

The Joy of Getting It Right the Second Time

By Yossi Ives

The creation story at the beginning of Genesis is dominated by key commands that brought the universe into existence: “Let there be light,”¹ “Let there be water,”² “Let there be luminaries,”³ and so on. The rabbis refer to these as “The 10 Utterances.” Obviously, creation consists of many more than 10 components, so each of these utterances was broadly inclusive. Why, then, did there even need to be 10 utterances? Couldn't a single, even broader one have been sufficient?

This question is addressed in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers):

The world was created with 10 utterances. What does this come to teach us, as it could have been created with a single utterance? However, this is in order to get pay-back from the wicked for destroying a world that was created with 10 utterances, and to reward the righteous for sustaining a world that was created with 10 utterances.⁴

In other words, to compound the guilt of the wicked and to increase the merit of the righteous, the world was deliberately created with a larger number of utterances.

It is understandable that the Almighty would create the world in a manner that would afford greater opportunity for reward to those who choose to do good. But why would He want to create the world in a manner that is specifically designed to generate greater punishment for those who do wrong? Surely G-d is the epitome of goodness and would not pursue a scheme to saddle a sinner with the maximum amount of punishment!

The Need for a Void

The Rebbe offers a transformative approach to understanding this teaching. For five decades the Rebbe expounded on the core concept of “*dura betachtonim*,” the foundational notion⁵ that the purpose of creation is, in the words of the Midrash, “To make for the Blessed One (G-d) a dwelling place in the lower realms.”⁶

The entire point of creation is so that there should be a place of relative spiritual darkness and Divine concealment, which we, through our good deeds, will transform into a place filled with goodness and G-dliness.

Human beings are not created as angels and placed in a world of intense spirituality and revealed G-dliness. Rather, we are put into a reality in which there is temptation and sin, and where it is possible to forget about G-d and spiritual matters. The aim of the game is to see through all the distractions and recognize our Divine mission, which is to make the world a better place by fulfilling G-d's commandments.

Sinners' Advantage

In the Torah we read about impressive miracles wrought by glittering figures such as Moses and Elijah, and we learn about the saintly lives of the great prophets and teachers. Through their exemplary lives, they brought immense holiness into the world. However, it is those who committed sins and then turned their lives around that have achieved the highest fulfillment of the purpose of creation. Those who acted improperly and then repented for their past misdeeds, they are the ones who have turned bad into good.

While bad deeds subvert the purpose of creation by bringing more darkness into the universe, when a person eventually does true *teshuvah* (repentance) all their negative acts are transformed into positives.⁷ The greater the terribleness of the sins, the greater the grandeur of their atonement.

So, there is something that former sinners can achieve that the forever righteous cannot. When a person had sinned in the past and now has chosen the path of good, all their "negative achievements" can be cashed in for positive ones. That is the ultimate converting darkness into light.

Dividends of Darkness

Now we can understand what G-d gains from getting payback from the wicked. This does not refer to meting out punishment, but to the repentance of the sinners and the transformation of their bad deeds into good ones.

We were all put on earth to fulfill the purpose of bringing light and sanctity into the world. But what happens when someone chooses to sin instead? They become indebted to their Creator for failing to contribute properly to the goal for which they were created. So, how does such a person repay their debt?

They pay back in the currency most favored by G-d: Repentance. On the one hand, the ideal path is to get it right the first time around – to not sin at all. But in a very real sense, it is the person who at first got it wrong and then corrected their ways who fulfills most fully what life on earth is supposed to accomplish.

So keen is the Almighty to reap the benefits of the former sinner gone right, that He created the world using 10 utterances, even though He could just as well have created it with a single word.

Herein lies a hugely valuable lesson: We may make a mistake and do things wrong. Now we feel a failure and think that we have blotted our paper and it shall never be as good again. This is utterly untrue. When we recognize the power of repentance and change, we can not only fix the past but transform all the negative into positive, bringing tenfold light into the world and bringing delight to our Creator.

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Dwelling for G-d in the Physical World

Ten Utterances

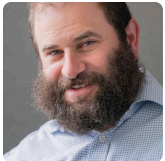
Creation

Bereishit

Parshah

FOOTNOTES

1. Genesis 1:3.
2. Paraphrase of Genesis 1:6.
3. Genesis 1:14.
4. Pirkei Avot 5:1.
5. Tanya chapter 36.
6. Midrash Tanchuma Naso 16.
7. Yoma 86b.



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More from Yossi Ives

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