



## *Insights into Pirke Avot*

by

**Rabbi Yaakov Hillel**

*Rosh Yeshivat Ahavat Shalom*

### *Perek 6, Mishnah 11 (Part 1)*

6:11 Everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He only created for His honor, as it says, “All that is called by My Name and in My honor, I have created it and formed it and also made it” (*Yeshayahu* 43:7). And it says, “Hashem will reign for all eternity” (*Shmot* 15:18).

#### *Revealed In Nature*

In the previous *mishnah* we learned that Hashem created five entities that have a special connection to Him. These entities reveal His *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) at all levels of Creation, all the way down to this world. In this *mishnah* we learn that not only these five, but every entity in Creation is directed toward the lofty purpose of revealing Hashem’s honor. The *mishnah* tells us, **Everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, *lo bara ela lichvodo***. Literally translated, *lo bara ela lichvodo* is negative: “He did not create them for any [purpose] other than His honor.” This wording emphasizes that Hashem’s honor is the *only* purpose behind everything in Creation.

Let us understand more about the concept of Hashem’s honor.

Every day we affirm our belief in Hashem with the words, “Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One”<sup>1</sup> (*Devarim* 6:4). We follow this declaration by saying, “Blessed is the Name of the honor of His Kingship forever.”<sup>2</sup> Hashem was One before Creation, and He is One after Creation. He created the world to reveal His Kingship, and every entity in existence has a role in fulfilling this purpose; otherwise, it would not be here. This is true of the angels, entirely spiritual beings, and of

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<sup>1</sup> *Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokenu, Hashem Ehad.*

<sup>2</sup> *Baruch Shem kevod malchuto l’olam va’ed.*



everything from Heaven and earth down to man, animals, plant life, and inanimate objects like sticks and stones.<sup>3</sup>

Everything in Creation sings its own song of praise to the Al-mighty, revealing His honor. The Sages attribute specific verses to each creature, compiled in *Perek Shirah* (*Perek Shirah, Otzar HaMidrashim*, vol. 2, p. 522).<sup>4</sup> This should be the way we view the world around us; every entity, bar none, is a revelation of Hashem's might and Kingship (see *Hilchot Yesode HaTorah* 2:2). Any study of the world, its patterns, and the way it operates, ranging from mathematics and the sciences to geography and history, will reveal Hashem's greatness.<sup>5</sup> We find this concept in a number of verses and teachings of the Sages:

- "There is no rock (*tzur*) like our G-d" (I *Shmuel* 2:2). Our Sages explain, "There is no artist (*tzayar*) like our G-d" (*Berachot* 10a). The beauty and intricacy of Hashem's magnificent creations by far surpass the portraits and landscapes of the finest artists.
- "Raise your eyes on high and see Who created these" (*Yeshayahu* 40:26). Observing the sun, moon, and stars is proof of the Creator Who made them. The Rambam writes that this is how our Forefather Avraham came to recognize G-d (*Hilchot Avodah Zarah* 1:3).
- "When I see Your Heavens, the work of Your Fingers, the moon and stars that You created" (*Tehillim* 8:4). Studying these creations makes it obvious that the world has a Creator (*Metzudat David*).

In an earlier *mishnah* we recounted a story told about the Rambam that highlights this idea.<sup>6</sup> The Rambam is renowned and revered to this day as a monumental Torah giant. He also earned the respect of non-Jewish scholars for his expertise in science, medicine, and philosophy. However, a certain group of non-Jewish philosophers could not understand the Rambam's devout adherence to the tenets of traditional Judaism, and were determined to set him straight. They paid

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<sup>3</sup> See below, "At Every Level."

<sup>4</sup> See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 1:13, Part 3; 3:14, Part 3; and 5:20, Part 1 for discussion of the significance of *Perek Shirah*.

<sup>5</sup> The famous physicist Albert Einstein is said to have gained awareness of the Creator through his study of science. Unfortunately, he did not take the next step of acknowledging that the Creator revealed His Will to mankind in the Torah. Study of nature reveals the Creator, but study of the Creator's Torah is a more direct route to this knowledge. "Rabbi Shimon says, one who walks along the road and learns, and stops his learning and says, 'How beautiful is this tree' and 'How beautiful is this plowed field' is considered by Scripture as if he is liable for his life" (*Avot* 3:7). In our discussion of this *mishnah*, we explained that Torah study is man's most powerful link to Hashem. Interrupting it to focus on a lower level of connection – appreciating Hashem through nature – shows a lack of respect. See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 3:7, Part 2.

<sup>6</sup> See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 3:7, Part 2.



him a visit, and began to denigrate his belief in Judaism as unfounded. What solid proof could he give of a Divine Creator?

The Rambam told them that he would rather leave the philosophical debate for another occasion. Instead, he would entertain his guests with a superb piece of art. He showed them a breathtaking painting of a finely detailed map of the world: every city, every river, and every hill was depicted in vivid, lifelike color. They had never seen anything like it. One of them asked, “Who is the artist?”

“Artist?” said the Rambam. “There was no artist. I had a few bottles of ink on my desk. They happened to spill out on the canvas, and this is the result.”

Annoyed, they told him that he knew as well as they did that he was talking nonsense – an accidental ink spill could never produce such a complex work of art.

This was what the Rambam had been waiting for. “The universe is more complex than any painting,” he told them. “If you don’t believe that a picture of the world came into being by accident, how can you believe that the world itself came to be by accident?”<sup>7</sup>

In our times as well, some people prefer to believe that the world somehow burst into existence without a Creator. They do not see the great wisdom and infinite beauty in even the smallest, most commonplace entities, which point directly to their Creator. Every species of animal, bird, or fish is an encyclopedia on its own. The same is true of trees, plants, and fruit. We are not knowledgeable enough to appreciate the extraordinary Divine wisdom in daily phenomena that we take for granted, but it is there.<sup>8</sup>

### *At Every Level*

**“Everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He only created for His honor.”**

These words also teach us that everything in this world can be used to serve Hashem. There is not a pebble, blade of grass, or flea that does not have a purpose. Every gust of wind declares Hashem’s honor.<sup>9</sup>

Our Sages teach that there are four basic levels of creation in the physical world.

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<sup>7</sup> The author of *Hovat HaLevavot* discusses a similar idea concerning a page covered with beautiful handwriting (*Hovat HaLevavot, Shaar Rishon, Chapter 6*).

<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Avigdor Miller’s *Rejoice O Youth* discusses this topic at length.

<sup>9</sup> The Sages instituted blessings for natural phenomena like thunder and lightning, the ocean, and the renewed flowering of the trees in spring.



In ascending order they are *domem*, inanimate objects; *tzomeah*, plant life; *hai*, living creatures; and *medaber*, man, who is endowed with the capacity of speech (*dibbur*). Every level of creation, even inanimate objects (*domem*), has a role in *mitzvot*. Our Sages cite the verse, “Who can count the dust of Yaakov?” (*Bamidbar* 23:10). They explain, “Who can count the commandments they fulfill with dust? ‘Do not plow with an ox and a donkey’ (*Devarim* 22:10); ‘Do not plant your vineyard with hybrids’ (*ibid.* 22:9); ...‘For three years they [the fruits of a new tree] will be forbidden to you’ (*Vayikra* 19:23); and the like” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 20:19).

We fulfill many *mitzvot* with plant life (*tzomeah*), including separating tithes from agricultural produce (*Devarim* 14:22), declaring the produce of the Sabbatical year ownerless (*Vayikra* 25:5, Rashi), reciting the blessings on different varieties of produce (*Shulhan Aruch Orach Hayyim* 202-203), and more.

There are many *mitzvot* related to animals (*hai*). Some animals are permitted for consumption, and others are forbidden (see *Vayikra* 11). Permitted animals need to be slaughtered in a specific manner (*Shulhan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 20-22), and soaked and salted to remove the blood (*ibid.* 69-78). Additional *halachot* govern different aspects of our use of animals. For example, we are forbidden to harness two species of animals to haul a load together (*Devarim* 22:10, Rashi).<sup>10</sup>

Above all, the Jewish people are here to reveal Hashem’s honor in this world by using everything in Creation to do His *mitzvot*. There are two deterrents that keep us from carrying out this task to the fullest.

One is exile. When the Jewish people suffer the degradations of exile, Hashem’s honor is degraded as well, so to speak, because He has linked His Name to our nation; “Your Name is called upon us” (*Yirmiyahu* 14:9). He is there with us, sharing our suffering (see *Tehillim* 91:15). This is the concept of the “exile of the *Shechinah*.”<sup>11</sup> Rather than enhancing Hashem’s honor, the exile of the Jewish people desecrates it (*hillul Hashem*), as we learn from the verse, “And they desecrated My Holy Name when it was said of them, these are the people of Hashem, and they left His land” (*Yehezkel* 36:20). When the Jews are scattered among the nations, the non-Jews say that they are in exile because their G-d could not protect them and keep them in the Holy Land. This is a gross desecration of Hashem’s Name (see Rashi, *Radak*).<sup>12</sup>

Another source of interference is sin. Sins are a barrier separating us from

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<sup>10</sup> See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 2:1:2.

<sup>11</sup> See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 3:3, Part 2 and 5:3, Part 3.

<sup>12</sup> See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 4:4, Part 2.



Hashem: “For your sins divide between you and your G-d” (*Yeshayahu 59:2*).<sup>13</sup> They block our vision, so that we see only physicality, not spirituality. The more we work on enhancing our spirituality, the closer we can come to Hashem, and the more capable we become of viewing everything in existence as a revelation of His Will.

King David said, “G-d spoke one and I heard two” (*Tehillim 62:12*). Hashem, the sole Creator and Ruler, is One, and everything in existence is a revelation of His Will. Because we are human beings with Free Will, we are misled by the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) to “hear two.” In other words, we are responsive to both good and evil – we can hear many different “truths.” In actual fact, Hashem “spoke one”; there is only one truth.<sup>14</sup>

The reality of Hashem’s Oneness is not sufficiently clear to us, because the *yetzer hara* pulls us down and confuses us, blinding us to the truth. When *Mashiah* comes, the last of the barriers will fall away, putting an end to confusion and doubt. There will be no question that Hashem is One, and that **everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He only created for His honor.**

### *Created in His Honor*

The first of the seven blessings (*sheva berachot*) recited for a bride and groom is reminiscent of our *mishnah*: “Blessed are You Hashem our G-d, King of the world, Who created everything in His honor.” How is this concept related to a wedding and marriage?

One answer is that marriage is not simply a kosher way to satisfy personal desires. The connection between a husband and wife is far more than merely physical. Viewed correctly, it is spiritual and sanctified, an expression of *she’hakol bara lichvodo*: Hashem created everything, the relationship of husband and wife included, for His honor.

We learn from the teachings of our Sages that Hashem is a partner in this relationship, and in the formation of the children it produces. “There are three partners in the creation of a person: the Holy One, blessed be He, his father, and his mother. His father implants the white matter, from which develop the bones, sinews, nails, the brain, and the white of the eye. His mother implants red matter, from which develop the skin, the flesh, the hair, and the pupil of the eye. And the Holy One, blessed be He, instills the life force, and his soul, the light of his face, eyesight, hearing, speech, gait, and intelligence and wisdom.” They go on to explain Bilam’s words, “Who can... count the seed of Israel?” (*Bamidbar 23:10*). This teaches us

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<sup>13</sup> See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 1:12 and 6:6, Part 20.

<sup>14</sup> See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 2:12, Part 3 and 4:22, Part 1 for fuller discussion of this topic.



that the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and counts the seed of Israel – when will there come the drop from which a *tzaddik* will be formed?” (*Niddah* 31a).<sup>15</sup>

Many assume that having children after marriage is automatic: a couple gets married, and soon enough their first child will be born. A year or two later they will have another child, and then another and another. This should never be taken for granted; the conception and birth of a baby is one of the wonders of the world. Marriage, and every child that comes into the world, be it a couple’s first or fifth or tenth, whether born in the first year of marriage or after many long years of waiting and praying, is a miracle, a revelation of Hashem’s honor in this world.

### *Evil Included*

**Everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He only created for His honor.**

Earlier in *Avot* we learned, “Do not be scornful of any person, and do not underestimate anything, for there is no person who does not have his time, and nothing that does not have its place” (*Avot* 4:3). Every person and every entity has a purpose.

This is true even of evil. The Torah recounts that when Hashem completed Creation, “G-d saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (*Bereshit* 1:31). “Very good,” the Sages teach, refers to the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination (*Bereshit Rabbah* 9:7). The *yetzer hara* is the source of endless tragedy and trouble. How can it be good at all, let alone “very good?”

We can answer this question by considering why we were given a *yetzer hara* to begin with. Hashem created the world to bestow good in the form of eternal reward upon those who serve Him.<sup>16</sup> Without the *yetzer hara* to tempt us and challenge our resolve, we would have no way to earn that reward. Learning Torah and keeping *mitzvot* would be so easy and so obvious that they required no effort, and would not deserve any special reward. The *yetzer hara* is evil and dark, but the constant struggle it presents is priceless, because it is the key to our reward.

Our Sages teach that “Light is only appreciated in contrast to darkness” (*Zohar*, vol. II, p. 184a). Those who were born with the blessing of vision take it for granted, but a blind person whose sight is restored will appreciate it for the great gift it is. Human beings are spiritually “blind.” We look at an entity and we see only its external, physical aspect. We lack the wisdom necessary to perceive the Divine light

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<sup>15</sup> See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 3:14, Part 3 for a fuller discussion of this topic.

<sup>16</sup> See below, “Dual Purpose.”



inherent in **everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world**. If only we would learn to recognize the true meaning and purpose in Creation, we would understand that every entity and every situation – evil included – is an opportunity to reveal another facet of Hashem’s honor. We face innumerable tests throughout our lives in this world. Every test we fail is disaster for us, and a triumph for the *yetzer hara*. But if we prevail and pass that test, we turn it into a source of blessing and reward. The *yetzer hara* is darkness, yet it is “very good,” because more than any other creation, it is the vehicle that proclaims Hashem’s honor in this world.

### *Dual Purpose*

**Everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He only created for His honor.**

Understood simply, these words imply that G-d benefits from Creation: it is a source of honor for Him. This perception is impossible; Hashem lacks for nothing, and there is nothing that man or Creation can give Him. “If you have sinned, what [harm] do you do to Him...and if you are righteous, what [benefit] do you give Him?” (*Iyov* 35:6,7).

How, then, is Hashem “honored” by Creation? We can answer this difficult question by explaining our *mishnah* on a more profound level.

In earlier *mishnayot* we discussed two possible explanations of Hashem’s purpose in Creation. The first is that Hashem created the world because it is His Will to bestow good upon His created beings (*Derech Hashem* Part 1, Chapter 2, and *Daat Tevunot* 1:42-43; see *Etz Hayyim*, beginning of *Shaar HaKelalim*).

However, suggesting that Hashem created the world in order to give could also imply that He did, in fact, stand to gain from Creation. We might think that before Creation He had no one to give to, and that once there was a world, He gained an additional ability – the ability to give, which He had been missing before. This is a serious misunderstanding. Creation does not “add” anything to G-d. Hashem gives because it is His Will to give. It is perfect giving, without receiving anything in return. For Hashem, giving is not a deficiency that is filled by others. It is a strength.

Because Hashem’s giving is perfect, He structured a world where man grapples with never-ending tests. As we said, overcoming the pull of temptation and obeying Hashem’s commandments earns him eternal reward, all the more precious and valuable because of the effort involved in acquiring it.<sup>17</sup> **Everything that the Holy**

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<sup>17</sup> See above, “Evil Included.”



**One, blessed be He, created in His world, He only created for His honor,** not because creating the world made Hashem greater, but because it is the setting where man would work to earn reward.

The second possible explanation for Creation is that it is Hashem's Will that His created beings should know Him through the revelation of the various powers, Divine Attributes, and Divine Names through which He rules the world. The Arizal taught that the Al-mighty created the world so that mankind would know and recognize Hashem as its Ruler (*Etz Hayyim Shaar Alef*, Chapter 1, citing *Zohar*, vol. II, p. 42b). He explains that G-d has many Names, which represent His powers and Divine Attributes. Before Creation, the potential inherent in these Names was unrevealed, because there was no one to appreciate it. Creation brought all the potential of Hashem's Attributes to realization, so to speak.

For example, the Name *alef-dalet-nun-yud* means "Master (*Adon*) of Everything." This Attribute existed in Hashem's Will even before Creation, but it would only be manifested when there would be people who served Him as their Master. Elokim, the Name associated with Divine Judgment, is only realized when there are created beings whom He judges. The Name *E-l*, which represents Divine Lovingkindness, is realized when there are beings upon whom He can bestow Divine Lovingkindness. The Attributes behind these Names were always there; they were part of Hashem's Will to create. It was Creation that brought them from the realm of the potential to the actual.<sup>18</sup>

*Why* did Hashem want to create a world that He would rule through specific Divine Attributes, and where He would reward man with good? We do not know, and we cannot know. Anything related to Hashem before Creation is entirely beyond man's capacity to grasp. With Creation, all of the Attributes were moved into the realm of reality, and we can begin to attempt to study and understand them. **Everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He only created for His honor,** to reveal His Divine powers as Ruler by means of the created world.

This is the message of our *mishnah*. **Everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He only created for His honor,** or in other words, to fulfill His purpose in Creation. It is through man, who lives in the physical world with its opportunities and temptations, that Hashem's Will to give is fulfilled. No other being can earn Divine reward by overcoming temptation and obeying Hashem's commandments, because it is only man who grapples with the evil inclination and the challenges of Free Will that abound in this world.

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<sup>18</sup> See Insights into *Pirke Avot* 4:22, Part 1 for fuller discussion of this topic.





By studying those aspects of Creation that are within man's grasp – the natural world and the wisdom of the Torah – and by keeping Hashem's *mitzvot*, we continually discover more of Hashem's greatness and reveal His light in this world, showing how **everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He only created for His honor.**

*This essay contains divre Torah. Please treat it with proper respect.*

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