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begins. The animals are shown to the Angels first but they cannot name them. But when they are shown to Adam, Adam names the ox, then the camel, donkey, and horse.

So what is this *chochma* that Adam has and the Angels lack? By naming the domesticated animals first, it appears that naming is a proxy for identifying something's utility. Thus the Angels, who exist only to serve God, with no need for food or drink or anything domesticated animals can provide, lack the mix of intelligence and will to identify that which is potentially useful. They don't ask about things, and can't ask about things, what is this *to me*?

But then the midrash takes an interesting turn. God asks Adam, "What is your name?" And Adam answers "It would be nice for me to be called Adam because I was created from the earth (*adama*)."

Adam looks past utility, how something else relates to him, and sees instead what his relationship is to something else.

(Note that the animals were *also* taken from the earth, but that is not what Adam sees. Perhaps someday Adam will recognize how both humans and animals share a common source, and their relationship will be transformed from the Genesis 1 imperative to "subdue" the land into the Genesis 2 suggestion that humans are in the garden "to till and to keep it." But that day is not today.)

The midrash then takes its most radical step. God asks Adam: "And me, what is my name?" And Adam replies: "It would be fitting for you to be called Adonai, since you are the master (*adon*) of all your creations." What a progression! First Adam sees how the animals relate to him. Then Adam sees how he relates to the world. And finally Adam sees how all of it relates to God. But by having Adam name God, the scene in which Adam grasps the "true hierarchy" also subtly subverts it. The unique power and role of human beings is to take a world that is otherwise quite happy going about its business and bring to it awareness and appreciation of God's presence. This too is a role that Angels cannot play.

The Midrash suggests that human wisdom, the grasping of the relationship between things, is manifest in naming - both in what we name, and what names we give. This reminds me of the work of legal theorist Catherine MacKinnon who, along with her colleagues, coined the term "sexual harassment." Before these pioneering feminists named this particular kind of interaction, it was an amorphous phenomenon, a common and generally accepted feature of the workplace and elsewhere. Before it was named, there was no way to legislate against it because there was no way to even talk about it. The act of naming, of being able to grasp the problematic relationships at play, was a critical step in bringing about long lasting change and ending abuse.

What should be clear is that naming - what we talk about and how we talk about it - can conceal or reveal, and even subjugate or liberate. But at its best, it is

how God wants to be brought into the world.



TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Bereshit

Shabbat Mevarekhim Hahodesh

October 6, 2018 | 27 Tishrei 5779

Annual | Genesis 1:1-6:8 (Etz Hayim p. 3-34; Hertz p. 2-20)

Triennial Genesis 5:1-6:8 (Etz Hayim p. 30-34; Hertz p. 16-20)

Haftarah | Isaiah 42:5-43:10 (Etz Hayim p. 35-40; Hertz p. 21-25)

D'var Torah: The Power of Naming

Rabbi Shoshana Cohen, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

Towards the end of the second creation story in this week's parashah, Adam is alone and lonely. Though God causes the land to bring forth various creatures to provide him company, none of them satisfy Adam's need for companionship, so *Isha* is ultimately fashioned from his rib/side. Along the way, the Torah tells us, Adam gives all of the creatures names: "So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name." (Genesis 2:19)

God doesn't tell Adam to name them, but knows that Adam will. In fact, God is quite curious what names Adam will give. As presented here, the impulse and capacity to name things is a fundamental human trait. But what we name, and what names we give, seems to be a test. So what exactly is God looking for? What do acts of naming reveal?

The Midrash in Genesis Rabbah 17 may offer some clues. It begins with a backstory that before creating Adam God consulted with the ministering Angels. (This is one of a series of midrashim based on the strange phrase in Genesis 1:26, "**We** will make adam in **our** image in **our** likeness," that assumes that God consulted with other parties before creating humans.) The Angels ask what Adam will be like and God answers that Adam's wisdom, *chochma*, will be

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greater than that of the Angels. Following this conversation, the naming ritual

D'var Haftarah: Universal Significance

Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

As many know, the first two chapters of Sefer Bereshit present two different cosmologies - descriptions of the creation of the world. Less well known is the cosmological statement made in this week's accompanying haftarah. Though all three differ in significant ways, each is an attempt to convey the meaning and significance of the world we live in. The Torah's first chapter expresses the idea of majesty and order and God's rule over the universe; the second expresses God's intimate relations with His human creations. The message in the haftarah, which was probably composed during the return from Babylonian exile, firmly casts God in the role of Creator and Ruler over all: "Thus said God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretch them out, who spread out the earth and what it brings forth, who gave breath to the people upon it and life to those who walk therein." (42:5)

Why would the haftarah need to revisit God's role in creation? The *p'shat*, or simple contextual meaning, is that the prophet sought to establish God's proprietorship over the world in order to proclaim God's ability and right to carry out God's will. Rabbi David Kimche (13th century Provence), on the other hand, viewed the prophet's statement about God as part of a polemic against what he thought were illegitimate ideas regarding the creation of the world. Kimche projects his own reality onto the text but poses some interesting ideas in the process: "The prophet repeated his description of God as creator a number of times because there were in his generation people who believed incorrectly. There were those who believed that the world was not created, rather that it always existed, [therefore, it was important to state that] it does have a cause and one who caused it; others believe that the world was an accident and that there was no creator or cause... and on account of these wrong beliefs it was necessary to repeat this matter, that God blessed be He created the world and renews it and created it from nothing."

Why was Kimche so adamant about combating these Aristotelian ideas about creation? To his mind, these ideas were not only problematic because they challenged the idea of God as creator, but also because they implied that the world had no positive meaning and no moral order and purpose. These ideas were thus anathema to the Jewish mind. For Kimche, the Jew, the creation of the world was an event of monumental significance because it spelled out the meaning of existence and because it marked the world as positive and good.

The challenges marked in this debate are still with us. Is the world one of order or chaos, virtue or vice? Is it an accident or full of purposeful? How we see the world can have great impact on how we live in it and experience it.

Parashat Bereshit Self-Study

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

We are starting again! In this loaded parashah we hear about the creation of the world from 2 perspectives, learn some basic issues in human behavior, and get the genealogy (and development) of humanity in its early stages.

- 1) The first story of the creation of the world is told in Gen 1:1-2:3. Two of the words/roots repeated most frequently in the passage are Vayomer (He said) and Vayav'del (He separated). What might this tell us about God's ideas for this world?
- 2) When God makes the human (Adam) in the second creation story, God places Adam in the Garden "to work it and to watch it" (2:15). As everything that God had created seems to be self-sufficient, why do you think the human being needs to 'work and watch' the garden?
- 3) In the second creation story God makes animals, and brings them to Adam to see what Adam will name them (2:19-20). What is the significance of naming something or someone? What is the relationship between the named and the 'namer'?
- 4) Adam was forbidden to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, yet he eats from its fruit (2:16-17, 3:6-12). When God wants to confront Adam, He asks 'Ayeka?' ('where are you?') What is strange about this opening from God, and why do you think that God approached Adam in this manner?
- 5) After Cain killed his brother Abel, God tells him that now he is cursed from the Earth (Adama) that opened its mouth to take his brother's blood from him (4:10-13). How is this going to affect Cain? Why do you think that the punishment is coming from the Earth?

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