

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



B'REISHIT

What is Man that You Are Mindful of Him?

As we begin anew our annual Torah reading cycle this week, we return to the story of Creation. The birth of the universe is, of course, a remarkable story, but it's pretty much overshadowed by God's conception of humanity.

The genesis of mankind dominates the Creation story in two ways, first of all it caps off the narrative in the first chapter of our Torah and, then, its reprise in the second chapter emphasizes the special relationship between God and humanity.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik pointed out the profound ideas contained in the repetition of the creation of humankind. He observed: We all know that the Bible offers two accounts of the creation of man. We are also aware of the theory suggested by Bible critics attributing these two accounts to two different sources. Since we unreservedly accept the integrity of the text, we categorically reject this hypothesis. It is, of course, true that the two accounts of the creation of man differ considerably. This incongruity was not discovered by the Bible critics. Our Sages of old

were aware of it. However, the answer lies not in an alleged dual tradition but in dual man, not in an imaginary contradiction between two versions but in a real contradiction in the nature of man. The two accounts deal with two Adams, two men, two fathers of mankind, two types, two representatives of humanity, and it is no wonder that they are not identical.

But what are the differences between the two accounts and, indeed, the two images of humanity?

In the first chapter we have this remarkable verse: And God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth."

First of all, what does God mean by 'us'? Who was God partnering with? Rav Hirsch declares that this is Pluralis Majestatis ('royal we', as in 'We are not amused.'), because of the lofty position of humans in the scheme of things.

The Radak, on the other hand, claims that God was including the earth in this creation. The earth contributed the raw material for all the other animals, but here God contributed the soul. Rav Steinzaltz added: Although in a physiological sense man is very similar to other living creatures, he is nevertheless a cate-

gory of being to himself. Unlike other creations, man was fashioned in the image of God, not in terms of his appearance, but in terms of his essence. Aside from man's superior intelligence, this likeness is expressed principally in man's freedom to choose. This quality is unique to man and God.

Now we're getting somewhere. Man's unique position is clearly delineated. Humanity is cool, because we have Free Will. That's special, but now we must focus on what did God add to this exceptional position of humanity in the reprise of humanity's creation in chapter 2?

In chapter two we have this verse: The ETERNAL God (Hashem Elokim) formed a Human from the soil's humus, blowing into his nostrils the breath of life: the Human became a living being.

Immediately we must notice that the Divine appellation ELOKIM (used exclusively in chapter one) is now joined to the Tetragramaton. Clearly, a new aspect of humanity's remarkable position and role is being announced. But what is it?

Rav Hirsch is clearly moved by this new declaration, and states: In this sentence the whole secret of the nature of Man is laid down, and the whole higher dignity of Man rests on the facts revealed here.

But what's the secret? He explains

that the unique manner of his creation raised him so high that he is different from all the other creatures. It's the singular nature of humanity's formation that makes us so superior. We alone from all creatures possess a Divine element directly implanted by God.

Chizkuni adds that God personally, if you will, blew the breath of life into the first human, which was not done for any other being. This enabled humanity to have the wisdom (and 'Holy spirit') to discern the differences in all the other creations. But much more importantly, this granted humans an 'immortal soul'. The true boon granted humanity was an immortal soul, which survives the physical body it inhabits.

Now that's cool! But the Kli Yakar observes that we still have a dual creation process going on here. There is a first step in Chapter 1 which is an enhanced version of every creation. Then there is a truly unique added version of humanity's creation in Chapter 2. Why do we need both?

Well, the two steps in the test reflect two stages in human development. Humans begin very much like other animals (Kli Yakar alludes to the verse: man is born a wild donkey, Iyov 11:12). Our eventual perfection depends on diligent effort and good choices as one opens their eyes in intellectual endeavor as one matures.

Our sublime superiority is not inevitable, only possible through the tools God provided.

Now, I believe, we can begin to address the question which is my title: What is mankind that you are mindful of him, human beings that you care for them? (T'hilim 8:5). To a certain extent the very next verse in Psalms begins the answer: That You made him a little less than Divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty.

In other words, God loves us because in the Divine effort to Create we were granted unique gifts. We've mentioned a number of these gifts: free will, adaptability, and the potential for immortality.

But what is the purpose, the goal of these bequests? I think that's the \$64,000 Question (that's before inflation). Although it would be easy to declare: Divine Largesse. God was just being generous. Okay. But I think there's more.

I strongly believe that these gifts also make a demand upon the recipients. God created a world which is physical, and, therefore, not conducive to Divine Presence (SH'CHINA). AHA! We can be holy and make space for God in this realm.

God created an amazing habitat for humanity. We display appreciation by hosting the SH'CHINA. We make the physical realm hospitable for the

spiritual, for the Holy, for God. Enjoy your company! 