

The Creation

From childhood we all know the story of the Six Days of Genesis. But then we learned a bit of science at school and realized that there are some problems in the story of the Torah: Does the story grow with us or does it remain a children's legend?

The story of creation completely ignores the scientific discoveries of the past thousands of years. In the story of the Torah the earth was created before the sun, the stars are tiny, the sky is blue because there is a sea above them, the sun is not the source of the sky's light or the change from day to night, and the time of day and night are the same everywhere in the world – which is probably flat. How innocent we were at Kindergarten.

We have inferior feelings relative to science. There are many scientists, they have huge financial support, and they are allowed to change their version and improve it with time. Nevertheless it's important to note that we are leading in points. For thousands of years, science has claimed that the world is static and had always existed. Only about 60 years ago, confirmation of the Big Bang theory was accepted, and the scientific community reached an agreement that the world was indeed created. This theory even determines that in the creation of the world time was actually created, so there is no point in talking about what happened before the Big Bang: there was no "before". The theory of evolution is a better fit to the story of creation than the assertion that all animals had always existed. The only remaining marginal issue is the amount of time it took. It's like a couple who agreed to marry and the only dispute is over the size of the dowry. The problem is that in our case, if we stick to the parable, the groom's father demands 14 billion Dollars while the father of the bride has barely six shekels...

There are three main approaches to dealing with the controversy about the age of the universe. The first approach attempts to show that the story of creation actually fits the big bang theory. According to this approach, a day for God in the creation of the world is not our day, and perhaps six days are six billion years. Entire books were written about these efforts. Trying to fit the theory of evolution with the story of the Torah is, in my opinion, more logical than attempts to become scientists ourselves and to try to contradict scientific theory. Let's leave the scientific discussion to the scientists.

But in my opinion this is not the correct direction. I invite you to read Gersonides' attempt at fitting the story of Creation with the scientific theories of Aristotle and Ptolemy which included wheels in the sky and the four elements of matter. Just as this interpretation seems irrelevant to us today, this is how contemporary interpretations will look to readers in another 500 years when new theories emerge, such as the discovery of the ancient spaghetti monster.

Those who try to follow this approach are forced to extract many verses from their simple meaning. For example, "Let there be light" may corresponds to the Big Bang, but how was the sun, the moon and all the stars created on the fourth day - after the plants that were created on the third day?

Let's move on to the second approach. According to this approach, science is simply wrong in its time assessment. Just as we waited patiently for science to admit that the world was created, we will wait until science advances and finally reaches the truth. The problem is that science is not expected to make such far-reaching changes. It is unlikely that science will suddenly decide that the plants appeared before the sun and the stars.

Another problem for both approaches listed above is a new account of creation that begins in chapter 2, contradicting and ignoring the creation of the world we just read in the first chapter: "אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בַּיּוֹם עָשׂוֹת ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם. וְכָל שֵׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בָּאָרֶץ וְכָל עֶשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר ה' אֱלֹקִים עַל הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם אֵין לַעֲבֹד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה ... וַיִּיצֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה" (ב ד-ז).

And only later are the animals created and Eve built from one side of Adam.

The contradictions between the two chapters brought the critics of the Bible to the conclusion that we are looking at two different folklore stories that were both placed consecutively. The Rambam (Guide for the Perplexed 2:29) states that the entire story of Genesis is a parable.

The first two approaches tried to narrow the gaps. I would like to introduce a third approach called "world created old". This approach also works well with the theory of evolution.

Let us focus first on the creation of Adam. Adam was not created as a newborn but as a 20-year-old. A doctor who examined him would say that he was 20 years old. The doctor could show how his bone structure was affected by 20 years of physical activity. The doctor would even find antibodies of Rubella, proving that Adam was ill at the age of five. The antibodies are not there to mislead the doctor. Every healthy 20-year-old must have antibodies for Rubella, a dangerous disease for adults, especially if your name is Adam and you plans to live until the age of 930.

The same is true of the creation of the world. The Creator created a universe from nothing, and this universe is "healthy for a world of 14 billion years." Just as the creation of Adam, a scientist who studies the world claims that it is 14 billion years old and can describe to us all the different stages that the world has undergone over the years in accordance with the laws of nature.

Here, too, there is no pretense. Dinosaur bones and geological layers were not planted in order to fool the scientists. These scientific discoveries indicate a normally developed world. The conclusions of the scientists are true in relation to understanding the nature of the world - but only in relation to the nature of the world. They should not be basis for any theological or moral insight. Science must focus on "what" and "how" - and not deal with "why".

This approach is presented by Radak in his commentary on "וַיְהִי אוֹר": "And everything was created at one moment, but each of these started to act its duty in its day." In his commentary on verse 14, he elaborates: "Each and every one of them was at the time of its creation in its complete form." He bases this on the words of R. Yehoshua ben Levi: "Each creation of Genesis was created in its full height, its full character, its full brevity" (Bavli Chulin 60b).

According to this explanation, the theory of evolution can be correct. The nature of the world may include an amazing process that we call evolution and this is how God created the world. It does not mean that the process was a random one, but rather God used evolution to create the world. I will add a parable to explain this point. A scientist invented a method to solve the problem of oil stains at sea. He takes a solution of seawater and food and gradually replaces the food with oil. The bacteria in the solution gradually adapt to oil and under these circumstances evolve to extract energy from the oil. After many generations we have bacteria that oil is their food. The scientist wants to patent his invention, but the bacteria were created by themselves in an evolutionary process. You may be surprised, but this is indeed the approach of the Patent Institute today: You cannot patent a living creature. So we should not be offended that science does not give credit to God for the creation of mankind.

Some people do not feel comfortable with the "world created old" approach. They claim that this is an elusive and sophistic approach that cannot be proven or contradicted. My answer to this is that the Torah does not try to prove its claims anywhere. The Torah tells us how things are and we may use or ignore the information. When a radio announcer reports an accident on the highway he does not need to prove his claim. One may ignore the information and join the traffic jam. The "world created old" approach takes us from a state of contradiction between the Torah and science – back to a state of equilibrium. It is now a matter of faith as was the initial case.

Regarding the question of the second story that begins with chapter 2, we will use another metaphor. Let's say we're putting on a play. For six days we will prepare the stage, the backgrounds and the lighting. Then we will invite the co-stars to study their parts and finally introduce the respected main star. This description is suitable for Chapter A. Since the play has not yet started - this time is outside of the play's event timeline.

Chapter 2 describes the beginning of the play. The clock of the world begins to tick. Indeed, the description of events begins with the words "אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ" (2: 4). Here begins the chronological description of the story within the time of the world. The world is indeed a stage.

Thus for example, in Chapter 1, all the animals are prepared behind the scenes ready to go onstage. Chapter 2 describes how the need arose for them and when it was that they came on stage. So too the plants were ready but it was necessary to water them so they will grow.

Let us now return to the story of the Six Days of Genesis. In light of the above, these days do not describe historical events, and do not describe a scientific process. So what is the meaning of the story of the creation of the world? Also what is the meaning of the numbers six and seven as they relate to the number of days of the creation?

Indeed, the Torah is neither a history book nor a science book. Its purpose is to direct man in the right way and to educate him toward values and faith. The purpose of the creation is to teach us the foundations of faith in one Creator. Indeed, if we look at the first verse, it seems that the heavens and the earth were created in one short moment. This verse is not an introduction, for immediately afterwards it was said that the land was chaotic, there was darkness, an abyss and water. The word "ברא" hardly appears anymore. Or HaChaim brings this interpretation in accordance with the words of R. Yishmael (Bereishit Rabbah 1:14): "'The heavens' - including the sun, moon and stars; 'and the earth' - including the trees, the shrubs and the garden of Eden." Maimonides also gives a similar explanation (Guide of the Perplexed 2b), based on the Bavli Hagiga (12a): "The lights were created on the first day but were placed on the fourth day."

The first three days were a process of distinguishing between opposites: day and night, earth and sky, sea and land. Bring chaos into order. In the three days that followed God added content into the separate parts: the heavenly bodies, the fish, the birds, the animals, and finally mankind. We learn about the unity of the Creator: There are no different forces in the world as was the view of idolatry. There isn't a god of death, a god of heaven, a god of a land or a god of the sea. God created all the creatures including the great crocodiles, considered god by the Egyptians, and God distinguishes between the opposing forces and later between the holy and the profane, as well as between good and evil.

There are additional lessons from Creation, such as the special place of mankind in creation, made of simple earth on the one hand, but in the image of God on the other. Hence all human beings are equal and must show gratitude to their Creator.

Another lesson in Creation is related to the numbers six and seven. Six symbolizes all natural directions (“ימה וקדמה, צפונה ונגבה”, plus up and down), and seven represents a part within nature that is separate: the holy. Eight represents the supernatural. The lesson is that holiness is a part of our natural world and not external to it. There is no need to disconnect and abstain from the nature of the world in order to be considered holy. The meaning of holiness is the ability to live nature itself in the right way, and if you are cut off from nature, holiness is impossible.

In the creation of the world, the earth is flat because "the Torah spoke in the language of man," as Rabbeinu Bechayi explained (Gen. 16:27): "The intention of the Torah was to write the words and matters as the understanding capability of the listener so that the matter will settle on his heart". After all, we all talk about the sun setting into the sea, although we know that this phenomenon is an illusion resulting from the rotation of the Earth around its axis. The Torah was written according to the understanding of its recipients, with the expectation that, as their scientific understanding will progress, they will progress both in humility and in understanding this exact principle - that the Torah was given according to the understanding of its recipients. If the Torah had specified that the earth was round or not in the center of the universe, it would have been rejected as nonsense. As proof of that, recall the world's reaction to the scientists who first made such claims. Therefore, the Torah must certainly refrain from mentioning anything about a big bang, an infinite space dotted with clusters of stars, and a remote and seemingly insignificant planet in which our entire existence takes place.

If the purpose of the story of creation is to lay the foundation for faith in one Creator, then the story we have learned in kindergarten can remain in the warm corner where it resides in our heart: the corner of God.