

Parashat Bereishit, 5780, 2019:

*Emet in Our Lives*

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Parashat Bereishit is an endlessly fascinating *parasha*. While it contains many topics, I find the creation of humankind to be one of the most thought-provoking themes contained therein:

And G-d said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” And G-d created man in His image; in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them. And the L-rd G-d formed man of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul. (*Sefer Bereishit* 1:26-27, 2:7, this and all Rashi and Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

In his commentary on the phrase, “Let us make man,” Rashi (1040-1105) suggests the following “story behind the story:”

**Let us make man:** From here we learn the humility of the Holy One, blessed be He. Since man was created in the likeness of the angels, and they would envy him, He consulted them... **Let us make man:** Even though they [the angels] did not assist Him in His creation, and there is an opportunity for the heretics to rebel (to misconstrue the plural as a basis for their heresies), Scripture did not hesitate to teach proper conduct and the trait of humility...

Rashi notes that the angels were envious and “they did not assist Him [Hashem] in His creation [of humankind].” *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 8:5 elaborates upon the angels’ multi-level reactions, and reveals that in addition to envy, some angels were actually completely hostile to the notion of creating humankind:

Rabbi Simon said: “At the very moment the Holy One blessed be He sought to create the

first man, the Ministering Angels gathered together into various groups and caucuses. Some of them declared: 'Let him be created!' While others proclaimed: 'Do not create him!' This is written in the verse: '*Chesed* (overflowing kindness) and *emet* (truth) have met [that is, have encountered one another] and *tzedek* (justice) and *shalom* (peace) have kissed [that is, met up with each other].'" (Translations my own)

At this point, the *midrash* presents the very different claims of *chesed*, *emet*, *tzedek* and *shalom* (that is, the positions of the various groups of angels) in order to clearly represent their claims:

*Chesed* said: "Let him be created! After all, humankind is capable of acting with lovingkindness." *Emet* protested: "Do not create him! Humankind is nothing other than a pack of lies!" *Tzedek* said: "Let him be created! After all, humankind will undertake righteous acts." *Shalom* said: "Do not create him! Humankind represents endless fighting [and violence]. What did the Holy One blessed be He do? He grabbed *emet* and tossed it to the ground! This is what the verse states: "And He threw *emet* to the ground." (*Sefer Daniel* 8:12)

In sum, *chesed* and *tzedek* strongly supported the creation of humankind, while *emet* and *shalom* were just as equally opposed. The battle of *chesed* and *tzedek* versus *emet* and *shalom* is echoed in the positions of two great Chasidic *rebbe*s, the Ba'al Shem Tov *zatzal* (1698-1760) and the Kotzker *zatzal* (1787-1859). As noted by Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel *zatzal* (1907-1972) in the introduction to his work, *The Kotzker*, the primacy of *chesed* and *tzedek* over *emet* and *shalom* is the hallmark of the Ba'al Shem Tov: "In this world, *chesed* stands on a higher level than *emet*." In stark contrast, the Kotzker was deeply pained by humankind's creation, for now "*emet* remains lying upon the ground." (Translations my own). As one might expect, these very different positions of the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Kotzker gave rise to two contrasting kinds of *Chasidut*: In broad terms, those groups who follow in the footsteps of the Ba'al Shem Tov continue to stress the superiority of *chesed* over pure *emet*, whereas those who emulate the Kotzker continue to focus upon the pursuit of absolute and uncompromising *emet*.

As our relationship to *emet* is profoundly analyzed in the non-Chassidic world as well. One powerful example of this discussion is found in the introduction to *Iggrot Moshe*, written by one of the greatest *poskim* (halachic decisors) of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's *zatzal* (1895-1996). Therein, he differentiates between *ha'emet klapei shamaya* (the *emet* of Heaven) and the *emet* that man can apprehend:

And, in all humility, it surely appears to me that it was logical and permissible, and even obligatory, for latter halachic experts to decide issues of Jewish Law, even though they were not deemed to have reached the level of halachic decision making and expertise that we find in the generations of the Sages of the *Gemara*. For in these cases, we can certainly doubt that perhaps [these latter authorities] did not determine the law in congruence with the *ha'emet klapei shamaya*. Yet, we must remember, that in regards to rendering a practical halachic decision, it has already been stated in the Torah [*Sefer Devarim* 30:12 and by our Sages in *Talmud Bavli, Baba Metziah* 59b], "*lo ba'Shamayim he*" ("it — the Torah — is not in Heaven"). But, rather, the determination of the *halacha* is according to that which appears to the Torah sage after performing his due diligence and analysis of the Talmud and the opinions of prior halachic experts, according to his intellectual acumen, and with respect and awe for Hashem, may He be blessed. (Translation and brackets my own)

In sum, Rav Moshe maintains that even though, more often than not, we are not privy to *ha'emet klapei shamaya*, we are nonetheless mandated to determine the *halacha* in accordance with the principles and precedents that form the fabric of halachic jurisprudence, for this is the *emet* that is accessible to us.

Based upon our sources, we are now in a better position to understand the midrash's phrase, "the Holy One blessed be He...grabbed *emet* and tossed it to the ground!" Hashem knew that we cannot exist in a world of *ha'emet klapei shamaya*, for we are finite and incapable of apprehending that which is infinite. Therefore, in order to create a world wherein we could thrive, perfect and ideal *emet* needed to be set aside.

With Hashem's help and our fervent desire, may each of us be *zocheh* (merit) to live lives

filled with *emet*, and the pursuit of *chesed*, *tzedek* and *shalom*. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>  
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:  
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\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.