Himself to Himself but not to anything other than Himself. The other *Sefirot* from *Hesed* to *Yesod* are also directed to Himself, but are of an emotional nature, as the Rav explains. The three *Sefirot* of *Keter*, *Hokhmah* and *Binah* correspond to the *parzufim* of *Arieh-Atik*, *Abba*, *Imma* which the Rav interprets as God's will and thought of Himself.

<sup>95</sup> In Lecture X, the Rav divides the six *Sefirot* of *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, *Nezah*, *Hod*, and *Yesod* into two groups of three. The first group, comprised of the *midot* of *hesed*, *gevurah*, and *tiferet*, represents the ethical aspect of the Personal God, whereas the second group, comprised of the *midot* of *nezah*, *hod*, and *yesod*, represent the aesthetic aspect of the Personal God. The phrase “aesthetic affected personalism” includes both the ethical and aesthetic personal relationship of God to Himself; and, subsequently, to Creation.

understands Himself, but also loves Himself. God reveals Himself through the volitional, the intellectual, and the emotional.

The prime *Sefirot* begin with *Keter* and end with *Yesod*, before we come to *Malkhut*:

The ninth *Sefirah* is called *Yesod* because here the Deus Persona reaches completion.<sup>96</sup> *Malkhut* is not part of the nine *Sefirot* but faces them. *Malkhut* implies an external object, an outside. Here the Thou is no longer within God but outside. *Malkhut* means the will, thought, and feeling of God enshrined in concrete matter, in finitude. The concrete order of things, therefore, also expresses Deity. God imprisons Himself in the external order of things.

The *Zohar* I: Prologue:

In the Beginning:<sup>97</sup> R. Elazar opened his discourse with the text:

בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר פְּתַח (שָׂאוּ דָף ל' א) מְרוֹם עֵינֵיכֶם וְרֵאוּ מִי  
בְּרֵא אֱלֹהִים. שָׂאוּ מְרוֹם עֵינֵיכֶם לְאֵן אֲמַר, לְאֲמַר דְּכָל עֵינָיו תִּלְקָאן לִיה. וּמֵאן  
אִיהוּ, פְּתַח עֵינֵיכֶם. וְתִמְן תִּנְדְּעוּן דְּהַאי סְתִים עֲתִיקָא דְקִנְיָא לְשָׂאֲלָה. בְּרֵא  
אֱלֹהִים וּמֵאן אִיהוּ. מ"י. הַהוּא (שְׁמוֹת ק"מ א) דְּאֶקְרִי מְקַצָּה הַשְּׁמַיִם לְעֵילָא.  
דְּכָלָא קִנְיָא בְּרִשְׁוֹתֵיהּ. וְעַל דְּקִנְיָא לְשָׂאֲלָה וְאִיהוּ בְּאַרְחָ סְתִים וְלֹא אֲתִגְלִיא,  
אֶקְרִי מ"י, דְּהַאי לְעֵילָא לִית תִּמְן שָׂאֲלָה. וְהַאי קַצָּה הַשְּׁמַיִם אֶקְרִי מ"י. וְאִית  
אֲתִגְרָא לְתַתָּא וְאֶקְרִי מ"ה. מַה בֵּין הַאי לְהַאי, אֱלֹא קְדָמָא סְתִימָא דְּאֶקְרִי  
מ"י קִנְיָא (תְּרוּמָה קל"ח א', וַיִּקְהַל רִי"א, בְּהַעֲלוֹתְךָ קַמ"ח ב', וְלֵהֲלֹן ט' א',  
י"ו, קס"ז א', שְׁמוֹת קנ"ז) לְשָׂאֲלָה, כִּינּוּן דְּשָׂאֵל בְּרַשׁ וּמְפַשֵּׁשׁ לְאַסְתַּפְּלָא  
וְלִמְגַדְעָ מִדְּרָגָא לְדְרָגָא עַד סוּף כָּל דְּרָגִין, כִּינּוּן דְּמִטִּי תִמְן, מ"ה. מַה יִּדְעָתָּ, מַה  
אַסְתַּפְּלָתָא, מַה פְּשָׁפְשָׁתָא, הָא כָּלָא סְתִים כְּדִקְדַּמִּיתָא.

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who hath created these? (Isaiah 40:2) "Lift up your eyes on high;" to which place? To that place to which all eyes are turned, to wit, *petakh enayim* ("eye-opener"). By doing so you will know that it is the mysterious Ancient One, whose essence can be sought, but not found, that created these: to wit, *mi* (who?), the same, who is called [who] (from) (Hebrew: *mi*) the extremity of heaven on high, because everything is within His power, and because he is ever to be sought, though mysterious and unrevealable, since further we cannot inquire. That extremity of heaven is called *mi*, but there is another lower extremity which is called *mah* (what?). The difference between the two is this: the first

<sup>96</sup> The Rav means by this that God has now a complete relationship with Himself. As such, He is "personalized" and may therefore have a personal relationship with something other than God. This first "other" is called *Malkhut*, the tenth *Sefirah*. This corresponds to the *parzuf* of *Nukvah*.

<sup>97</sup> *Zohar* 1b.

is the real subject of inquiry and reflection, but after a man by means of inquiry and reflection has reached the utmost limit of knowledge, he stops at *mah* (what?), as if to say, what provest thou? What have thy searchings achieved? Everything is as baffling as at the beginning.

אמר רבי שמעון, אלעזר בני פסוק מילך ויתגלי סתימא דרזא עלאה דבני  
 עלמא לא ידעין. שתיק רבי אלעזר. בכה רבי שמעון וקאים רגעא (נ"א  
 שעתא) חדא. אמר רבי שמעון, אלעזר מאי אלה. אי תימא פכבא ומזלי, הא  
 אתהוון תמן תדיר. ובמ"ה אתבריאו קמא דאת אמר, תהלים לג (בדבר יי  
 שמים נעשו. אי על מלין סתימין לא לכתוב אלה דהא איתגליא איהו. אלא  
 רזא דא לא אתגליא בר יומא חד דהוינא על פיך ימא, ואתא אליהו ואמר לי  
 רבי, ידעת מה הוא, מי ברא אלה. אמיןא ליה אליו שמיא וסילהון עובדא  
 דקודשא בריהו הוא דאית ליה לבר נש לאסתכלא בהו ולברכא ליה דכתיב,  
 (כי אראה שמיך מעשה אצבעותיך וגו' יי אדונינו מה אדיר שמיך  
 בכל הארץ. מר לי רבי מלה סתימא הנה קמי קודשא בריהו הוא, וגלי  
 במתיבתא עלאה ונדא הוא. בשעתא דסתימא דכל סתימין בעא לאתגליא, עבד  
 ברישא נקוד"ה (להלן ט"ו א', משפטים ק"ה א', ט' ב', שמות רכ"ו ב', רכ"ח  
 א) חדא, ונדא סליק למהני מחשבה. צייר בה פל ציוריו. חקק בה פל  
 גליפיואגליף גו בוצינא קדישא סתימא גליפו דחד ציורא סתימא קדש  
 קדישין בנינא עמיקא דנפק מגו מחשבה ואקרי מ"י שירותא (נ"א ראשיתא)  
 לבנינא. קיימא ולא קיימא. עמיק וסתימא בשמא. לא אקרי אלא מ". בעא  
 לאתגליא ולא תקרי בשמא (דא) ואתלבש בלבוש יקר דנהיר וברא אלה,  
 וסליק אל"ה בשמא. אתחברון אתנון אליו באליו ואשתלים בשמא אלהים.  
 ועד לא ברא אלה לא סליק בשמא אלהים. ואנון דחבו בעגלא (נ"א בעלמא).  
 על רזא דנא אמרו (שמות לכ) אלה אלהיך ישאל. וכמה דאשתתף מ"י  
 באלה, הכי הוא שמא דאשתתף תדיר. וברזא דא אתקנים עלמא. ופרח אליהו  
 ולא חמינא ליה

Said R. Simeon: "Elazar, son of mine, cease thy discourse, that there may be revealed the higher mysteries which remain sealed for the people of this world." R. Elazar then fell into silence. R. Simeon wept a while and then said, "Elazar, what is meant by the term 'these'? Surely not the stars and the other heavenly bodies; since they are always visible, and were created through *mah*, as we read, 'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made' (Psalms 33:6). Nor can it imply the things inaccessible to our gaze, since the vocable 'these' obviously points to things that are revealed. This mystery remained sealed until one day, whilst I was on the seashore; Elijah came and said to me, 'Master, what means "*mi* (who) created these?" I said to him, "That refers to the heavens and their hosts, the works of the Holy One, blessed by He, works through the contemplation of which man comes to bless Him, as it is written, "When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy singers, etc. Lord

our God, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth!" (Psalms 8:4–10.)

"Then he said to me, 'Master, the Holy One, blessed be He, had a deep secret which He at length revealed at the Celestial Academy. It is this: When the most mysterious wishes to reveal Himself, He first produced a simple point which was transmitted into a thought, and in this He executed innumerable designs and engraved innumerable engravings. He further engraved within the sacred and mystic lamp a mystic and most holy design, which was a wondrous edifice issuing from the midst of thought. This is called *mi* and was the beginning of the edifice, existent and non-existent, deep-buried, unknowable by name. It was only called *mi* (who?). It desired to become manifest and to be called by name. It therefore clothed itself in a refulgent and precious garment and created *Eleh* (these), and *Eleh* acquired a name. The letters of the two words intermingled, forming the complete name Elokim (God). When the Israelites sinned in making the golden calf, they alluded to this mystery in saying *Eleh* (These are thy gods, O Israel. Exodus 32:4). And once *mi* became combined with *eleh*, the name remained for all time. "And upon this secret the world is built."

"Elijah then flew away and vanished out of my sight. And it is from him that I became possessed of their profound mystery."

The *Zohar* speaks of *mi* and *eleh*, which suggest the perennial question of *mah*.<sup>98</sup> What is creation, if not the encounter between the *mi* and the *eleh*? What is the difference, however, between God as the *Ein Sof* and God as the *mi*, a Deus Persona?<sup>99</sup> The *Ein Sof* can't be questioned. It is beyond wonder. We cannot attempt to hint or to allude to Him. But

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<sup>98</sup> In other words, the *Zohar* questions the connection between God, as Deus Persona, the personal God referred to as "*mi*"; and the creation, referred to as "*eleh*." This question of the relationship between the personal God, "*mi*," and the God of Creation, "*eleh*," is referred to as "*mah*." In the language of *parzufim* discussed above in fn. 91, the "*mi*" in the passage of the *Zohar* refers to the *parzuf* of *Imma* and the "*ma*" refers to the *parzuf* of *Nukvah*. *Imma* is always hidden, but *Nukvah* is subject to human apprehension. This is expressed in the first passage of the *Zohar* quoted by the Rav on p. 13 and explained in fn. 7. In the beginning, from the candle inside (the world of wisdom) emerged an emanation (and en clothed itself in the next world *Imma*) from which contracted the worlds (of *Zeir Anpin* and *Nukvah*) which would direct the world. *Imma* is described as en clothed but *Nukvah* is apprehensible in the contracted world.

<sup>99</sup> That is, the personal God "*mi*" is no more knowable than the infinite God "*Ein Sof*." In which case, why can one ask about "*mi*" more than about the "*Ein Sof*" about which surely one cannot ask?

God in the *mi* is knowable only through the question *mi*, although no answer will come forth, but we can enter into questions with Him by asking *mi*. Revelation then made possible the asking of *mi*.<sup>100</sup> You never attain an answer but, nevertheless, you ask. Moses asked of God:

הראני נא את כבודך (Exodus 33: 18) הראני נא את כבודך  
(שמות ל"ג: י"ח).

Moses wanted positive knowledge of God. But God answered, לא  
(לך) תוכל לראות את פני שם כ" (שם שם כ" (ibid. 20).

Only the question can be asked. You can trace back to God, but never finding the answer. It is, nevertheless, man's duty to trace back to God although it ends in despair. As Maimonides said, the result of knowledge is despair.<sup>101</sup> There is nothing so great for man as resignation, to give up, but only after making a heroic attempt to discover God. What you retain after all your efforts is the great question of *mi*, which becomes less answerable and more complicated.

Both Maimonides and the *Zohar* approached it the same way. Some people despair and it leads to faith, others to agnosticism and skepticism. Man in search of God traces His footsteps through all phenomena and goes on and on and soon discovers that he is not going in a straight line, but rather in a circle and returns to his original starting point. What he gained is not knowledge but an expansion of the question as a greater puzzle. The atheist gives up; the man of faith goes around again. For the great task is to discover that this question is insoluble, as in certain mathematical problems which are insoluble, but you have to be a great mathematician to know that is insoluble.

The only knowledge that man can gain is when he asks the question *mab* (what?) in regard to *eleb*, to natural phenomena, by establishing relations which answer the questions of "How?" of the world.<sup>102</sup> But when

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<sup>100</sup> While "*mi*," the personal God, ultimately cannot be known, one is permitted to ask concerning "*mi*." This is because the creation itself elicits the question of "*mi*?" as expressed in the verse, "*mi bara eleb*," "Who created these?" as well as in the passage of *Zohar* cited above.

<sup>101</sup> The Rav is probably referring to what Maimonides writes in chapter 54 of section 1 in the *Guide* that Moses requested from God to reveal to him His Essence but was denied.

<sup>102</sup> The Rav here is claiming that the question "*mab*" referred to in the *Zohar* may be answered through scientific investigation of the natural world, "*eleb*." This is the "lower extremity" which will not help a person to understand the higher extremity "*mi*," but will enable man to understand the "how" of the physical world, "*eleb*."

you ask *mab* ("what?") in regard to *mi* to answer "Why," this is insoluble.<sup>103</sup> Man understands God only through the media of the objective world, God as a Deus Persona,<sup>104</sup> although what we [seek] is insoluble.

Man never reaches God on a transcendental level, but only through the natural law. Most philosophers end here. The *Zohar*, however, goes on to solve this problem of the redemption of God, who is imprisoned in the objective order and also in man the object, and brings them both to a merger. This is found in the philosophy of the *Zohar*, in regard to Shabbat and [in] an eschatology where God and man will meet. ❧

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<sup>103</sup> The relationship between the God of Creation, "*eleb*," and the Personal God, "*mi*," is the answer to the question, "*mab*?" *Eleb* refers to what is in the world, which can be discovered by man. The answer "why" things are in the world is the answer to the question "*mab*," which is ultimately insoluble. When the Rav says, "You ask '*mab*' in regard to '*mi*' to answer 'why,'" he means that you ask "*mab*" to relate "*eleb*," which is "what," to "*mi*." This question "*mab*" answers the "why" of Creation. This the Rav calls insoluble. The union of the Deus Persona, Personal God; and the Deus Mundus, the God of Creation, is forever sought and never reached.

<sup>104</sup> That is, man can only understand God by understanding His physical creation, but the personal God, Deus Persona, remains hidden. Nonetheless, through the process of understanding the physical world, Man continuously revisits the question of "*mi*," seeking, on increasingly higher levels, to understand the personal God.