

The Torah commences:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

“In the beginning, the Lord created: the Heavens and the Earth.” (Bereishis 1:1).

What is the beginning? What heavens and what earth is the pasuk referring to? What was there before the creation of the Heavens and the Earth? When creating “Heavens” and “Earth” what did the Lord create with them?

Gemara Arachin 17a says, *the Lord wanted to revert the earth back to “void and emptiness” (Bereishis 1:2) because of the evil of Yehoyakum.* Similarly, Gemara Shabbos 88a says, *Hashem said, if the Bnei Yisroel do not accept the Torah then I will return the world to void and emptiness.*

This returning means not to before creation, but to the next step in creation. There was no “void and emptiness” before *In the beginning...* There was not even void and emptiness which denotes a lack of *physical* space. There was nothing. When looked at carefully, the pasuk says, *וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוֹ וְנִבְהוּ* “and the Earth was void and empty.” (Ibid 1:2). It was *the Earth* that had the void and empty, not “the world *before* the Earth.” Before the Lord created the Earth there wasn’t even void and emptiness.

This is seen in the Gemara Chagigah 12a, *ten things were created on the first day. The Heavens and the Earth, void and emptiness, light and darkness, wind and water, the length of day and of night.* Each of these ten things were created on *Day One*. Before *Day One* these things, including void and emptiness, and darkness, did not exist.

Gemara Chagigah continues (and is brought down in Talmud Yerushalmi Chagigah 2:1), *Beis Shammai says the Heavens were created first, because it says, “created the Heavens and the Earth.” (Bereishis 1:1). Beis Hillel says earth was created first, because it says, “on the day that Hashem the Lord created earth and the skies.” (Ibid 2:4).*

Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel are not arguing, but referring to different things. “The Heavens” referred to in this pasuk is the Heavens at large, the proper “Heavens” not the sky. The “earth” referred to in 2:4 is planet earth and its atmosphere. There, the earth was created first and then the atmosphere, and thus the sky, was formed after. (See below for further discussion about the difference between the Heavens and the heavens; see below Bonus Shtikel in how the sky was formed after the earth)>

This is also how the Rabbis responded to Alexander of Macedonia when he inquired of chazal. Gemara Tamid 32a records, *the Heavens were created first based of this pasuk (1:1).* The inquiry was “Were *the Heavens* created first?” Hillel (and the pasuk 2:4) was referring to planet “earth.”

Gemara Megillah 9a says, *they changed the wording of the verse of “The Lord created in the Beginning” so that it should not be confused as “The beginning created the Lord.”* This cannot be the interpretation based on the plain reading. See below.

Rashi says, *we interpret this pasuk as 'at the beginning of the Lord's creating.'* Otherwise it would have said, בראשונה "at first."

Ibin Ezra says, *the bes letter in בראשית is superfluous, it is the same as reishis. It is a construct and connects to the next pasuk. Bara is an absolute word of creation, creating something out of nothing. Es means the very thing.*

Ramban says, *the Lord created all things from absolute non-existence. Now we have no expression in ancient Hebrew for bringing forth something from nothing other than the word bara (created). Everything that exists under the sun or above was not made from non-existence at the outset. Instead, the Lord brought forth from total and absolutely nothing a very thin substance devoid of corporeality but having a power of potency, fit to assume form and to proceed from potentiality into reality.*

There are many beautiful homiletic, Midrashic, and mystic interpretations of the pasuk. I will now interpret it – according to my style – per the plain (not simple) meaning.

"In the beginning." This is not the beginning of time. Time also had to be created. This is not when the world had void and emptiness. Void and emptiness had to be created. "And the Earth [that was referred to in pasuk 1:1] was void and empty." (Bereishis 1:2). Therefore, it cannot be referring to the beginning of time. It also cannot refer to something called *Bereishis* creating the Lord because there is no 'vav' to include "the Heavens and the Earth." The pasuk would then be *Bereishis created the Lord. The Heavens and the Earth.* Therefore, it means *in the beginning of* and it connect to "creation." Creation commenced with this creation of a beginning. It is akin to *the first thing the Lord did was...* It is impossible to know how many "years" or how much "time" lapsed before man was created because time was created later: "He called night, and it was evening and it was morning, Day One." (Ibid 1:5). Before man was on earth and experienced night and day there was no time, days, weeks, months, or years either. Therefore, the "days" of creation are an unknown length of time, perhaps even created without or before time. Accordingly, *in the beginning* is not referring to time. It is *at the start of creation.* There is also more to it.

"The Lord created." It can be read as *The Lord created in the beginning.* If so, perhaps it should have said "The Lord created in the beginning." Except, that would mean that in the beginning of something was when the Lord created the Heavens and the Earth. However, before creating time there is no *before and after*, there is no *beginning*. Accordingly, read it "the Lord created *in the beginning.* Hashem created the concept of before and after right here. That was the first thing created. "Created" is also absolute. It was not *nivreh* forming something out of other things. This is absolute creation, creating things that did not exist before like *before, the Heavens, darkness, and space.*

"The Lord." One may think to interpret this as multiple gods. It does look like a plural word. Talmud Yerushalmi Berochos 9:1 says, *Notzrim, Jewish followers of the one from Nazarene, asked Rabbi Simlai, "How many aspects of divinity created the world?" He answered them, it says, 'the day that the Lord created man on the earth.'* (Devarim 4:32). It does not say "when gods created" but "the day that the Lord created." This means it is always singular. This Gemara is unclear. The pasuk in Devraim also uses the word *elohim* which can mean gods.

Perhaps Moshe is referring back to when *gods* created man? The answer is in the reading of the context of the pesukim. (Simple reading *or pashut pshat* looks at the words and simply translates them. *Plain meaning* reads the words in context). *Bara* is singular. Thus, *Elokim* cannot be plural. It must be the name or title of the Creator. The Lord or *Elokim* created. Singular. Every time it says *Elokim* the verbs that modify it are always singular. *He* or preferably, *It*, as the Lord does not have gender, created.

“*Es.*” In the beginning, the Lord created אֵל. It created the alphabet from aleph to taf. That is the formula and the blueprint for the entire universe. The aleph bes alphabet arranged in various ways creates the atoms which create the molecules. They do this on the physical plane (es the Heavens) and the physical (es the Earth).

“The Heavens.” *Es* makes this a proper noun. It does not refer to the skies. It refers to the Heavens which are so much more. It is all heavens, all skies, all atmosphere, all weather, and all spiritual and celestial beings. Heavens is where the intangibles live, like space, angels, destroyers, light, wind, and the ethereal.

“The Earth.” This does not refer to planet earth or land, or even Eretz Yisroel which is later referred to as the Land. This is all physical beings including the sun, stars, moons, planets, meteors, and of course, planet earth. At first it was created empty and void, and dark. (See Bereishis 1:2). Then everything else was created in it, including light – which emanated from the Heavens. The process of creation of the world was like a Torah scroll. Look at the white space before the first words. That is what there was. A blank template. First, there was no Torah. Then the white was created, and that is the Heavens, what cannot be seen. Then the lines were created, the Earth. It was void and empty. The letters then were everything in the Earth, the physical world that can be experienced. Sometimes they cross over and angels can incorporate physical beings and be seen and felt.

Note, Hashem is not named here. That is because there was no man. Hashem is the relationship that the Lord has to man. Before man there is no need for *Hashem*.

BONUS SHTIKEL

Does evolution have a place in the interpretation of the Torah? The answer is, absolutely. There are two reasons. First, there is a concept that Hashem made the world to run naturally. Second, the Torah itself refers to an evolutionary concept in creation.

This must be clarified, or qualified, on two grounds. First, evolution done randomly is a concept contrary to the Torah. Evolution that is guided by the hand of Hashem is corroborated by the Torah and our *hashkafa* teachings. Second, evolution is not restricted to the definition of any current scientist or theologian. It is a general concept that actions, behaviors, intelligence, characteristics, and abilities can evolve over time.

The theory of evolution is misconstrued by today's scientists and used as a weapon against religion. Their arguments in support of their position are as harmless as their ideals are misguided. It is akin the theoretical existence of an atheist. Atheists do not exist. While this is a tangent, a momentary digression is warranted. Claimed atheists' arguments fall into one of the following: *I do not see evidence of a god*. Therefore, they are agnostic, because if they saw evidence, they would be believers. *I cannot believe in a god that is cruel or brings harm to the world*. That is akin to saying, I do not understand why the Lord allows pain and suffering in the world. They are believers dressing up in atheist clothing. Finally, a slightly more sophisticated and subtler argument is: *The cruelty I see in the world proves there is no god. For if there were a Lord, It would save humanity*. They are agnostics. They do not understand the Lord's ways. They are trying to make the Lord in their image, instead of understanding that they are made in the Lord's image. (Ironically, they usually do not espouse the same generosity, kindness, and loving mankind that they expect in the Lord).

Evolution as a modern theory only dates back to 1859. In less than two hundred years the theory is far from fully developed. It also is a 'theory' and is unproven. Evolutionary concepts go back to the Greeks that proposed animals can transform into other beings. (Though, much of this—like spontaneous creation—was disproven by Pasture in the early 18th Century). More sophisticated theories came from Europe in the early 19th Century. Theories were proposed like different animals have common ancestors, and plants have the ability to mutate in different environments. The modern theory commenced with the idea that over time nature chooses the fittest to survive. More modern ideas of the 20th Century theorists propose that all modern-day creatures evolved from single celled organisms crated long ago.

The originator of natural selection, Darwin, was a theist. He was very religious and did not write his book to attack religion. Instead, scientists of the 20th Century who developed a need to remove themselves from culpability, responsibility, and accountability to any higher power use evolution as a weapon to disprove the Lord. They have failed, simply, because it does not. Evolution does not disprove the existence of the Lord nor does it at all contradict the Torah.

Hashem runs the world through evolution. Clearly land masses, seas, and the solar system have moved and changed over time. Species of animals and plants have mutated over time to develop defenses to survive their environments. There is lots of scientific

evidence that more sophisticated creatures, e.g. humans, carry similar DNA and characteristics from simpler creatures like fish and mice. Humans still have their evolutionary brain (that controls breathing and heartrate) along with their evolved brain (that allows critical thinking). Evolution of ecologies and species can be seen and recorded over time.

The problems of evolution also get fixed when acknowledging the Lord. Problems include: How can a primordial world exist? What created it and initiated the catalyst for creating the entire universe? How do species land on the proper DNA sequence to mutate while simultaneously survive long enough to pass on these genes and characteristics to the next generation? A snake has a venom that saves its life. It also has protective features so that it does not swallow its own venom. How did they both evolve the same time?

The answer is simple: G-d. Even the self-proclaimed atheist scientists acknowledge the existence of the Lord. They just call It something else. Higher power, nature, natural order, laws of nature, or rules of the universe. Whatever it is called, it refers to the Lord and Its hand guiding the universe. The Lord runs the world naturally and guides evolution. That is how the known problem of “skipping” is solved. Scientists cannot explain how species sometimes skip steps as they evolve. Two steps are required for a change and they are seen to happen simultaneously in one evolutionary jump. They can find no fossils that have the intermediary step. Answer: the Lord.

The Torah also talks about evolution. Read carefully: “In the beginning, the Lord created the Heavens and the Earth.” (Bereishis 1:1). Call it the big bang or catalyst, creation came out of nothingness and the Lord did it. The Heavens contains all substance of the intangible world while the Earth contains all physical elements, including hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen that make up air and atmosphere.

“The Earth was void and empty and darkness pervaded...the Lord’s spirit hovered over the waters.” (Ibid 1:2). The world was void of everything. A total vacuum. Then the Lord made all atoms and molecules. The basics of life is water. The Lord guided the molecules to form into water. There was darkness as there was nothing to make light yet.

The Lord then created light. (Ibid 1:3). This is the solar beings that give light like the stars and energy, which is pure light. Day and Night (Ibid 1:5) does not mean actual day and night because there was no sun yet (or earth) to rise and set. They are, clearly, categories of time. Or they represent good and evil, both created to live in the universe. Another proof to this is: “On the day that Hashem, the Lord, created planet earth and the skies.” It was not done in one day, but over six, yet it refers to one day. Day, then, means a period, not a specific day. Further, earth was made before the skies because the land masses formed and attracted the atoms through gravity to create the atmosphere—the skies.

The Lord then made the laws of nature (Ibid 1:7). Then as these molecules formed into masses and hurdled through space, the Lord formed them into meaningful masses—planets, stars, meteors. He made an expanse above and below; meaning minerals and water gathered together in one core; created gravity, and that gravity drew in a sky. (Ibid 1:9). Land was formed and it drew in a sky made up of atmosphere. These are the planets

that are comprised of land and seas. (Ibid 1:10). Then vegetation was allowed to grow where there was light, water, and soil. (Ibid 1:11). The laws of nature that govern life—*life will find a way*—was created. (Ibid). This also proves the existence of life on other planets because this solar system's sun was not created yet.

At this time, the sun was formed in the solar system and life flourished on planet earth. (Ibid 1:11-12). The Lord finalized the cycle of the planets in the solar system and spun earth at its current rate. (Ibid 1:14). It created the concept of time, breaking it into days and nights, months and years. (Ibid). The reason for the luminaries is given as they were made for their light (the source of life and time), sun for day and moon and stars for night. (Ibid 1:16). Single-celled creatures were created and then all sea life. (Ibid 1:20). The sea teemed with life. (Ibid 1:21). They then evolved into amphibians and lizard—living on land--and then birds. (Ibid). Dinosaurs evolved into birds. “Great sea monsters....and birds” (ibid) includes the dinosaurs.

Then the more evolved land animals were made—or evolved. (Ibid 1:24). Insects and simple life evolved into mammals. (Ibid). Finally, after all that, man was made—or evolved. (Ibid).

An educated Torah scholar can easily see how the theory of evolution not only does not disprove Hashem, but actually helps prove that the Torah—written millennium ago—knew what scientists are only now discovering. It is truth.