

Parshas Bereishis – Jonathan Gershlick (reprint)

ז' תשרי תשע"ז – 29th October 2016 – שבת פרשת בראשית

In the Friday Night Kiddush, we recite the Torah's conclusion of the process of HaShem's creation: "...Ki Vo Shavat Mikol Melachto Asher Bara Elokim La'assot." (Bereishit 2:3) "...because on it [i.e. Shabbat], He rested from all His work which God had created to make."

This last bit of the Passuk is a little puzzling. Leaving out the final two words, we would simply understand that HaShem blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it, He rested from all His work which he had created. Why also say "to make"? Rashi's answer is that the Melacha that was to be done on Shabbat was actually "made" on the sixth day, i.e. twice the amount of work had to be done on the sixth day. Bereishit Rabba (11:9) says HaShem created three things every day (i.e. days 1 to 5) except on Friday when six things were created. (The six Melachot on Friday comprised making man, woman, creeping creatures, domestic animals, wild beasts and harmful spirits).

But can we really be satisfied by Rashi's explanation for the seemingly superfluous words: that the Passuk is simply telling us that by resting on Shabbat, HaShem had more to "make" on Friday? The Or HaChayim gives another explanation. He says "la'assot" refers specifically to the completion of the process. So, the verse means that first HaShem created the Universe, then He rested from all of his work and finally he completed/"made" it. This draws attention to the fact that the initial act of creation was comprehensive. Everything was actually created at the very beginning of the first day. How can that be?

The Or HaChayim (Rabbi Chayaim Ben Attar) has a proof for his answer right at the start of Bereishit (1:1). In "Bereishit Bara Elokim Et Hashamayim v'Et Haaretz", the word "Et" precedes both "Hashamayim" and "Haaretz". The Or haChayim asks why did the Torah need to add these two words. Rabbi Chayim Ben Attar says the clue is in the connection between the 10 utterances of creation and the Asseret Hadibrot – the 10 Commandments. In Sh'mot 20:1, the Torah says: "Hashem spoke all these words saying", which hints at the fact that these were words that the human mouth is unable to utter and the human ear is unable to hear.

According to some commentators, Hashem uttered the entire 10 Commandments in a single utterance. Similarly in Bereishit, we have the tradition that there were a total of 10 utterances of creation (including the initial "Bereishit Bara..." as well as nine more sayings, beginning with "Vayomer...") but that HaShem actually created the whole universe and all that is contained in it with the single utterance of "Bereishit Bara Elokim Et Hashamayim v'Et Haaretz". The Or haChayim says all objects contained in the heaven and the earth were included in that first utterance and that is why the utterance has "Et" twice.

But this begs the question that if the act of creation was actually fully comprehensive with everything carried out at the very beginning of the first day, what was there to do the rest of the week? After all, we still have the Torah's other 9 sayings to account for. The Or HaChayim, together with Bereishit Rabba, comes to our rescue. Even after HaShem had made at the start of day 1 the "heavens and the earth", (a euphemism for the entire universe and everything in it), the earth was far from complete. As Bereishit 1:1 says – it was still "Tohu VaVohu" - "bewilderment and void". All the other stages were still to come, including: light (the rest of day 1); firmament, Gehinnom, angels (day 2); trees, plant life, garden of Eden (day 3); the sun, moon, constellations (day 4); birds, fish, Leviathan (day 5); and man, woman, creeping creatures, domestic animals, wild beasts and harmful spirits (day 6). All these subsequent developments were revealed during the rest of the week of creation, as HaShem went about creating order within the Universe that he had created.

Shabbat Shalom