

Bereshit

*The six days of Creation • The Torah does not teach science
• Unity of the human race • “It is not good for the man to be
alone” • Eden and expulsion: the moral • “Am I my brother’s
keeper?” • The descendants of Adam*

1:1. In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.

The wise understand that the intent of the Torah is not to teach of the natural sciences, but that the Torah was given only to direct humankind on the path of righteousness and justice, and to establish belief in the Unity and Providence of God in their hearts, for not to the scholars alone was the Torah given, but to the entire people. Just as the concepts of Providence and reward and punishment are not explained (and properly not explained) in the Torah in a philosophical manner, but are treated in human terms (“And the Lord was angry with them,” “And His heart grieved,” and many other such expressions), so the story of the Creation is not told (and properly not told) in the Torah in a philosophical manner—for as the Rabbis said, to impress upon flesh and blood the power of the Creation is impossible.¹

Therefore it is not proper for the Torah scholar to force the Scriptures from their literal meaning to make them conform with the natural sciences,

1. This Rabbinical saying is cited by Maimonides in the introduction to the *Guide for the Perplexed* and by Nachmanides in his first comment on Gen. 1:1. A source for the saying is *Midrash ha-Gadol* on Gen. 1:1, but this medieval Yemenite work would have been unavailable to Shadal, as it was introduced to European scholars only in 1878.

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nor is it proper for the critic to deny the Divine origin of the Torah if he finds things in its stories that do not conform with scientific research. Both scholar and critic ought instead to examine the inner nature of the human mind, and the different learning approaches nature takes when it speaks to each mind: to a child in its way, to a youth in another way, to an aged person in another, to the strong in a special way, to the weak in a special way, to the rich in one way, to the poor in another. So with all groups of human beings nature speaks to their minds in a way particularly befitting them, and nature never reveals to any of them the naked truth without some veil or garb. And so the blessed Giver of the Torah (for the God Who created nature and the God Who gave us the Torah is one God), when He speaks to human beings, must speak according to their level and not according to His.

Now God wanted to proclaim to humankind the unity of the world and the unity of the human race, for error in these two matters caused many evils in ancient times. Without knowledge of the world's unity, it followed that people believed in private gods with limitations and imperfections, and that people would do evil deeds in order to gain their favor (see my comment in *Yitro* (Exod. 20:3) on "You shall not have other gods").² Without knowledge of the unity of the human race, it followed that one people would hate and despise another, and that physical force, not justice and righteousness, would rule among them. These two cardinal principles—the unity of the world and the unity of the human race—are the overall purpose in the story of the Creation. Other parts of the Book contain other purposes, which will be explained.

In the beginning, God created. Many have been aroused to ask why no specific utterance is mentioned in the creation of heaven and earth, and why the creation of the angels is not mentioned. One may also wonder why the first day is different from the rest of the days of creation: each of them is devoted to a particular thing, or to particular things of one type or class, but the first day includes a particular thing, the creation of light, and includes besides that a general thing that is more comprehensive than anything else—the creation of heaven and earth. This is very strange; it would have been fitting for one day to be devoted to the creation of heaven and earth, without adding the creation of a particular thing, the light.

2. In that comment, Luzzatto expands on this concept: those who believe in one God believe that He is good, and they seek to emulate His goodness, but those who believe in many gods inevitably believe in one or more evil gods and seek to emulate their evil, as ancient history attests. Polytheists ascribe jealousy, hatred, and rivalry to their gods, with the result that human relations suffer. It was only after the Torah was disseminated over the world that the nations began to recognize that all men are brothers.

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It seems to me that one answer will suffice for these three questions, and that is that heaven and earth were created not on the first day, but *before* it. As it is said, “The Torah was not given to the ministering angels.”³ The purpose of the creation story is only to tell of the beginning of the lower world, the abode of humankind, and only partly of the beginning of the higher world as it relates to humankind, that is, the good that reaches us from it. It would not have been possible to explain Heavenly matters to man, and yet neither was it God’s intention to cause man to believe that nothing exists other than what we see and know. For this reason, the Torah tells what was created and done on each of the six days of creation, but prefaces the details of the creation with one verse to include another creation, one that preceded the six days. Its details are not specified in the Torah, which merely states, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”—and not “And God said, ‘Let there be heaven; let there be earth’”—in order to inform us that it was not His purpose to tell us the details of that creation, and that this is only an abbreviated statement including several utterances.

The “heaven” and “earth” mentioned here are not exactly the same heaven and earth that are later specified on the second and third days. The “heaven” mentioned here includes everything above the earth, while the heaven mentioned on the second day includes only that part of it known to humankind. The “earth” mentioned here includes the land with the water, and the air above it, while the earth mentioned on the third day includes only the dry land.

This, in my opinion, is the essential plain meaning of this verse. One might object that this negates what is written in the Ten Commandments, “For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth” (Exod. 20:11), but actually there is no contradiction there to my interpretation. It does not say, “In six days the Lord created [*bara*] the heaven and the earth,” but “In six days the Lord made [*asah*] the heaven and the earth,” meaning the making of the sky and the division of the land from the water. The words “and all that is in them” in the Ten Commandments (*ibid.*) refer to the light, the luminaries, and the living things on the land and in the water. In *Ki Tissa* [“For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested” (Exod. 31:17)], the verse is brief and mentions only the heaven and the earth, while “all that is in them” is included by inference.

The Rabbis, too, said that the Throne of Glory preceded the creation of the world [*Genesis Rabbah* 1:5].

3. See *Berakhot* 25b, *Yoma* 30a, *Kiddushin* 54a, and *Me’ilah* 14b.

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created (*bara*). The verb ברא (*bara*, “to create”), in the *kal* and *nif'al* conjugations, is never found anywhere to refer to human activity. We find that a human being is called “maker” [*oseh*] or “fashioner” [*yotser*], but never “creator” [*borei*]. It seems that this root refers to anything out of the ordinary way of the world, as in:

- “I will make wonders that were never performed [*nivre'u*] in all the earth” (Exod. 34:10);
- “If the Lord performs a creation [*beri'ah yivra*] so that the earth opens its mouth” (Num. 16:30);
- “I have announced to you new things from this time.... They are created [*nivre'u*] now, and not from old” (Isa. 48:6-7);
- “For the Lord has created [*vara*] a new thing in the land” (Jer. 31:21).

Here, “God created the heaven and the earth” is a Divine activity without compare.

We find creation *ex nihilo* stated explicitly in 2 Maccabees 7:28.⁴ The Samaritans, too, in their liturgy, say that the world was created from nothing, and so the Karaites also believe.

Ezekiel, in speaking of the king of Tyre, does use the terminology of “creation”: “In the day that you were created [*hibbara'akha*] they were prepared” (Ezek. 28:13); “From the day that you were created [*hibbar'akh*]” (ibid., v. 15). By way of poetic metaphor, he likened the king to Adam, whom God created and placed in the Garden of Eden, as he says, “You were in Eden, the garden of God” (ibid., v. 13). For this reason, the prophet refers to him in terms of “creation,” as if he had not been formed by a father and mother but had been a creation of God Himself.

In the *pi'el* conjugation [*berei*] we find this root in the sense of “hewing” and “cutting,” and in the *hif'il* conjugation, *lehavri'akhem* (“to make yourselves fat”) (1 Sam. 2:29), in the sense of “healthy” or “fat.” In some manuscripts we find, in the *kal* conjugation [of a different verb, *barah* (“to eat”)], “neither did he eat [*bara*] bread with them” (2 Sam. 12:17), with an *alef* instead of a *he* [i.e., the irregular form ברא instead of the expected ברה]; this was Ibn Ezra’s reading but not Kimhi’s.

God (*Elohim*). *El* (“god”) and *ayil* (“lord”) are terms of strength and power. *Elohim* is the plural form, and it was used by idol-worshipping peoples

4. “I beg you, child, look at the sky and the earth; see all that is in them and realize the God made them out of nothing...” (New English Bible).

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(*Kuzari* 4:1). They used this term for all the forces of nature that are the causes of events on earth. They worshipped them all, and each one was a god to them. The monotheistic Hebrews, however, kept this name in the plural form to show that the God they worshipped was not one individual force—as the nations used to say, “The Lord is a God of the hills, but He is not a God of the valleys” (1 Kings 20:28)—but a grouping of all the forces, and master of them all (for a similar explanation, see the comment on the word “seas” at Gen. 1:10 below). Thus they called Him by the name *Tseva’ot* (“Hosts”), to say that He Himself includes the forces of all the hosts of heaven that the nations used to worship. See my comment on Isa. 1:9.⁵

the heaven and the earth (*et ha-shamayim ve-et ha-arets*). The Torah speaks in the language of man and divides the whole world, and all the worlds, into two parts, upper and lower, according to the viewpoint of humankind that lives on the earth. In Arabic, *سماء* is the equivalent of *gavah* (“to be high”) in Hebrew, and in Aramaic, ארע—from which comes ארעא, which equals ארץ (“land”) with the exchange [from Aramaic to Hebrew] of the letters *ayin* and *tsadi*, as in צאן/עאן (“sheep”), רבץ/רבע (“lie down”) which yields ארבעה (“four”), and similarly עיר as a term for “angel,” corresponding to the Hebrew ציר, which denotes “messenger”—means “low,” as in, “And after you shall rise another kingdom inferior [ארעא] to you” (Daniel 2:39).

According to some (Golius and Clericus), the words *סמא* and *ארע* were formed from *shamayim* and *erets*. It seems likely, as per R. Jacob Abendana, that *shamayim* comes from *sham* (“there”), denoting a distant place, and that it was called *shamayim* because it is far and high from every direction that a human being faces. The Arabic verb meaning “to be high” was afterwards derived from *shamayim*, for verbs that refer not to action but to a characteristic of the subject—like the verb *סמא*—do not likely come into existence before the noun or adjective that indicates the characteristic in question. First, for example, the blood of living creatures was called *dam*; later, anything resembling blood was called *adom* (“red”); and still later, the adjective was made into the verb *adam*, *ademu* (“was red,” “were red”). However, the adjective *ארע*, which describes anything low, probably came into use before the “land” was called ארעא.

5. In this comment, Luzzatto elaborates on these ideas and expresses disagreement with those who translate *YHVH Tseva’ot* as “Lord of Hosts,” i.e., God of the angels or of the stars.