

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Lectures on Genesis, I through V

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

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Editor's Introduction

It is with great joy and trepidation that I present the *Lectures on Genesis* of our teacher, *Moreinu v-Rabbeinu, Rabban shel Yisrael, Maran Ha-Gaon* Rav Yosef Dov Ha-Levi Soloveitchik, זצ"ל. The Rav was part of an exclusive group of *Gedolei Yisrael* of the Twentieth Century who were able to draw upon: their great Torah scholarship; their familiarity with the tradition of Torah giants; and their widespread erudition in philosophy, science and theology. Nowhere is this more evident than in these lectures in which the Rav explicates fundamental concepts of Jewish thought and belief in a profound and elegant manner.

My feelings are a mixture of joy and trembling. The joy comes from the Torah of the Rav, a joy best described by David Ha-Melekh (*Tehillim* 19:9) פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב, *the commandments of God are righteous and gladden the heart*. The trembling comes from the awareness of the immense responsibility I have undertaken in editing, annotating and interpreting the Rav's words. Had I possessed the Rav's notes the task would have been daunting. How much more so when the only notes I possessed were those of a student who attended his lectures so many years ago. Ḥazal's words (*Gittin* 60b), דברים שבעל פה אי אתה רשאי לכתוב, *words transmitted orally may not be written*, are certainly relevant here. Nonetheless, Ḥazal have also declared (*Tehillim* 119) עת לעשות לה' הפירו תורתך, *at a time when one must act for God's sake, waive away the Torah*. Orally transmitted Torah may be put into written form when it is in danger of being lost to us forever (*Gittin* *ibid*). The loss of these lectures to the generations would

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be a far greater tragedy than any negative effect of a potential misinterpretation of some details.

The Rav's lectures explain many fundamental tenets of Jewish philosophy. They speak to the individual described by Rambam as:

[A] religious man for whom the validity of our Law has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief—such a man being perfect in his religion and character, and having studied the sciences of the philosophers and come to know what they signify (Introduction to *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines trans., p. 5).

These lectures will be of interest to both student and scholar for they bring together different parts of the Rav's philosophical and theological corpus. Finally, this work provides an important starting point for the uninitiated who wish to become exposed to the beauty and depth of the Torah. It is for these reasons that I have undertaken this daunting task.

The philosophical and literary corpus of the Rav is distinguished by its focus on the various dichotomies inherent in the human spirit. In both *Halakhic Man* and *The Lonely Man of Faith*, the Rav describes man, including himself, as beset by existential dualisms. The Torah of Brisk, of which the Rav is a scion, developed a methodology to resolve halakhic contradictions by positing multiple abstract halakhic categories. The Rav extended this methodology to the anthropological realm as well. The transcendental halakhic dichotomies of *Halakhic Man* are expanded to also describe their humanity. Starting with the first verse in Genesis, the Rav takes us on an intellectual journey from Scripture to the Talmudic Sages; from Maimonides and medieval rationalist philosophers to the revelations of the *Zohar* and the Arizal. We are presented with a panorama of traditional Jewish intellectual history describing the world from creation to the eschatological end of time. At the end of his lectures the Rav writes:

Man in search of God traces His footsteps through all phenomena. He 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 the question is insoluble. (Lecture IX)

Indeed, this existential and spiritual dilemma is manifested at the climax of the final Shabbat meal:

The last meal [of Shabbat evokes] both joy and parting. [The great metaphysical unity] is never realized. It is only a dream [for] the distant future, eternal vigilance for the next encounter. (Lecture X)

To properly understand this idea we provide a brief sketch of Lithuanian Jewish philosophy, as formulated by the Rav's 19th-century paternal ancestor R. Ḥayyim Volozhiner, in his *Nefesh Ha-Ḥayyim*, an original ontology of God, man and Torah. In *Sha'ar III* R. Ḥayyim reformulates the Ari's kabbalistic ideas of Divine contraction (*tzimtzum*) and emanation (*kav*). In direct contradistinction to the more literal interpretation of R. Schneur Zalman's *Tanya*, R. Ḥayyim inverts their dynamics. The process of Divine creation is explained by the Ari as a two-stage process: contraction (*tzimtzum*) through which God allows for the existence of a 'world' other than Himself, followed by emanation (*kav*) in which He 're-enters,' albeit in a finite and bounded fashion. Before *tzimtzum* God constituted all of reality. After *tzimtzum* He allowed for the existence of a world other than Himself. At the center of this world is man to whom God reveals Himself and establishes a relationship.

R. Ḥayyim took this two-stage process and converted it into an irreducible dichotomy. There are two ontologies of God deriving from two perspectives: One perspective is how God perceives Himself, and the other perspective is how God allows Himself to be perceived by man. *Tzimtzum* is the Divine perspective in which He constitutes all of reality. *Kav* represents the 'human' perspective, whereby God appears separate and transcendental. Hence immanence is from God's perspective. Transcendence is from man's perspective. Man does not relate to God through God's immanence, for that would be tantamount to idolatry and paganism. Rather, man relates to God as a transcendent Being. All of this, of course, is in contradistinction to the *Tanya*, where man relates to God through His immanence. Hence it can be said that R. Ḥayyim immanentized the eschaton, and eschatologized the immanent.

There were two important consequences of R. Ḥayyim's ontology. One relates to man's role in the universe. The other relates to the Torah. Since man's worship and service of God constitutes a 'transcending role,' man's spiritual powers become infinitely magnified, for his every act has vast consequences in the spiritual worlds. This, writes R. Ḥayyim, is what the Torah means when it says that man is created in the image of God, בצלם א-לקים. Man's metaphysical powers imitate those of God, as his actions affect myriad spiritual worlds. The image of God, בצלם א-לקים is therefore *imitatio Dei* in a metaphysical sense.

The second consequence of R. Ḥayyim's transcendental understanding of man relates to the role of the Torah. Since man has the ability to

affect the entirety of the physical-metaphysical cosmos, it must be that the source of this power lies ontologically beyond the 'created' universe. R. Hayyim locates the source of this power in the Torah. The Torah for him is thus ontologically prior to all of physical-metaphysical reality. In fact, from the human perspective it is not less prior than Divinity itself. Hence the famous Lithuanian credo, coined by R. Hayyim, "God, the Torah and Israel are one." This does not, God forbid, mean that R. Hayyim submits to a new form of Trinity, but rather it is an expression of the almost Divine-like empowerment of man in his ability to study and act through the Torah.

Much has been written about the history of the Volozhin Yeshiva beginning with its founder, R. Hayyim Volozhiner, and continuing through his scion R. Hayyim Soloveitchik, its last Rosh Yeshiva. The connection between these two, however, has rarely been analyzed beyond the institutional or familial realm. The philosophical continuum from R. Hayyim Volozhin to R. Hayyim Soloveitchik is usually ignored primarily because the latter was known not as a theologian but as a halakhist. Nonetheless, if we examine the legal methodology that was introduced by R. Hayyim Soloveitchik in Talmudic scholarship (a methodology that constitutes the basis of Torah as studied in yeshivot today) we can see a clear connection between the ontological and theological conception of Torah in the *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim* and R. Hayyim Soloveitchik's methodology, usually referred to as the 'Brisker *derekh*,' the way of Brisk.

In R. Hayyim Soloveitchik's methodology, concepts in the Talmud are abstract categories into which the Talmud places specific facts or details of law. The Torah, therefore, takes on the role of an a priori system in which the corpus of halakha is prior to the world. The Rav echoes his grandfather and writes in *Halakhic Man*:

When halakhic man approaches reality, he comes with his Torah, given to him from Sinai, in hand. He orients himself to the world by means of fixed statutes and firm principles. An entire corpus of precepts and laws guides him along the path leading to existence. Halakhic man, well furnished with rules, judgements and fundamental principles, draws near the world with an a priori relation. His approach begins with an ideal creation and concludes with a real one. (p. 19)

We see from the words of the Rav, that R. Hayyim Soloveitchik adopted R. Hayyim Volozhiner's ontological concept of Torah and employed it methodologically. However, in addition to employing the *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim's* ontology of Torah, R. Hayyim Soloveitchik also em-

ployed his ancestor's ontology of man. In R. Hayyim Soloveitchik's system, man is the one who both contracts and cognizes these a priori categories and creates the very underlying system of abstractions with which he relates to the world. For R. Hayyim Volozhiner, man's intellectual roots reach so far that it can be said that man studies the Torah and "God repeats what he says" (*Sha'ar* IV; chapter 6). This intellectual empowerment of man is methodologically used by R. Hayyim Soloveitchik in his profound and influential works in which he creates an abstract world of enormous beauty and power to probe the most complex and subtle halakhic problems.

This world view was the legal-philosophical tradition that the Rav inherited. While the Rav's pre-eminence as a Talmudic scholar and lecturer cannot be overemphasized, it is the Rav's philosophical contribution on which I wish to focus. The Rav's role, in this Lithuanian intellectual tradition, was to expand this theme into the anthropological and existential realms. The transcendental role of man creates, in a sense, a fundamental dichotomy between man acting as God and man acting as man. From man's metaphysical and intellectual Divine-like personality, and moreover because of it, there emerges a human being beset with existential loneliness and crisis. Thus, the Rav begins *Halakhic Man* with the declaration that:

Halakhic man reflects two opposing selves: two disparate images are embodied within his soul and spirit. On the one hand he is identical to prosaic, cognitive man; on the other hand, he is a man of God. (p. 3)

A different but parallel expression is to be found in *The Lonely Man of Faith*:

The Biblical Dialectic stems from the fact that Adam the first, majestic man of dominion and success, and Adam the second, the lonely man of faith, obedience, and defeat, are not two different people locked in an external confrontation as an 'I' opposite a 'thou,' but one person who is involved in self confrontation. 'I,' Adam the first, confronts the 'I,' Adam the second. In every one of us abide two *personae*—the creative, majestic Adam the first, and the submissive, humble Adam the second. (pp. 80-81)

By analysing Cognitive Man as presented in *Halakhic Man*, and Adam the First as presented in *The Lonely Man of Faith*, it becomes apparent that the Rav is referring to the same person. Cognitive man "observes and scrutinizes the great and exalted cosmos" with the "intent of understanding and comprehending its features" thereby "uncovering the secret of the world" (*Halakhic Man* p. 5). Adam the first is also "interested

in just a single aspect of reality and asks one question only—“how does the cosmos function?”” (*The Lonely Man of Faith* p. 13). Cognitive Man seeks pure theoretical knowledge “to establish fixed principles, to create laws and judgments, to negate the unforeseen and the incomprehensible, to understand the wondrous and the sudden in existence” (*Halakhic Man* p. 5). Conversely, Adam the First’s acquired knowledge is “not of an exploratory - cognitive nature,” but its purpose is to “harness and dominate the elemental natural forces and to put them at his disposal” (*The Lonely Man of Faith* p. 13). Nonetheless, this distinction between Cognitive Man and Adam the First is analogous to the distinction between the theoretical knowledge of R. Hayyim Soloveitchik and the Divine-like empowerment of man as found in the works of R. Hayyim Volozhiner. The role of R. Hayyim Soloveitchik’s Torah methodology is strikingly similar to that of Cognitive Man. Just as cognitive man seeks “to establish fixed principles, to create laws and judgments” (p. 5) so too does Halakhic Man “orient himself by means of fixed statutes and firm principles” (p. 19). The Torah, however, was given to halakhic man “not simply for the sake of theoretical study, but in order that man might continue the act of creation” (p. 101). This ethos defines the role of Adam the First who also “engages in creative work, trying to imitate his Maker (*imitatio Dei*)” (p. 17). This latter idea expresses the concept of the image of God (*tzelem Elokim*) as found in *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim*’s description of man (*Sha’ar I*).

Nonetheless, according to the Rav, the cognitive aspect of Halakhic Man and Adam the First do not fully describe man. Halakhic Man has a second dimension and Adam the First has his counterpart in Adam the Second. Halakhic Man, in addition to resembling Cognitive Man, is also “a man of God” who is “devoted to a worldview saturated with the radiance of the Divine Presence” (p. 3). Adam the First has a counterpart within man himself, Adam the Second, who “explores not the scientific abstract universe but the irresistibly fascinating qualitative world where he establishes an intimate relationship with God” (*The Lonely Man of Faith* p. 22). Through these alternate personalities the Rav adds a complementary existential dimension to the vision of man as expressed by his Lithuanian predecessors. The theme of the Rav’s works is that despite the awesome role of man, to imitate God (*imitatio Dei*) in both a metaphysical and an intellectual sense, man must also contend with his “other” religiously existential self. Only through the dialectic of this dual identity can the spiritual condition of modern man be understood.

These lecture notes unveil new dimensions of understanding the aforementioned duality of man. In these lectures Adam the First who is driven by the question “how?” and Adam the Second who is driven by

the question “why?” are described in the context of a Zohar that the Rav beautifully explains by describing the inherent existential dichotomy that is expressed by these questions. The Rav writes:

The only knowledge that man can obtain is when he asks the question “*Ma* (what)?” in regard to *Elokeab*, to natural phenomena, to establish relations which answer the “how” questions of the world. But when you ask “*Ma*” (what) in regard to Me, to answer “why,” this is insoluble. Man understands God only through the media of the objective world. God, as a *Deus Persona*, [God as a Being, for] whom we search [is] insoluble. (Lecture IX)

This passage reveals very movingly the irreducible dichotomy of the human religious condition which is a central theme of the Rav's religious philosophy, and offers but a glimpse into how these *Lectures on Genesis* reveal new insights into the Rav's overall philosophical model. In these lectures, the Rav traces the origin and evolution of this theme in Jewish thought through the interpretations of the Bible's account of creation. For the Rav this not only describes the condition of man, but also defines the dynamics of history. The purpose of creation is to reveal to man the forging of the two questions “why?” and “how?” thereby uniting Adam the First and Adam the Second. The unfolding of this drama is the story that is told in these lectures.

Every project requires the help of many people. First, I thank R. Robert Blau for allowing me to use his notes which are the basis for this project. I also thank Rav Moshe Talansky for introducing us and for giving this project its initial impetus.

I thank R. David Sedley for his help in putting this project together, and I thank all those who helped with the editing and proofreading, particularly my *haburah* at Machon Shlomo with whom I studied the material. My thanks also to Raizy Lichtenstein for her editing of the text and for clarifying difficult points. On a personal note, I thank my wife and family for their understanding and encouragement as I spent countless hours toiling over this project.

Finally, and above all else, I thank the Master of the Universe for giving me a portion amongst those who sit in the Beit Midrash, and who has allowed me to learn, teach, observe and fulfil His Torah.

Meir Triebitz

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Lecture I

This course will cover the story of Genesis in the light of the Aggadah, Kabbalah and medieval philosophy. We will discuss the following:

- 1) Man's role as a Divine personality.¹
- 2) Man's role as a sinner.²
- 3) Analysis of Creation.³
- 4) Clarification of the practical significance of metaphysical premises that underlie [philosophical] ideas or *halakhot* [principles]. It is our task to pursue the transition from metaphysics to *halakha*. Metaphysics and *halakha* have a common root. They are intertwined. [Every] *halakha* represents some basic metaphysical experience.⁴

In the analysis of the metaphysics of Genesis we will encounter these issues:

- 1) The dichotomy between Jewish and Christian hermeneutics.

The greatest minds of Christian theology interpreted the story of Genesis. It was [very] important to them to pursue the great mystery of creation and salvation (Jesus) as one continuum. The [need for] salvation emerges for them, in Creation. The salvation is in the New Testament. The Fall of Man is the beginning of the great human

¹ Man's role as a divine personality is discussed by Rav Soloveitchik in these lectures in a number of ways. See Lectures II, IV, V.

² The Rav understands human sin as an abuse of his role as a divine personality. See Lecture V.

³ The Rav presents the Jewish concept of God's creation of the world from two perspectives: the philosophical and the kabbalistic. In Lecture III he elucidates two philosophical understandings of Rambam's account of creation, while in Lecture VIII he presents the AriZal's kabbalistic account of creation through Divine contraction (*tzimtzum*) and revelation.

⁴ The Rav's assertion that "metaphysics and halakha have a common root" is part of a central theme in the Rav's philosophical works which explore the relationship between ontology and ethics.

In this series of lectures the Rav views the opinion—that man can construct the commandments of the Torah through reason alone without Divine revelation—as an "absurdity" (Lecture II). On the other hand, the Rav views the discovery of the "ethical performance" of nature as a goal of man's scientific efforts to understand the natural world in which he lives (*ibid.*).

tragedy [that] finds culmination in Christ on the Cross. The most important interpreter was Augustine.⁵

2) The dichotomy between modern science and the Bible, including Creation [versus] evolution.⁶

As to the issue of “scientific cosmogony,”⁷ the problem is basically rooted in the difference of methodology, not in facts, as science operates mostly with hypothetical premises.⁸ The variety of theories and their

⁵ Augustine of Hippo understood the Old Testament as a metaphor for the salvation of man:

You, my helper, delivered me in this way from the chains. I was seeking the origin of evil and here was no solution. But you did not allow fluctuations in my thinking to carry me away from the faith which I held that you exist and are immutable substance and care for humanity and judge us: moreover, that in Christ ...and by your scriptures commanded by the authority of your Catholic Church, you have provided a way of salvation whereby humanity can come to the future life after death. (source: Confessions VII. vii. 11.)

For Christian Biblical interpreters the narrative of Adam and Eve is indeed the story of the Fall of Man: human beings have ever after been condemned to a life of “transgression and sin in all our generations” (Life of Adam and Eve 44:2). Later on, in Lectures XII and XIII the Rav understands Christian Biblical hermeneutics as symptomatic of their inability to reconcile man’s transcendence with his physicality. This is in contradistinction to Judaism which sees no contradiction between these two aspects of man. The Rav says:

All in all man in the story of creation does not occupy a unique, ontic position, but is a particle that falls into a scheme of the concrete order. Man is only the last of three stages of living matter. Science and evolution interpret man only as part of the emergence of organic matter. Christianity split the story into two and explained man without taking into consideration animal and plant and misinterpreted Biblical philosophical anthropology (Lecture XIII).

⁶ See Lectures XII and XIII.

⁷ Scientific cosmogony: scientific theories of Creation.

⁸ On p. 46 the Rav says, “The method of science is to construe a priori aspects of reality and construct a reality. The reality of man’s mind is not exact. No scientist will tell you that his world is the true world...”

This formulation of science is taken from the neo-Kantian school of philosophy whose central figure was Hermann Cohen to whom the Rav refers later in this lecture as ‘the greatest of modern religious philosophers’ (p. 46). In fact, the Rav’s doctoral dissertation at the University of Berlin was devoted to Cohen’s neo-Kantianism. As a philosophy of science, this school of thought rejects the ability of science to investigate the nature of any mind-independent reality, but rather views science as constructing cognitive models that are test-

continued flux make any Biblical apologetic almost impossible, for one will soon have to reinterpret our conclusions. However, the methodological discrepancy with the approach of science must be investigated, not for the sake of reconciliation, but, rather, to understand this discrepancy. This will, in the end, enrich our own religious experience.⁹

The problem of faith and science is as old as Jewish philosophy and thought itself. It is interesting that Nahmanides understood this dichotomy better than Maimonides or the others, because he was not handicapped by any philosophical terminology.¹⁰

ed against the empirical world. Cohen's neo-Kantianism bears thematic resemblance to the Rav's philosophy of halakha.

⁹ This discrepancy is a major theme of these lectures, and the dialectic between objective scientific knowledge and one's personal relationship with a Hidden God constitutes the central theme of the Rav's thought. Thus, the Rav asserts in Lecture IX, "Man understands God only through the media of the objective world. God as *Deus Persona*, although the search, is insoluble. Man never reaches God on a transcendental level but only through natural law. Most philosophies end here. The *Zohar*, however, goes on to solve the problem of the redemption of God who is imprisoned in the objective order...."

It is important to note that this fundamental dichotomy between objective, scientific knowledge and subjective, religious knowledge is the central theme of the Rav's famous essay *The Lonely Man of Faith*. The two forms of knowledge and relationship to the world are embodied in that essay in Adam the First, and Adam the Second.

¹⁰ Ramban writes: "The answer [to why R. Yitzhak asked why the Torah begins with the account of Creation] is because the Creation is a deep secret which cannot be understood from the Scripture alone, but through a tradition (kabbalah) which leads to Moshe Rabbeinu to whom it was revealed, and those who know it are required to hide it" (Gen. 1, 1).

Clearly Ramban understood that *Ma'aseh Bereshit* cannot be derived through human intellect, for the Torah reveals not rational scientific truth but rather spiritual truth. In such a case, there is no commensurability between Scripture and humanly conceived science. This idea is repeated in various ways by the Rav. The following two examples from the lectures are characteristic of his approach: "There is no need to find commensurability between Judaism and Occidental thought" (p. 46). "However, the methodical discrepancy with the approach of science must be investigated, not for the sake of reconciliation..." (p. 44).

In contrast to this view, Rambam clearly saw commensurability between the two systems, as is evident by his account in ch. 30 of section I of the *Guide* in which he interprets the first chapter of *Bereshit* in terms of Aristotelian science. Thus, Ramban's viewpoint is clearly more in line with the Rav's than that of Rambam. The Rav makes a statement to that effect on p. 65 of this lecture. Despite the apparent difference between Rambam's view of commensurability

In ancient Greek thought there was no understanding of change and transformation. [But] in modern science [while] the amount of matter is constant, evolution takes place in form. [Thus] when science speaks of evolution, it is [of] morphological evolution. [It is] here [that] Aristotle differed. He could not understand morphological evolution. For him all forms were eternal and could not change, hence nature, for Aristotle, did not undergo any change. Therefore, any theory in which Creation sprang into being was nonsense to the ancient Greeks. The Jewish minds threw up their hands in despair because they could not reconcile Biblical creation with Greek thought. This is a conflict as to methodology.¹¹ For creation speaks of origin, being, and springing into existence

Today this complex problem can be seen in a different light. Evolution in both cosmogony and biology is the password of science. The beginning and end is now a part of scientific thinking. Whatever occurs in science is an evolution; any change [is an evolution]. The faithful and religious personality feels more at home here than in Aristotelian times,

and that of the Rav, in Lecture VIII he makes an assertion that blurs that distinction: "Maimonides was not influenced by the Kabballah. However, in the final analysis, both the Kabballah and Maimonides agree. The difference is only that one employs philosophical terms while the other employs picturesque-metaphysical terms."

¹¹ It is not clear to what the Rav is referring here, for Aristotle certainly had a theory of 'change of forms.' The intention behind this statement may be related to Aristotle's theory of the eternity of the world as expressed by Rambam. In the *Guide* (Chapter 13 of section II), Aristotle's theory of creation is the furthest removed from the Jewish idea of creation ex nihilo for it conceives of a never-changing natural order in contradistinction to Plato's primordial formless matter—*hyule*—which undergoes a radical upheaval at the onset of the creation of the current natural order.

In my opinion, however, the Rav is probably referring to Aristotle's scientific methodology which views nature as a hierarchy of forms of different qualities that characterize different regions of the universe. As a result the phenomena of nature are governed by different kinds of 'causes' or principles. They are many and different for each segment of nature, even though their number "should not be increased without necessity." Science too, cannot be any more uniform than its subject matter. The translation of methods from one science to another leads only to category mistakes. In the name of this injunction, Aristotle repudiated Plato's belief in an overarching science (dialectics) as well as Plato's "eidetic numbers" that guarantee the order and connection of ideas, and also Plato's geometrization of the universe. (Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, Princeton University Press, 1986).

As a result an underlying evolutionary process that leads from one region of nature to another was alien to Aristotelian science, as the Rav remarks.

though this does not solve *creatio ex nihilo*, which still remains a problem for science. Still, there are common aspects to both viewpoints. For if there exists the possibility of microscopic beings without cause, then *creatio ex nihilo* is also no absurdity.

The method of science is to construe a priori aspects of reality and to construct a reality, for reality through man's mind is not exact. No scientist will tell you that his world is the true one. Even in an experiment there are subjective elements. All science does is duplicate certain mysteries.

As regards the other issue, the Christian approach, many an idea of a church father may be of Jewish origin. For example, there is every possibility that St. Augustine was influenced by our Aggadah. If we can trace a Christian idea to a Jewish origin we will be doing a good deed, השבת אבידה לבעלים. However, there are certain Christian thoughts that are of Christian origin and we have to purge our *Weltanschauung* of them.

Let us state that we will not indulge in apologetics and revise our ancient formulas [to accommodate] present scientific fascinations. There is also no need to find commensurability between Judaism and Occidental thought, because it leads to absurd conclusions as happened with Hermann Cohen, the greatest of modern religious philosophers. Had Maimonides tried to investigate Jewish philosophy without Aristotelian terminology of which he was a prisoner, he would have rendered a greater service to Judaism, as the *ba'alei ha-Kabbalah* have done.

Let us begin then with *Beresbit* as our text:

בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Rashi on this passage says:

אמר ר' יצחק לא היה צריך להתחיל את התורה אלא מהחדש הזה לכם שהיא מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו בה ישראל. ומה טעם פתח בבראשית? משום 'כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלה גוים' (תהלים קיא:ו) שאם יאמרו אומות העולם לישראל ליסטים אתם שכבשתם ארצות שבע גוים הם אומרים להם כל הארץ של הקב"ה היא. הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו, ברצונו נתנה להם וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו.

R. Isaac said: The Torah (which is the Law, Book of Israel), should have commenced with the verse (Exodus. 12:1) 'This month shall be unto you the first of the months,' which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it commences with the account of the Creation? Because of the thought expressed in the text (Psalms 111:6): 'He declared to the people the strength of His works (i.e., He gave an account of the work of Cre-

ation), in order that He might give them the heritage of the nations.' For should the peoples of the world say to Israel, 'You are robbers, because you took by force the land of the seven nations of Canaan,' Israel may reply to them, 'All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed He gave it to them and when He willed He took it from them and gave it to us.'

Midrash Tanhuma quoting R. Yitzhak contains the first part of Rashi; *Midrash Rabba* contains the answer. It seems that R. Yitzhak contends that the Torah is a book not of metaphysics of theoretical thought, but of practical *mitzvot*, commandments. If, however, R. Yitzhak was correct we would be rendering a disservice to our Torah. For from the Prophets we see that the exploration and inquisitiveness about all knowledge is one of the greatest virtues of the human mind.¹²

Secondly, the *ba'alei Aggadah* were also *halakhists*, and they knew that *halakha* is impossible without a knowledge of scientific facts. *Nezikin*, *Zera'im*, *Niddah* are all founded on a scientific background. Many other *halakhot* are founded on psychological and sociological background, i.e., *Ne'emanut*, *Hazaka*, *Migo*. There is not a single gadget invented by science that does not involve a *halakhic* problem, simply because *Yahadut* is concerned with all phases of existence. This it has in common with science.

Lecture II

The Torah is not interested in disclosing any scientific data to man. Revelation was only the revealing of the will of God and not the wisdom of God. This is [also] the theology of Karl Barth, of the dialectical school that was part of the Swiss Reformed school of philosophy.¹³ It considers

¹² A source for the Rav's assertion that the prophets strove for intellectual apprehension of God's creation may be found in Rambam:

What is the way that man can love and fear God? When a person reflects on God's great and wondrous creations, and perceives through them His great Wisdom, which is infinite, immediately he comes to love and praise God and develop a desire to know His Great Name, as David says in Psalms, "My soul thirsts for the Living God" (Psalms 42: 3), (*Hilkebot Yesodei Ha-Torah* II).

Read in this light, this verse testifies that King David thirsted for knowledge of the world.

¹³ Barth, a Protestant theologian considered to be one of the most important Christian thinkers of the twentieth century, employed the method of dialectical theology in order to bring about a transformation in his reader by making contradictory statements in the same sentence. An example: "God's "No" to us is

revelation as non-cultural.¹⁴ Therefore, if the Bible employed the Ptolemaic description of the cosmos, it was only to present to the people of its time and not to present the true scientific view.

To return to the Jewish viewpoint, that of R. Yitzhak quoted in Rashi,¹⁵ revelation was voluntaristic (revelatory only of God's will), uninterested in revealing to man anything metaphysical.

Does this mean that the Jews lacked the inquiring mind that questions and explores everything? From the Prophets and the methodology of *Halakha* we see that they worked constantly in close contact with scientific knowledge. It was not the intention of the *Midrash* to push science aside. [For us] to accept Karl Barth would be fallacious. To him,¹⁶

complete, but in its completion, it is also a "Yes" to us. God is known as the unknown." (See "Fifty Key Christian Thinkers," Peter McFinhill, George Newlands, ed. (Routledge 2004), reprinted 2005, pp. 58–66.

¹⁴ Barth rejected the liberal theology of the nineteenth century, which drew from secular philosophy and science in order to ground religious belief. Instead, he emphasized the sheer Otherness of God. Only in this way can man be open to God's authentic, undiluted message through revelation without man's modern rational and cultural preconceptions. If revelation employs terms and concepts that appear to be in contradiction to contemporary cultural ideas, it is only because the historical revelation was expressed in terms of the culture of that time in history.

¹⁵ Genesis 1:1.

¹⁶ What the Rav appears to be saying in this paragraph is that according to Barth's philosophy, the purpose of revelation is not to present man with a legal framework for his life, but only to provide a means of his salvation. As such, Barth deemed knowledge of the physical world as irrelevant for obeying God's Will. Judaism, on the other hand, while not believing that revelation reveals God's Wisdom, nonetheless places a strong emphasis on scientific knowledge of the world as a means of understanding God's creation. This knowledge is acquired by man through his intellect.

The important point being made here is that the central dispute between Christianity and Judaism, from the nascence of Christianity up to and including the modern era, has always been the Christian rejection of Halakha. This idea is elaborated upon by the Jewish medieval authorities such as the Rashba (see *Hidushei Aggadot, Berakhot* 12: 6 and Responsa 1:37) and the Ritva (*Commentary to Tractate Niddah* 61b) in their refutation of Christian "interpretations" of certain Talmudic passages. The passages under discussion were used by Christian polemicists to demonstrate that the Talmudic Sages viewed Halakha as historically terminable and thereby rendered it contingent upon a final "redemption." The Rashba and Ritva in their commentaries show these "readings" to be fallacious. The Rav's point is that even a twentieth-century thinker such as Barth, whose theology very much opposes medieval Christian theology, still upholds the central Christian dogmatic rejection of the Halakhic context of the Bible.

Revelation came not to guide us in our lives but only for salvation. Barth sees this idea as part of a natural drive within man towards God [which is his conceptualization of *tzelem Elokim*]. This is typically Christian.

But within Judaism the purpose [of Revelation], of the Bible, is to give man a *modus vivendi*:

ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרע (דברים ל: טו).
See that I have placed before you today life and the good, death and evil. (Deuteronomy 30: 15)

The [Jewish concept of a *tzelem Elokim*] is to have the cognitive drive and the ability to inquire.¹⁷ To have the cognitive drive without the ability to inquire would be a curse to man. The *tzelem Elokim* is first expressed in the Bible in Genesis, when God blessed Adam, saying:

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the heaven, and over every animal that creepeth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

In other words, to [infuse] the animal kingdom with intelligence. Another reference is in Psalms:

ותחסרהו מעט מאלקים. (תהילים ה:ו)
You have made him little less than divine. (Psalm 8:6)

Yet all this lies outside the realm of revelation, revelation being with regard to *halakha*, in which man is not charged with the drive to discover the *halakhic* Jew, but rather God revealed to man a set moral system. The Christians believe in natural law which man discovers without revela-

¹⁷ The Rav develops the idea of man's intelligence and power of inquiry as *Tzelem Elokim* in his essay *The Lonely Man of Faith*. The Torah's first account of man, referred to by the Rav as Adam the First, indicates that he is created *b-tzelem Elokim*, in the image of God, and that he is given the mandate from the Almighty to fill the earth and subdue it: (בראשית א: כח). The Rav explains:

There is no doubt that the term "image of God" in the first account refers to man's inner charismatic endowment as a creative being. Man's likeness to God expresses itself in man's striving and ability to become a creator. Adam the first who was fashioned in the image of God was blessed with great drive for creative activity and immeasurable resources for the realization of this goal, the most outstanding of which is the intelligence, the human mind, capable of confronting the outside world and inquiring into its complex workings. (*The Lonely Man of Faith*, p. 12)

tion.¹⁸ *Yabadut*, however, is doubtful whether man would ever discover all *halackic* law himself. Even if we would say that man could discover, for example, the general principle of *lo tirtzab*, he certainly could not discover all its ramifications.¹⁹ For example:

ההורג את הטריפה פטור. (סנהדרין עח א)

One who murders a “*treifa*” is exempt [from the death penalty].
(Sanhedrin 78a)²⁰

Halakha is not to be confused with the general principle of morality. *Voluntas Dei*, [God’s will], was communicated to man, through that great apocalyptic experience. *Halakha* is not devoid of the ethical motive, but is sometimes opposed to the conventional ethos of modern times. God

¹⁸ The central Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas elaborates a theory of natural law in his *Summa Theologiae*:

Whatever is contrary to the order of reason is contrary to the nature of human beings as such; and what is reasonable is in accordance with human nature as such. The good of the human being is being in accord with reason, and human evil is being outside the order of reasonableness. . . . So human virtue, which makes good both the human person and his words, is in accordance with human nature just in so far as it is in accordance with reason; and vice is contrary to human nature just in so far as it is contrary to the order of reasonableness. (ST I-II p. 71, a, 2c)

¹⁹ The Netziv of Volozhin, the great-great-grandfather of the Rav, elaborates on this theme in his letter of approbation for the Hafetz Hayyim’s *Ahavat Hessed*. He writes that even though *gemilut hasadim* is the natural foundation of the world and thus constitutes a human obligation, there are nonetheless positive commandments in the Torah that obligate Jews to perform acts of *hesed*. The existence of these commandments indicates that *gemilut hasadim* is not only a broad and natural obligation but also a metaphysical obligation, as impenetrable to human reason as other less rational Torah commandments.

A consequence of the idea that commanded law, even ostensibly natural law, must have metaphysical meaning, is the existence of logical Halakhic details that cannot be attributed to or learned from natural law.

²⁰ The term “*treifa*” here refers to a human being who bears any type of anatomic defect that, according to the Talmud, renders him terminally ill. The Rav brings this as an example of a Halakha that runs contrary to common moral reasoning. The Rav’s point is made evident by the fact that 1) Rambam rules (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 9:4) that a Gentile (*ben Noah*) who murders a “*treifa*” receives the death penalty, and 2) several medieval authorities (see *Tosefot, Sanhedrin* 78a) are of the opinion that the Talmudic statement of the exemption of a Jew from the death penalty for the murder of a “*treifa*” is valid even according to the opinion that the category of “*treifa*” does not necessarily render the victim terminally ill.

took man into confidence as a friend on this voluntaristic level by revealing to him the secret of a right path of life, for the intimacy of any friendship is a dialogue. Rav Saadia Gaon claims that man could in time have discovered the whole Torah through rational methods, but God revealed it to man because the life span is so short.²¹ To us, however, this is absurd.

The commandment of *lo tirtzah* was not [meant to be] self-evident to the intellect. It is also a *hok*, as is the eating of *hazir*. The only difference is that it fits into our moral concept of thinking, whereas *hazir* doesn't. [It is not obvious] reasoning that I should not murder someone who stands in my way.²² Halakha is a matter of training. Man is so flexible that he can be trained in a variety of ways.

God on the cosmic realm, however, did not take man into confidence. What the world is, man was not told but rather he was commissioned to explore the cosmic nature of God imbedded in organic and inorganic matter.²³ Man possesses the ability [to discover that on which he was not given] data. The moral law was a gift to man; the natural law a challenge. The reason for this discrepancy lies at the very heart of *Yahadut*. To know is a basic moral virtue. Knowledge as such is a great ethical performance. Knowledge means to have possession of certain data. Cognition means to know through the process of searching.²⁴ The pur-

²¹ There appears to be a mistake in the notes which attribute this to Rambam who does not make this claim. The Rav is referring to R. Saadiah Gaon and R. Hai Gaon. See R. Hai Gaon's introduction to Tractate *Berakhot* of the Babylonian Talmud and R. Saadia Gaon's *Emunot Ve-De'ot* (Introduction 6). Both claim that the commandments can be arrived at through rational reason. Rambam argued against this claim. In his opinion, most commandments can be known only through revelation. See *Moreh*, Section II, Chapter 33.

²² See note 19.

²³ It would seem, based upon what the Rav says above (p. 50) and in *The Lonely Man of Faith* (p. 11), that the ethical content of human knowledge is based on the verse *מלאו את הארץ וכבשוה*, "Fill the earth and subdue it." Man is commanded to use his intellect to subdue the world. In Tractate *Shabbat* R. Yehoshua ben Levi says in the name of Bar Kapparah, "Concerning one who knows how to calculate the astronomical seasons and zodiac but doesn't do so, it is written, "They have not seen the works of God and the acts of His Hands."

R. Yohanan asks, "How do we know that it is a commandment to calculate the seasons and zodiac? "You shall obey the commandments for it is your wisdom in the eyes of the other nations"(Deuteronomy 4: 6). What is wisdom in the eyes of the nations? It is the calculation of seasons and stars (Shabbat 75a).

²⁴ The Rav's emphasis on the 'process' and not the accumulation of knowledge is rooted in the neo-Kantian view of science (see Lecture 1, fn. 8). According to

suit of wisdom [cognition] is the great ethical performance, not the possession of accumulated knowledge. If a man has a better memory, he is not more ethical than his fellow man; it is a natural endowment. But this searching, this pursuit is what is important. The moral performance is the process of yearning. Knowledge is an *actus*, not a *factum*. If God would have revealed to man the cosmic mystery, it would have destroyed the human creativity of man.

Even in *Halakha* only premises were revealed, while the *hidush* is the central motif. There is no religion that gives man as much freedom as does *halakha*. Foundations of *halakha* were revealed to man, but the *halakhic* edifices are to be built by man. For if knowledge leads to pride and haughtiness, then knowledge is dangerous. But if it leads to humility it is ethical.

Why is the pursuit of knowledge so important? Judaism has a monistic approach to reality, just as it has a monotheistic God. Basically, there is one pursuit in which man is completely engaged, the pursuit of God. All other drives are media to the pursuit of God. *Avodah zara* is not only idol worship, but anything that is in competition with God. God wants man to serve Him and through his creative mode man strives to imitate God²⁵ [and thus serve Him].

this view, science is a process by which man continually creates theoretical models of nature in accordance with the structure of his intellect. Science, however, can never describe the world in and of itself. Consequently, for the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism, headed by Hermann Cohen, the essence of science is the idealistic process and not the accumulation of scientific knowledge: "The search for truth is the truth" (Cohen, qtd. in Sh. Bergman, *Hogei Ha-dor*, p. 220).

²⁵ The Rav refers here to two types of spiritual activities: serving God and imitating Him.

Through the pursuit of knowledge of the cosmos man both serves God and imitates Him. It is, however, the act of pursuit, more than the attainment of knowledge, which constitutes the ethical act. This begs the question of why the pursuit dominates the accumulation of knowledge. An approach to this question may be formulated based upon the Rambam at the end of *Hilkhot Teshuva*, where he writes, "The love of God is not instilled in a man's heart unless he pursues it constantly and abandons everything else in the world in its pursuit. This is acquired only with knowledge of Him... Therefore a person should devote himself to the study of sciences and wisdom which inform him of his Creator" (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 10:3).

This passage indicates that Rambam understands the pursuit of knowledge to be an act of love that must be consistently maintained. The emphasis is on the act. The pursuit of knowledge is thus an expression of love.

There is greatness not in being ethical when it is easy, but rather when forces are against us and it involves sacrifice and struggle. The first step is realizing the apocalyptic will revealed by God. We find that nature often seems to be opposed to this revealed will. We should then search for God in the “theoretical performance [of His revealed will] in nature,”²⁶ not as a mechanistic accomplishment, but to find nature not indifferent as [it appeared] in the outset, but to find it also involved in the ethical performance.²⁷ The greatness is not to find God but to

In addition, the pursuit of knowledge as an act of *imitatio Dei* is significant only in the act, giving significance to the act itself. This is discussed by Rambam in the *Guide* (I:68) where he equates the act of intellectual process of God and that of man.

²⁶ When nature seems to be opposed to God's will which is revealed in the Torah to be merciful then it is necessary for us to interpret a seemingly hostile nature in accordance with what we know, through revelation, as God's mercy and kindness. The Rav calls this the “theoretical performance of His revealed will in nature.”

²⁷ The Rav introduces the important notion that one can discern ethical content in nature itself. This idea is illustrated in the Gemara: Rav Yehuda says, ‘Had the Torah not been given, one would learn modesty from a cat, honesty from an ant and chastity from a dove’ (*Eruvin* 100b).

On a more fundamental level, this is the meaning of the verses in Genesis that state that “God saw that the Creation was good” (Genesis 1: 31). The Vilna Gaon takes this juxtaposition of creation and goodness to mean that every act of nature is “good.” Consequently, every act of nature has ethical content. See the *Asarah Klalim* of the Gaon for an elaboration of this idea. (עשרה כללים דף (קבלת הגר"א מאת יוסף אביבי תשנ"ג in קכ"ה).

The type of ethics to which the Rav refers in this discussion is unclear. Earlier in this lecture he claims that the commandments can be known only through revelation, and that the idea that one can empirically arrive at the *mitzvot* is termed ‘absurd’ (p. 51); here he seems to contradict this idea by claiming that ontology (and empirical thinking) leads to ethics (and *mitzvot*). It is possible that in this instance, ethics refers to a more general concept of moral behavior, and not to the more detailed halakhah which can be known only through revelation. This concept of general ethical behavior is referred to by Rambam in the *Guide*. He describes four levels of increasing perfection, namely material, ethical, intellectual, and moral perfection which comes from imitating God. Ethical perfection refers to the observance of *mitzvot* that come through revelation. (ch. 54 of sec. 3). The highest form of perfection, which comes from imitating God, would appear to be a more general form of moral behavior, which is not necessarily rooted in revelation but in understanding God in nature.

Hermann Cohen, in *The Religion of Reason*, on the basis of this passage in the *Guide*, makes the claim that for Rambam, there is no distinction between ontology and ethics. The Rav, in a personal conversation (quoted in Ravitzky),

search for Him. The discovery of the natural law alongside the realization of the moral law is a difficult [accomplishment]. The understanding of their mystery is the pursuit of God.

Lecture III

As we have already explained, it is not the accumulation of knowledge that is important, but the effort to attain it. This is true both in the drive for scientific knowledge and in regard to our *limud Torah*, the study of the Torah. The Torah was given not to the genius alone but to every man in Israel. And we know that people were not gifted with equal talent and ability. The Torah recognized this in the passage from *Hakbel*, למען ילמדו וישמעו.²⁸

Those who can learn are to do so. Those who can't must simply listen. There is a famous *ma'amar* of *Ḥazal* that says, הזהרו בזקן ששכח תלמודו (ברכות ה ע"ב). The same regard you have for an alert *hakbam* you must have for one who is already senile and has forgotten his accumulated wisdom, since it is the drive and effort that is important, and not the possession of wisdom.²⁹

Notice how in political governments such as the welfare state or in a social democracy such as communism, there is equality of economics but no equality as to the intellects. No one ever tried to create an intel-

agrees to this reading of Rambam. See the essay "Ontology and Ethics: A natural or metaphysical connection?" for an elaboration of this idea.

²⁸ The Rav is referring here to the commandment of הקהל את העם האנשים: הקהל והנשים והטף וגרך אשר בשעריך למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו וכו' (דברים לא:ב). The Talmud teaches: הקהל וכו' אם אנשים באים ללמוד נשים באות לשמוע, טף למה, באין? כדי ליתן שכר למביאייהן (חגיגה ג). "The men come to learn, the women come to hear, but why do the children come? In order to reap reward for those who bring them"

(חגיגה ג). The Rav learns from this Gemara that the Torah assigns value to the study of Torah for all types of people, regardless of their ability. Elsewhere, the Gemara emphasizes the democracy of Torah study as well: "Rav said to Rav Shmuel bar Shilat... those who cannot learn let them sit there among the other students [and whatever Torah they glean from the others will be a gain]" (*Bava Batra* (21a).

²⁹ The Gemara states: "Be careful (to respect) an elderly wise person who has forgotten his Torah studies – for it is said that both the broken tablets and the whole tablets were placed in the ark" (*Berakbot* 8b). The Rav understands that the Talmud refers to the senile scholar who is still making an attempt to learn and understand despite his handicap. Hence the Rav's emphasis on that scholar's efforts to accumulate knowledge. He is the scholar who, as the Rav says in the following paragraph, "tried and failed."

lectual democracy. Those who possess greater knowledge and skill possess also the higher ranks in society. Yet, Judaism tried to equate the dignity of every individual regardless of his possession of knowledge. [It differentiated] only in regard to his intellectual drive. Where Judaism gave preference to the *hakham* over the *am ha'aretz*, it was not with regard to his accumulation of wisdom but simply because he was engaged in this great ethical drive. If a man tries and fails, he is not condemned. [Rather] he receives equal respect [to that] of the *hakham*.

Modern society places too much emphasis on accomplishments. [That is] not [to say] that if I were ill I would not go to a more skilful physician. Even the Talmud speaks of the *mumbeh*. But as to social standing and acceptance there should be no difference. Communistic societies are built on skilfulness, and this usually leads to selfishness, egocentrism and tyranny. There is a story told by the sages, a very human story, of a certain *hakham*, possessor of great wisdom, who was to be placed in the World-to-Come next to a commoner who merited this reward because of his perfection of personality, philanthropic deeds, and his effort to study, though unsuccessful. He would rise every morning to study *Humash* before going to work. There is no greater attainment.

Avodah zara is not limited to primitive societies that worshipped idols. It [also refers to] a pluralism, where God shares human psychological interests of finite values. God, for *Yahadut*, must have no competition. There is no search for truth [independent of] a search for God. There can be only one drive, to find God. In our times, God has been relegated to a certain realm where He reigns supreme, while in other realms He is sometimes non-existent, or is in strong competition with some other interest. The consummation of a man's desire should be not in the accomplishment but rather in the drive [to find God]³⁰:

³⁰ Judaism's emphasis on drive rather than accomplishment—'intellectual democracy' as the Rav puts it—is a consequence of the fact that the Torah does not recognize any search for truth that is not a search for God. Only one who accumulates knowledge in finite fields of knowledge can be respected on the basis of and upon the accomplishment of his attainable goal. In contrast, one who studies the Infinite Wisdom of an Infinite God is valued for his drive towards Divine Wisdom rather than his accomplishment of that unattainable goal. A source for the Rav's idea is Rambam's identification of intellectual knowledge with love which indicates that it is the search, and not the attainment, of knowledge that is important. This is because love is an act, not an accomplishment.

הקל הנכבד והנורא הזה מצוה לאהבו וליראה אותו. (רמב"ם הלכות יסודי
התורה פרק ב: א)

This great and awesome God, it is a mitzvah to love and to fear him. (Rambam, *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 2:1)

Maimonides, in his *Mishneh Torah*, describes how man is drawn to the love of God—how after searching into the great wonders of His works, man is overcome with a great desire, a longing to search for Him.³¹ And in the *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides describes how the universe and its planets rotate in a circular movement, striving toward God, but never reaching Him.³² Maimonides saw the cosmos as a whole-and-great personality possessing the ethical drive towards God.

Now, to return to R. Yitzhak. The Torah, in disclosing the story of Genesis, [begins to develop] the motif of choosing Israel:

כה מעשיו הגיד לעמו... (תהילים קי"א: ו)

He revealed the powers of His acts to His people. (Psalms 111:6)

The emphasis being on “His people”; the choosing of a people devoted to God; the emergence of the Jewish community. Recording Creation was to show how, at the very beginning, the charismatic community³³ was the guiding motif of a Divine plan.

[The midrash relates *Beresheet* to] *Reishit temuto*, referring to Israel. Without [the knowledge of] creation, the act of historic selection would not be appreciated and the prophetic revelation on Sinai would not convey the proper meaning. How does this selection of a people come about?

An individual, Abraham, detects God. He senses that the mechanism of the world is guided by a Divine Will and the laws of nature are an expression of this will.³⁴ The natural law is only the guise for the

³¹ This concept is found in two places in Rambam: 1) *Yesodei Ha-Torah* chap. 2: *halakha* 2. 2) *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* chap. 10, *halakha* 6.

³² See *Guide*, Section II: chapter 7.

³³ The term ‘charismatic’ is understood within the Rav’s corpus as ‘free, anarchic and lonely.’ See *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, p. 203.

³⁴ In this crucial section, the Rav establishes through the personage of Avraham the historical link between ontology and ethics (see Lecture I, note 4 above). Avraham’s monotheism is the discovery of a rational natural law whose Creator must necessarily be incorporeal (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Avodah Zarah*, I:1). According to the Rav, Avraham’s monotheism is linked with ethics; the discovery of natural law is coupled with the discovery of moral law. This is explicitly stated in Rambam, *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* (ibid.), where he mentions Avraham’s discovery of the *kav ha-tzedek*, the ethical way.

moral law. The individual searches not only for the truth but for the good as well and finds both even without revelation:

ולא היה לו לא מלמד ולא מודיע ... אלא מדעתו הנכונה... (משנה תורה הל'
עבודה זרה א: ג)

He had neither teacher nor guide... only by his clear reasoning.
(*Mishneh Torah, Avodah Zarah* 1: 3)

Abraham accomplished both the finding of God and His Moral will. The principles of *tzedakah v'hesed* were not revealed to him. This is the prologue of selection.

What is the greatness of Abraham? To the Greeks the relation of man to God was in terms of the cultic performance. Their god wanted to be worshipped and glorified. Ethics to Aristotle was conventional, with no link to God. In certain Oriental religions the gods even favoured immoral acts. Abraham, however, understood that one serves God through one's moral being.

כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו דרך ה' לעשות צדקה
ומשפט... (בראשית יח: ו)

For I know he will command his children and household to guard the way of God, to do charity and justice. (Genesis 18:6)

Wherever Abraham went he built a *mizbeah*, but the Torah never reports the sacrifice of a *korban*. Abraham's emphasis was:

ויקרא שם בשם ה' א-ל עולם... (בראשית כא: לג)

And he called out there in the name of *Hashem, El Olam* (God, the Lord of the World). (Genesis 21: 33)³⁵

There is a scriptural basis for this linkage in the verses that describe Avraham's discovery of God. On one hand the verse in Genesis 21:33 "[Avraham] proclaimed there the name Hashem, El Olam" which Rambam in the *Guide* 2:13 interprets to mean that Avraham was the first to promulgate the idea of creation ex-nihilo, thus discovering the ontological truth of God in the world. On the other hand, the Torah (God) says concerning Avraham: "For I know that he will command his children and household to guard the way of God to do charity and justice" (Genesis 18:6), which clearly refers to ethical truth. The nexus of those two concepts is expressed by Rambam in *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* 1:3: "[Avraham's] heart explored and contemplated until he reached the way of truth and understood the path of justice through his intellect." See also *Guide* III: 29, II: 13, et al.

³⁵ See previous note.

[Rambam explains that he prayed and preached there in the name of the Divine ethical plan of the unique Creator.] This synthesis of worship and ethics is the greatest contribution of Abraham and the Jewish people. One's relationship to God expresses itself through one's behaviour within the finite community.

Now for the second phase of selection. God did not assist Abraham in his quest [for truth]. God first reveals Himself to him after the consummation of his search and together, at the *Brit Bein Ha-Besorim*, they form a covenant.³⁶ A covenant involves both parties, the finite and the infinite, in the same historical destiny. *Bereshit* and *Noah* were just introductions to Abraham (*Pirkei Avo*). God laid the foundation of Creation in six days, and it is man's job to continue this creation where God stopped, and also to rectify and redeem what Adam Ha-Rishon had corrupted. God assured His friend and servant that there are intrinsic ethical motives in creation that lend themselves to growth and sublimation. He was assured of fulfilment. This reality removes all doubts presented by the philosophies of scepticism, because nature will cooperate [with man], since God's moral law is expressed through His [created] works. Therefore, it is the same will that charges man with moral obligation, that charges nature with the natural law. And although we often find hostile occurrences, little by little we find realization. History and nature are both charged with the same will. The charismatic community was chosen to fulfil the [plan] of creation. Thus Creation is the background that lends sense and meaning to the choosing of a people.

Why does the story of Abraham precede the giving of the Torah? Because God did not impose law on man, but [the giving of the Torah] was the outgrowth of a covenant of the involvement of man and God in one destiny.

Lecture IV

Some philosophers of religion would call the complete surrender of wills to God a very punitive phase of religion [as] man surrenders due to fear. But for us it is an integral part of the religious experience. However, this is only one stage. It grows into a covenant, a mutual obligation, where man can find fulfilment. It is not a servant-master relationship, but, ra-

³⁶ Regarding the concept of covenant, see *Guide* 3:31, 49. There Rambam views the establishment of a covenant as the consummation and reward for intellectual achievement. The accomplishments include ethics, which is evidenced by Rambam's quotation of the verse mentioned in the previous footnote, "*Ki Yeda'atin*," which clearly refers to ethics.

ther, one of companionship. All prophesies should be interpreted in terms of guidance and counsel. God and man are then involved in one destiny.

What is the main mark of distinction between the pre-Sinaitic stage and post-Sinaitic stage? Nahmanides says that the *Avot* (Fathers) fulfilled the commandments only in Canaan (Israel) but not in *chutz la'aretz*, outside the land.³⁷ The reason was that the covenant involved the promise of the giving of Canaan to their children; and since the covenant was mutual the obligation took force in the area of the Land of Israel. Outside of this area it did not apply. Ramban says the reason Rachel died before returning to Canaan was because it was not permitted to live with two sisters within the land of Israel. This charismatic community was limited to a definite area, but after Sinai it was extended throughout the universe³⁸ *כי לי כל הארץ*. Yet, though it was extended to a greater area, the land of Israel still retained a greater extent of *kedusha*, holiness.

What else distinguishes between these two stages? There was no imperative or any element of compulsion before Sinai. The *hok* was self-discovered.³⁹ The community had to prove first that it can mould itself to a life of moral law. That is why this period of freedom preceded the period of the great drama to be enacted hundreds of years later, that of the imperative—the giving of the law.⁴⁰ The Patriarchs through their own freedom proved that they can meet God on the imperative level and that is why the Law was given to their children. This is why the Bible had to begin with this prologue of Creation and the story of the Patriarchs—to give meaning to their great apocalyptic revelation. Otherwise, God would have been looked upon as a tyrant who cruelly took a community into imprisonment. The main idea we see is that in the pre-Sinaitic period there was the involvement of God in a mutual agreement, while at Sinai it was unilateral: *na'aseh ve-nishma*.

The story of Genesis is to [direct Israel towards the fulfilment of the purpose of Creation], and the story of the Patriarchs is to show [that this process emerged] via free discovery. Hence, what is sin? Sin is not only a

³⁷ Ramban, *Bereshit* 26:5.

³⁸ Ramban, *Vayikera*, *Aharei Mot* 18: 25.

³⁹ The Rav probably refers here to self-motivation rather than self-discovery. This could be a reference to Ramban, who writes, “It seems to me that the opinion of our Sages is that Avraham learned the entire Torah by Divine Inspiration, studied the deep secrets of the *mitzvot*, and adhered to it voluntarily (*eino metzuvah ve-obseh*)” (*Bereshit* 26: 5).

⁴⁰ I.e., at Sinai.

transgression of moral law, but also of nature and creation,⁴¹ רדו בדגת הים - וכבשוה⁴² (בראשית א: כ"ח) "Rule over the creatures of the sea and conquer it" (Genesis 1: 28). Man is master so long as he behaves according to the law inherent in nature. If I transgress I forfeit my right as a unique, supreme ruler. [Returning to Rav Yitzhak] לתת להם נחלת גוים⁴³, the land of Israel is ours because the nation before us forfeited their right as owners. Man's status in this world is that of tenancy, מתנה על מנת להחזיר, God being the sole juridic owner. Man when he sins breaks the terms of the agreement.

Secondly, to own is not only a privilege but also a challenge. God's call to man is not only through the supernatural but also the natural, i.e., the external things of man—wealth, money, ownership, power, and social prestige; not only through his divine personality, his inherent intelligence, but also through his accidental attributes.⁴⁴ There are two types of revelation: the apocalyptic, where God reveals Himself through a number of media. He addresses man.⁴⁵ Then there is the revelation where God lets man share His properties which are exclusively God's. This is the case when God assigns the role of owner to man. God lets man share in His properties. In an autocratic state the subject cannot

⁴¹ In this crucial section, the Rav describes the ethical law implied in creation, thus laying the foundation for the union of ontology and ethics. According to the Rav, this unity is constituted by the halakhic concept of ownership and imparted possession. Creation is therefore an expression of God's ownership of the entire world. To man He imparted shared ownership on the condition that man would meet the terms of the 'lease.' However, if man breaks the 'terms of agreement' he forfeits his shared ownership. This is, therefore, the Rav's interpretation of the answer given by R. Yitzhak which appears in the first Rashi in Genesis (1:1, cited in Lecture I), that creation itself carries with it a moral content that ultimately lays the ethical foundation for all of the commandments.

⁴² *Beresbit* 1: 28. In this verse, the Rav understands that God gives man power and ownership of His natural Creation. This ownership carries ethical conditions that man must fulfill lest he forfeit his rights to it.

⁴³ Psalms 111: 6. In this verse, God expresses His right to strip man of power of ownership if he transgresses ethical law.

⁴⁴ The Rav's distinction between 'this divine personality, this inherent intelligence' and 'accidental properties' is based upon Rambam's distinction in *Moreh* 1:2 between man's intellectual ability to perceive 'true and false' (rational intellect) through which he is said to have been created in the 'image of God,' and between his knowledge of aesthetic or ethical attributes, which cannot be characterized as true or false but are, instead, 'judgements.'

⁴⁵ This refers to the revelation at Sinai.

infringe on the right of the ruler, as we find with Ahasuerus, where he had to extend his staff, and otherwise one was committed to death. But God desires man to share his attributes.⁴⁶

מה הוא נקרא חנון אף אתה תהא חנון.

Just as He is merciful, He desires that you also be merciful.

There is a revelation of descent such as at Sinai, and there is a revelation of ascent, where God lets man share that which is alien to him and is exclusively divine.⁴⁷ Adam's sin was that he rebelled and tried to share in something that was not his.⁴⁸ This is the sin of arrogance. If it is so important concerning the individual [as in the case of Adam] how much more is it in regard to a people. A land is the greatest of all gifts that God confers on a people. A national betrayal of Divine trust [arrogantly taking what God has not given] forfeits this nation its freedom and independence.

Thus Exile (*galut*) is to be understood as the loss of freedom [and of man's Divine attribute] as there is nothing as divine as freedom. For statehood is to be seen as the instrument of the ethos in pursuit of realization.⁴⁹ This is the reason, according to R. Yitzhak, that Canaan was taken from the seven nations and given to Israel.

To review:

- 1) The first premise is: There was Creation which tells us that the world was created as a scene where the great ethical drama can unfold itself, for Creation itself was a great ethical act. Within this framework a community was chosen to fulfill this ethical drama.

⁴⁶ This is based upon the *gemarab* in *Sotah* 14a: "R. Hamah the son of R. Hananiah says: What is the meaning of the verse 'You shall walk after Hashem, your God,' is it possible to (literally) walk after God? For it says, 'Hashem, your God is a consuming fire.' Rather it comes to teach you that you should imitate His ethical attributes. Just as He clothes those who have no clothes, etc." See also *Shabbat* 133b.

⁴⁷ By "revelation of descent" the Rav is referring to those commandments where God imposes [a seemingly] irrational law upon man. By "revelation of ascent" the Rav means those *mitzvoth* where man looks to emulate God's ethical acts.

⁴⁸ The Rav indicates that Adam, by eating from the Tree of Knowledge (*Etz Ha-Da'at*), took possession of something that he had not been permitted to own. Hence, the sin of Adam constituted a sin of theft or illegal possession.

⁴⁹ When man is securely situated in his own state, this allows him to devote himself to the pursuit of truth, which constitutes his purpose. See Rambam, *Hilkebot Teshuvah* 9:2.

- 2) God owns the world in a legal sense; not merely allegorically or symbolically. הנכסי גבוה is a *halakhic* concept. The owner owns the fruit of the laborer's labor; God not only has economic ownership, but he also owns me and my soul, להגוף שלך.⁵⁰
- 3) The story of the Patriarchs teaches us that man and God made a covenant of friendship with mutual obligations. God surrenders His rights to man. Man possesses because God as master surrenders rights to him. Were it not so, man would have no possessions since מה שקנה עבד קנה רבו.⁵¹ "The master acquires everything that is acquired by his slave" (*Kiddushin* 23b).
- 4) Man when he sins forfeits his rights and privileges of ownership. If it is true of an individual it is certainly true of a nation.

ולא תקיא הארץ אתכם... כאשר קאה את הגוי אשר לפניכם. (ויקרא יח:כח)
So the land will not spew you out... as it spewed out the nation who lived there before you. (Leviticus 18:28)

Lecture V

Ramban on Genesis 1:1, interpreting Rav Yitzhak's statement, [quotes the following verses]:

ויתן להם ארצות גוים ועמל לאומים יירשו בעבור ישמרו חקיו ותורותיו ינצורו.
(תהילים קה:מד-מה)⁵²

And He gave them the lands of the nations and they inherited the labor of the nations in order that they observe His statutes and guard His laws. (Psalms 105: 44-5)

This is the ethical motive behind the Divine will in granting man a land.

ונתן רבי יצחק טעם לזה כי התחילה התורה בבראשית ברא אלקים וספור כל ענין היצירה עד בריאת אדם, ושהמשילו במעשה ידיו וכל שם תחת רגליו, וגם עדן, שהוא מבהר המקומות הנבראים בעולם הזה, נעשה מכון לשבתו, עד שגירש אותו חטאו משם... (רמב"ן, בראשית א:א)

R. Yitzhak gave a reason for it. The Torah began with the chapter of "In the beginning God created..." and recounted the whole subject of creation until the making of man, how He (God) granted him dominion over the works of His hands, and that He put all things under his feet; and how the Garden of Eden, which is the

⁵⁰ *Selipot*.

⁵¹ *Kiddushin* 23b.

⁵² This verse is an expression of the idea developed by the Rav in Lecture IV: God's moral law is expressed through man's possession and dispossession of land.

choicest of places created in the world, was made the place of his abode until his sin caused his expulsion therefrom. (Ramban, Genesis 1:1 based on R. Chavel's translation.)

The [phrase] תחת רגליו [שתה] כל, “all things you have put under his feet,” shows man's unique position in this kingdom. Power is an exclusively divine attribute. Dominion is God's, הקל הגדול הגבור והנורא, the Almighty, the Great, the Powerful, the Awesome.⁵³ God let man share in His power and dominion.⁵⁴ This virtue was transferred to man not as a natural being alone but as a divine being [commanded] to rise to the level of transcendental existence.⁵⁵ [If he does not act as a *tzelem Elokim*] he is a rebel who usurps power.

שגירש אותו חטאו משם (רמב"ן לעיל), “until his sin caused his expulsion therefrom” (Ramban *ibid.*). Through sin man forfeits the privilege. Punishment is not extraneous but grows out of the act itself. For example, if a child insists on touching fire, let him till he burns himself.⁵⁶

R. Yitzhak did not deny [the need for the] metaphysical drive [to gain metaphysical knowledge] but he felt that man should [acquire] it through his own initiative and not through revelation.^{57,58} The Jewish

⁵³ From the liturgy of the “Eighteen Benedictions,” the daily Jewish prayer.

⁵⁴ According to the Rav's reading of Ramban, not only was man allowed to share God's possession of the land, he was also allowed to share God's dominion over the world. The same ethical stipulation made regarding possession was made with respect to man's power. Therefore, if man transgresses God's will, his power will be taken from him.

⁵⁵ The intention of this statement is unclear. Perhaps the Rav means to say that not only was man given the physical and intellectual capabilities to dominate nature, but he was also given certain metaphysical powers that allow him to rule over the spiritual worlds. This is in accordance with R. Hayyim Volozhiner's understanding of *Tzelem Elokim*, that man resembles God because he was created with the power to affect the spiritual worlds. The Rav understands that this power initially belonged to God and was then granted to man on the condition that he obey the Divine Will (*Nefesh Ha-Hayyim, Sha'ar 1*).

⁵⁶ The Rav's contention here is that the powers given to man will ‘naturally’ work against him if he uses them through transgressing God's Will. Hence, punishment is part of a ‘natural’ Divine process that empowers or disempowers man. The Rav brings proof of his assertion from Ramban's usage of “his”: “his sin caused his expulsion.” “His” refers to man, that man himself caused his expulsion.

⁵⁷ This is a continuation of the Rav's exposition on Ramban's interpretations of the statement of Rav Yitzhak. Ramban writes:

Therefore Rav Yitzhak said that there is no need for the Torah to begin with the account of Creation... for none of these events can be under-

mystics were the ones most driven by this metaphysical drive. To them the problem of creation was the most important factor. To Christian mystics⁵⁹ revelation was the most important factor, but the Jewish mys-

stood clearly from scripture alone... for this knowledge would be granted to exceptional individuals who have an oral tradition from Sinai. (*Commentary on the Torah, Bereshit* 1:1)

Ramban's depiction of man's knowledge of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* clearly refers to man's metaphysical, rather than scientific, understanding. The description of Creation, which can only be known through revelation, is an exclusive knowledge reserved for those outstanding individuals who, as the Rav notes, are 'driven' by their own initiative to understand the metaphysical structure of the physical-spiritual universe.

The answer given by Rav Yitzhak to prove the necessity of beginning with the Creation narrative, is that the events of *Bereshit*, extending from Creation to the generations of the Flood and the Dispersion, illustrate the pattern of possession and dispossession of land as Divinely decreed in accordance with man's adherence to the Divine Will.

The Rav understands Ramban's interpretation of Rav Yitzhak's question as coming from a recognition of man's innate desire to know the metaphysics of Creation. However, this desire, for most people, is not attainable, due to the esoteric nature of this knowledge. For this reason, the Torah should have begun with the first commandment, *hahodesh ba-zeh lakhem*.

The answer given to this question is that it was deemed preferable that man independently learn the moral lessons of the events of Creation through rational thought, and not rely upon a revelation of esoteric knowledge that was meant only for an exclusive group of mystics.

The Rav's phrase 'require it through his own initiative' means that through hearing of the events of *Bereshit* every man can independently be informed of the moral law inherent in the possession of land and power over nature. This is in contrast to the mystic who gleans the moral law through Revelation. It is clear that the Rav understands that there is a metaphysical basis of this moral law. See Lectures X and XI and the essay "Ontology and Ethics: A Natural or Metaphysical Connection?"

Alternatively one may interpret the phrase 'require it through his own initiative' to mean that man must bring himself to a level where he will merit metaphysical revelation. This understanding is borne out in the next paragraph.

⁵⁸ This is in contrast to the Kabbalists, who claim that both the commandments and metaphysics of Creation can be known only through revelation, as noted in fn. 11.

⁵⁹ This is in accordance with what the Rav says in the first lecture: For the Christians, what is important is not the act of Creation, but God's Revelation of Himself to man for the purpose of man's salvation (Lecture I, Fn. 5). This comment of the Rav is not meant to exclude the importance of revelation in the eyes of the Jewish mystics to whom revelation is crucial for revealing the details of God's creation of the world. (See Lecture II).

tics wanted to fathom Creation [that they might contemplate existence] from beginning to end, that [they might view] this world as infringing on the aloneness and loneliness of God, which existed before creation.⁶⁰

To say that R. Yitzhak did not value the metaphysical drive would be nonsensical to a man like Ramban. The mystics were not afraid to enter any area. To the mystics R. Yitzhak's question [of what value is there in detailing creation] was an absurdity. But as we explained, R. Yitzhak does not deny [the need for this] metaphysical knowledge, but contends that man is to attain it through his own initiative. But because a mystic [such as Ramban] is determined to solve [not only] the mysteries within the reach of man but also those beyond, he cannot rely on his own faculties, and so he seeks to find it by the bestowal of heavenly grace and kindness, to open the gates to their metaphysical mystery.^{61,62}

Mysticism is called Kabbalah and is a doctrine that treats the most intimate God experience, [understood] on a historical traditional level.⁶³ God or one of His angels has disclosed these verities of the Divine mysteries which otherwise would have been hidden from the human mind. Therefore, for Nahmanides, Revelation is not only on the ethical level but also on the metaphysical level.⁶⁴ [He believes that Creation had to be

⁶⁰ This is a reference to the Kabbalistic theory of Creation, and in particular, to the Arizal's concept of *Tzimtzum*, Divine Contraction, which the Rav discusses in Lecture IX. For the Kabbalists, Creation is a movement of God within Himself in order to allow for the existence of the 'other.' By this, God emerges from His "loneliness" and allows for the existence of the other with whom He can establish a personal, I-thou relationship.

⁶¹ R. Hayyim Vital writes in his introduction to *Etz Hayyim* (4a), "There is no doubt that these things can be understood not through the intellect of physical man, but only through an oral tradition or directly from Elijah *z'l* or through souls that reveal themselves in each generation to those few who merit it . . ."

⁶² The Rav is making the following point: Ramban understands that only through revelation can man be informed of the metaphysical basis of creation. Such information, however, is granted only to those who take the initiative to delve into such spiritual secrets. Hence the metaphysics of Creation are revealed only through merit, and not through rational understanding. Given that the Torah was written for all, the account of creation could not have been for the purpose of metaphysical information alone. This approach does not in any way undermine the metaphysical description of Creation.

⁶³ The Rav means that the mystical secrets of creation can be known only from a tradition that goes back to Moshe at Sinai, and cannot be empirically rediscovered, hence the term 'Kabbalah' which means literally 'a received tradition.' This is in accordance with Ramban quoted above.

⁶⁴ In other words, the Jewish mystical view of Creation is in contradistinction to the rationalist view of Rambam, presented in Lectures VII and VIII. Rational-

revealed at Sinai but it could only be explained meaningfully as an oral transmission to Moshe.] Ramban, as a halakhic individual, should have said that man could rely on his own intelligence [to develop this understanding], but here he forgets himself as a halakhist and talks like a typical Kabbalist.

Both mystical wisdom and the ethical norm converged through revelation. There were many heavenly figures who appeared to these Kabbalists and conveyed certain metaphysical knowledge. Ramban therefore reinterpreted R. Yitzhak's saying in terms of esoteric Kabbalism. [Rav Yitzhak asks why detail the six days of Creation in scripture since] the understanding of this revelation was reserved for a few selected scholars. Universal revelation⁶⁵ was on the level of ethical norms, [the *mitzvoth*]. The Kabbalists, however, can fill in the gaps in the *pesukim* and discover the real story. What is written in the Bible is the exoteric story for the common man.⁶⁶

Hassidism did not revolutionize the Kabbalah. It added some things but it did not revolutionize it. What the Ba'al Shem Tov or the Ba'al ha-Tanya did was creative in the field of the psychology of religion, but the premises are those of the Ari Ha-Kadosh. Hassidism for me developed an optimistic philosophy, while mysticism can express either of two feelings: despair, or self-confidence in the union with God.

Secondly, Hassidim removed the esoteric part of Kabbalah and popularized it. They tried to strip the ideas of the Ari of its peculiar terminology and present it in a popular form. They made Kabbalah accessible to everyone. The opposition of the Gaon of Vilna was in defense of esotericism. These men are by nature isolationists who retreat from society. For the Gaon it was an effort even to come out to pray with a minyan. In contrast, the Ba'al Shem Tov liked the crowds and the mob. The Gaon was an introvert; the Hassidim were extroverts. The same is true in philosophy. The German philosophers, e.g., Kant, wrote in a dif-

ism requires revelation only for the commandments, but not for understanding Creation. For the rationalists, creation can be understood through science and intellect alone. For the mystics, understanding Creation also requires revelation.

⁶⁵ That is, the *mitzvoth* were revealed at Sinai to the entire nation.

⁶⁶ The Bible reveals the exoteric message of the Torah to the common man. The Kabbalah reveals its esoteric meaning to the select few. The phrase "fill the gaps in the *pesukim* (verses)" refers to the esoteric Torah which was revealed through white letters on black letters of fire, as opposed to the revealed Torah which was revealed through black letters on white letters of fire (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Shekalim*).

ficult, esoteric style. The same is true with Halakha, as in the disputes of Shammai and Hillel.

To return to the text:

בְּרֵאשִׁית, בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים, אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ. הַיְתָה תְּהוֹ וְנְהוּ, וְחָשֶׁךְ, עַל-
פְּנֵי תְהוֹם; וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, יְהִי אוֹר; וַיְהִי-אוֹר.

The first sentence beginning with בְּרֵאשִׁית can be interpreted in several ways:

- 1) [We can read the word בְּרֵאשִׁית] as a noun in the form of an adverbial phrase meaning “In the beginning.”⁶⁷
- 2) [We can read it] as an adverb meaning “Firstly.”⁶⁸
(Both [of the above definitions] answer the question “when,” and the word בְּרֵאשִׁית modifies the word בָּרָא.)
- 3) [We can read it] as a noun in the form of *semikbut*,⁶⁹ turning the verb בָּרָא into a participial noun in the possessive case. Thus I would read, “When God created heaven and earth.”⁷⁰

Now if you retain the "ו" before the word הָאָרֶץ to read וְהָאָרֶץ in the next sentence of וְהָאָרֶץ הַיְתָה תְּהוֹ וְנְהוּ then the sentence of וְהָאָרֶץ is a [parenthetical] clause and בְּרֵאשִׁית modifies the word וַיֹּאמֶר in the third sentence, and the verb בָּרָא should be read as בָּרָא. Together it would be read in this way:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ, (וְהָאָרֶץ הַיְתָה תְּהוֹ וְנְהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל-
פְּנֵי תְהוֹם, וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם); וַיֹּאמֶר...⁷¹

⁶⁷ “Beginning” is a noun, and the prepositional phrase “in the beginning” comes to modify the verb בָּרָא ; i.e., created.

⁶⁸ This interpretation understands the word בְּרֵאשִׁית as an adverb modifying בָּרָא, created, in contrast to the Rav’s first explanation, which interprets בְּרֵאשִׁית as a prepositional phrase containing the noun “beginning” and also modifying בָּרָא. Nonetheless, both interpretations express a temporal reality and have roughly the same meaning, “When God created the world.”

⁶⁹ This means that בְּרֵאשִׁית is to be translated as “the beginning of.” The verb בָּרָא is now no longer a verb, created, but a noun: “the creation of.”

⁷⁰ Here the Rav, instead of translating the words בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא to mean ‘in the beginning of the creation of...’, is translating it, ‘When God created heaven and earth.’

In any case, the temporal meaning is present in both phrases: The verse is not relating an act of God, but describing what happened when God created the world.

⁷¹ Read this way, the verses translate as follows: ‘In the beginning of God’s Creation of the world, when the world was chaotic and there was darkness upon

[Read this way, the verses translate as follows: “In the beginning of God’s Creation of the world, when the world was chaotic and there was darkness upon the deep waters, God said...” Therefore, the phrase “in the beginning of God’s Creation of the world” indicates when God said (...ויאמר), “Let there be light.”] However, if you eliminate the letter "ו" in the word **והארץ**, then **בראשית** would modify the word **היתה** in the sentence **והארץ היתה תהו ובהו**. Together it would read:

בראשית, ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ. הארץ היתה תהו ובהו, וחשוך, על-פני תהום; ורוח אלהים, מרחפת על-פני המים.⁷²

[Read this way, the verses translate as follows: “In the beginning of God’s Creation of the world, the world was chaotic and there was darkness upon the deep waters. God said...” Therefore, the phrase “in the beginning of God’s Creation of the world” indicates when the world was (**היתה**) chaotic and there was darkness upon the deep waters.]

- 4) As an adverb meaning “How.” (Maimonides ch. 30, Bk II.) Through **ראשית** as an instrument, God created

Using the first interpretation, Onkelos, the Septuagint, the Vulgate, Sforino, Targum Jonathan, all translate **בראשית** as “in the beginning,” answering the question “When.” This tells us that **שמים וארץ**, heaven and earth, were created at the very beginning. This provides an answer to two questions:

- 1) Creation ex nihilo, there was nothing but God before Creation.
- 2) The problem of the sequence of Creation from **בראשית** to **ויכלו** [as all creation of heaven and earth is attributed to God].

The various phases of creation did not grow out of each other not by sheer force of evolution but by God’s word: **בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם**. Our sages have said: “The world was created with ten Divine

the deep waters, God said...’ Therefore the phrase “in the beginning of God’s Creation of the world” indicates when God said (...ויאמר), “Let there be light.”

⁷² Read this way, the verses translate as follows: ‘In the beginning of God’s Creation of the world, the world was chaotic and there was darkness upon the deep waters. God said...’ Therefore the phrase ‘in the beginning of God’s Creation of the world’ indicates when the world was (**היתה**) chaotic and there was darkness upon the deep waters.

utterances" (*Avot* 5: 1). With ten sayings the world was created, and each phase is a separate creation.

However, it does not say that there is no transition [and connection between the stages].⁷³ Still, each stage is a miracle in itself. The process of creation has no connection or causal link except the intervention of God's word. The Greek idea of matter passing through different stages of formation is alien to the Biblical narrative.⁷⁴

There are many midrashim that are alien or contrary to the basic principles of Judaism, and Maimonides said that we are obligated not to accept all midrashim, but, rather, to reject those that appear contrary to a basic principle.⁷⁵ ❧

⁷³ The Rav presents an apparent contradiction. On one hand, he asserts here that 'the various phases of creation did not grow out of each other by sheer force of evolution but by God's word.' As a result, each stage is a 'separate creation' and a 'miracle in itself.' On the other hand, the Rav also maintains that 'It does not say that there is no transition now,' which suggests that there is an evolution between one stage and the next.

⁷⁴ The Rav appears to be advancing a position that the different forms of creation emerged one from the other in discrete, quantum steps in accordance with God's word. This is alien to Greek science which the Rav described in Lecture I. "[Aristotle] could not understand morphological evolution. For him, all forms were eternal and could not change. Hence, nature, for Aristotle, did not undergo any change. Therefore, any theory where Creation sprang into being was nonsense to the ancient Greeks." This is in contradistinction to the Biblical narrative, which believes in an evolution created by God's word. The phrase "Greek idea of matter passing through different stages" is a reference to Aristotle whose science can only conceive of matter changing form within its given class of creation.

⁷⁵ The Rav here is referring to the principle of Creation ex Nihilo. Maimonides claims in Chapter 30 of Section 2 of the Guide that certain Midrashim follow the Aristotelian theory of the eternity of the world and therefore should not be accepted. This Aristotelian theory is alien to Judaism because it does not recognize the concept of Creation ex Nihilo.