

Dear Friends,

We have returned to the beginning, to Bereishit. What a pleasure! Just as there are parashot and books in the Bible that are considered “Holy of Holies” (like the Song of Songs), so, too, is Parashat Bereishit the “Deepest of the Deep”.

Parashat Bereishit tells us about the mechanisms of Creation. It includes - in a sublimated way - the Big Bang theory, evolution, the inner structure of all that *is* in the world, the foundation of human spirituality and psychology, and more.

In this drasha I would like to focus on one of those mechanisms of Creation. It may seem very obvious and familiar, but if we delve into its depth, perhaps the locked gates of the Garden of Eden will reopen.

According to Jewish tradition, the world was created with thought. We sing “**Last in deed is first in thought**” each Friday night in the Lecha Dodi hymn, written in Tzfat about 500 years ago.

There are several different ways to understand this sentence. The hymn is a song of praise for Shabbat. Therefore, although Shabbat was created last, it was actually the goal of Creation and the first and the most important to be planned.

Another explanation, one which I choose to focus on this time, is that the world was made by thought first. The Creator thought the world and everything in it into being.

In the Zohar (Part 3: 238A) it says: “First in thought last in deed”, meaning that the order of everything begins with thought. Everything!

**Thought is the mechanism of Creation! Before thought everything is still possible, and thought - whether conscious or not - reduces the infinite possibilities to one single one, which is the one that is manifest. The rest of the infinite possibilities do not disappear, they are always there potentially. This means that change is always possible! If and when thought changes, another possibility will be revealed and may be realized.**

This seems fairly simple, and you may say that there is nothing new here. We all know, for example, that every house that is built is planned and fantasized, tiles chosen carefully by a contractor, architect, or homeowner, and only then executed. So, too, are the meals we prepare for ourselves and our families, our careers, our choices of lifemates, etc.

But a deeper look will reveal that in our daily lives, in the way we conduct ourselves, the way we think about our lives, we do not actually function according to this knowledge. Most of us feel strongly that life “just happens” to us; that in most cases we are helpless victims of random or cruel circumstances that are much more powerful than we are. Even deep within us, most of us probably believe that the strong emotions and the deep impulses that sweep over us precede thought. I would like to suggest that this is not so, that thought is always first.

Beneath every feeling that we have, every urge that seems to control us, there is thought, and it precedes everything!

But who is doing the thinking? Who is thinking the thoughts that create the feelings, the urges, the reality? The Creator, or us? Or perhaps both? If so, can a conflict arise between human thought and that of the Creator? Perhaps He thinks the big thoughts, the big picture and the unconscious, and we think things that are conscious and less significant about ourselves, such as planning a house or a meal?

I would like to suggest - and, as usual, it is only a suggestion - that this division between our thoughts and that of the Creator (or of nature) is basically flawed! Not only that, but all of these divisions between us and them, and between us and the Creator, are deeply wrong and also extremely painful. This division is at the root of the human feeling of loneliness, which is also a result of thought. Our senses tell us that there is a division between things - between people, and between a person and the Creator - because this is what we are able to see, hear, and feel. But the deeper one delves - whether with our eyes or with our minds - into the finer resolutions of the universe, we discover that these divisions are only superficial, that in fact everything is part of one complete whole.

Therefore, there is no “our thoughts” and “the Creator’s thoughts”. There are only thoughts! There are conscious and unconscious thoughts, but they have only one source. This begs the question: of what use is this one thought that isn’t even mine? What value does this distinction have?

Well, a person who thinks their personal thoughts are important, wonderful, and special may well find it difficult to connect with this idea and find value in it. But those who are willing to contemplate the possibility that there is only One source of thought may find it significant.

Just the knowledge that thought is the beginning of deed, and that there is only one thought, one collective, unifying “Thinker” that Creates everything, allow us to release, relax, and entrust ourselves to It.

But there is a deeper invitation here. Much deeper. Our feelings, our concerns, our sense of being stuck, our anger, are all the result of our deep, human predicament. When humans first listened the mythological serpent saying “you can do it, you are great, you are wonderful” and ate from the Tree of Knowledge (the story appears in this parasha), their eyes were opened and, just as they were warned, they died! Simply died! They died in terms of their awareness of the eternal, infinite unity that exists in everything. They became separated from that thought, from that Thinker, from that unity, and began to think - mistakenly - that they are the ones who are doing the thinking. Ever since then, we are sure that we think our own thoughts and we are in tremendous competition with reality.

The voice of the serpent never ceases. It always whispers to us: “Youuuuuu arrrrre separaaaaaaaate! Youuuuuuuu arrrrrrrrrrre strongggggggggg! Youuuuuu arrrrre like Godddddd, Youuuuuuuuu!”

But the Tree of Knowledge and the serpent were there in the Creator’s thoughts in the beginning. He created them, and therefore they are not the enemy!

The first thought was (possibly) to send us into an awareness of separateness which causes us great sorrow, in order for us to begin our journey back, our Abrahamic “Lech Lecha” - back from exile, from Ur Kasdim, from Haran, from Egypt, back to the Garden of Eden, to the Tree of Life.

“The end of the deed”, then, is in “thought first”. The thought was that we would return to the consciousness of unity, but completely consciously, so that we can reconnect with that One thought, with the One Thinker who thinks everything into being, including us.

In order to return to a sense of unity, one does not require years of meditation on a Tibetan mountaintop. One needs only awareness, memory, and an acceptance of the idea that every deed is first a thought.

It’s okay if we forget again and are miserable in our feeling of separateness. We will read Bereishit again (and all of the other parashot), and be reminded to return to the sense of unity, to the One thought, the One Thinker. And so on.

Each time we are miserable, sad, or angry, it means we are confused. There is no need to do anything special, other than just do our best, since that is all we *can* do. But we can try to remember that we are confused, that we mistakenly think we are creating reality, and return to the deep knowledge that in the end, every deed is first thought by the Creator.

Shabbat Shalom, and enjoy reading from the beginning, MiBereishit again,

Elisha

P.S. If you are around, you are invited tomorrow morning to a class (in Hebrew) on the Torah portion at Veahavta. You can come any time after 8:30 a.m. At 9:45 there is a kiddush, and the class begins at around 10:00 and runs until 11:00. This year we will be reading the parasha using the interpretations of Harav Kook.