

# The Creation Debate



Day of joy, day of fear.

Day of prayer, day of acceptance.

Kingship. Submission. Apples and honey. The blowing of the shofar.

So many different elements to this day. And when we look back—and look forward—**there are so many different aspects to our year.** Ups and downs. Highs and lows. Times when we rode a wave of joy and times when we were plunged under the tidal wave of disappointment.

And yet, when Rosh HaShanah comes, we have an inner impulse to bind all these experiences as one. To make sense of it all, to take all the many days and hours and conversations and actions and **pull them into one narrative.**



**B**ut there's so much. And there's so much disparity. There are good times and hard times. There's heartache and laughter. There are times when we feel in flow, connected to our nearest and dearest, and times when we feel rejected or distanced. There are times when we're open to growth, to turning to Hashem, and other times when that feels too hard. So how can we make sense of the year that has passed, **and what kind of thoughts and feelings can encompass our tefillos for the year ahead?**

## The Creation Contention

**I**t turns out that when it comes to mankind, **the contradictions are right there from the start.** No—even before the start, our creation was the subject of fierce debate.

Rav Simon said: When the time came for HaKadosh Baruch Hu to create the first human being, the ministering angels broke up into opposing groups. Some among them said, **"Mankind should be created,"** and some among them said, **"Mankind should not be created."**

Kindness said, "Let mankind be created because **he will do acts of kindness.**"

Truth said, "Let mankind not be created because he is full of lies."

Righteousness said. "Let mankind be created, for **he will perform righteous acts.**"

Peace said, "Let mankind not be created, for he is full of dissension."

What did HaKadosh Baruch Hu do? He took Truth and flung it to the ground, as it is written, “You will cast truth to the ground” (*Doniel* 8:12).

The ministering angels said before HaKadosh Baruch Hu, “Master of the worlds! Why do You despise Your seal of truth? Let truth rise from the ground, as it is written, “Truth will grow from the earth” (*Tehillim* 85:12)....

Rav Huna of Tzipori said: While the ministering angels were arguing with one another, HaKadosh Baruch Hu created Adam HaRishon. He said to them, “Why are you arguing? **Man has already been created.**”

(*Bereishis Rabbah* 8:5)

Let’s delineate the sides of this argument. There’s *chesed* and *tzedek*—kindness and righteousness—**who advocate for mankind’s creation**, because he will do acts of kindness and righteousness. On the opposing side is *emes* and *shalom*—truth and peace—because people can be false to themselves and each other, and they may become embroiled in disagreements, conflicts, and even war.

This was the reason for the debate between the ministering angels. Would mankind, about to be created, respect his own and other’s boundaries? Or would he impinge on them, causing conflict and war? Shalom wasn’t convinced that mankind could live peaceably.

As for truth, it had to be cast aside completely.

Creation, we see, was a triumph of the mode of giving. **Hashem’s endless desire to bestow His goodness and His light.** While truth and peace had to be consulted—for they are vital ingredients in man’s existence and self-development—ultimately, when it came to creation, they were sidelined.

But why was truth in particular cast to the earth? Why wasn’t it enough for Hashem to simply choose the other side, the side of *chesed*, and leave the opposition alone? What is the significance of truth being thrown aside?

To answer this question, we need to understand **how these opposing energies exist** within creation and the role they serve.

### Opposite Modes

When Hashem created mankind, He didn’t just infuse the human soul with the trait of *chesed* or *tzedek*. Hashem’s question—should I create mankind—**resulted in a strident conflict, and that is what He created within man.** Both sides, the side of kindness and righteousness and the side of peace and truth were incorporated within man.

Body and soul. Kindness and boundaries. Righteousness and truth. Peace and fragmentation. These opposing qualities **all exist within one human being.** Man is a turbulent argument, an unresolved conflict between opposing traits, warring motivations,

and that conflict is the essence of the human condition.

Kindness and righteousness are qualities that stem from the *middah* of *chesed*, the trait of giving and kindness. With this trait, mankind can transcend his own barriers, his own self-centeredness, **and bring joy to other people's lives** and comfort to people who are suffering.

Then there is the opposite *middah*: that of *gevurah*, an attribute that is characterized by restraint and boundaries.

In order to create a person—living, breathing, thinking, choosing, bringing both darkness and light into this world—**two opposing energies are required**. There's the act of giving, of kindness and light and beneficence. And there's the *middah* of *gevurah*, in which structure and boundaries prevail.

So many opposite *middos* and energies converging in one being: mankind. So many conflicting elements. No wonder there was so much debate before his creation.

Then there is the setting in which mankind was placed in order to live, thrive, and imbue with purpose. The world itself is a complicated dance between concealment and revelation.

If Hashem had allowed His light to flow forth without concealment, the world couldn't possibly have contained it. It would have overwhelmed His creations, which would have been totally nullified in the face of such clarity, such divinity. Even if it could withstand it, the revelation of the Divine would wipe

out any chance for free choice. Effectively, we would be spiritual robots—so drawn to His overwhelming light and goodness that we would have no choice but to follow His word. There would be no *I'm too tired; It's not on my level; What will others think?; I'm just not going to think too hard about this one; I'm sure it's okay; This is confusing for me*. Every other consideration or misgiving would fade and become meaningless. **We would never engage in the spiritual exertion of the world, the struggle of self-development.**

In short, we would have no *bechirah*, no gift of free choice.

But that's not why Hashem created us. **He wants us to think, struggle, deliberate, and ultimately to choose**. To level out our playing field, as it were, and give us the space to make a meaningful contribution to this world, Hashem had to conceal Himself.

But too much concealment and we would be lost. The light of the soul would be so faint as to be almost undetectable. We would be swallowed by the opaqueness of the universe, unable to find ourselves or Hashem.

Concealment and revelation. *Din* and *chesed*. Constriction and flow. These are **the two opposing energies with which the world was created**—and with which mankind was created. Too much *chesed*, too much flow and revelation, and the world and mankind are overwhelmed. Too much *din* and constriction and there is no room to thrive, to reach toward Hashem.

For mankind to live, thrive, grow, he needs both energies in the right balance.

On Rosh HaShanah, the day on which mankind was created, the day on which the purpose of the world was renewed, **we find ourselves vacillating between these two poles**. There is the stricture of *din*: are we upholding the Torah, the structure and blueprint of the universe? But at the same time, we eat and drink and sing and dress in Shabbos clothes, celebrating not only Hashem's kingship, but the joy of life itself.

And yet as we do so, **we may find ourselves conscious of the conflict**. We daven for life. We want life. We want the gifts of a new year and new opportunities. But sometimes, all of it feels...well, just so very hard.

## The Debate Continues

תנו רבנן: שתי שנים ומחצה נחלקו בית שמאי ובית הלל.  
הללו אומרים: נוח לו לאדם שלא נברא יותר משנברא,  
והללו אומרים: נוח לו לאדם שנברא יותר משלא נברא.

The Rabbis taught: For two and a half years, the houses of Hillel and Shammai had a long-running debate. These said: It is better for man not to have been created than to have been created. Those said: It is better for man to have been created than not to have been created.

(Eiruvim 13b)

It's a mind-blowing debate.

Mankind is the apex of creation, nothing less

than partners with Hashem as we implement His purpose in creating the world. And yet **Beis Hillel and Beis Shamai spent two and a half years on this debate**.

What exactly does it mean? And what implications does it have for us, as we stand at the cusp of a new year, waiting to be recreated?

The *Sod Yescharim* (Hoshana Rabbah 4:3) addresses this question and asks us to reexamine the terminology of the argument. The words used by the Sages of Beis Hillel and Beis Shammai is not "*tov lo l'adam*—it would be better for man" but "*no'ach lo la'adam*—**it would be more comfortable for man**."

He explains further: At the time of creation, when Hashem's great light entered this world, there was a great cry. This great, soundless cry is also heard whenever a baby is born, for the unlimited *neshamah*, which until now dwelled in Hashem's light, is forced to descend to a world of darkness and confusion. Coming down into the world is the pathway to every good, for it is only through working and finding meaning and striving to connect and becoming the best people we can be **that we can attain the ultimate good**. Good, yes. But *no'ach*? Comfortable?

Not so much.

We all know that this world, this life, can be far from comfortable. We don't know what the future will bring, and we don't know what we can expect from ourselves. Often, **Hashem's guiding hand is hidden**, and the unknown future can fill us with unease. We lose people

we love and we lose parts of ourselves. We stoop to pick up the fragments of our broken dreams and hold them in our palms, even as they cut our skin. We can feel empty and alone.

On a deeper level, our soul yearns to be elsewhere. **It pulses inside us, begging to be filled, to be loved, to be home.** But often, we don't know how to identify its whispers, and so we cover it over, in the hope that we will find rest and peace, not realizing that it's prodding us to move closer to where and who we are meant to be.

Comfortable? Certainly not.

The *Sod Yesharim* continues:

Every Rosh HaShanah, this great cry [first heard at Creation] emanates throughout the world. And so, on Rosh HaShanah, we blow the shofar. We return that cry. And as we blow that shofar and the sound penetrates our hearts, **we suddenly know who we are and why we are.** We know what we want. And we suddenly feel the blessedness of life, and the way that even the *din* is simply a function of Hashem's *chesed*. The confusion falls away. The concealment is dispersed. And the debate is resolved. True, at times we lack clarity and it feels like it would be more comfortable for our *neshamos* to have stayed in Heaven, basking in Hashem's presence. But it would not be better for us. For the goodness can be found, even here, when we listen to the sound of the shofar, and know that we can return that

cry. We can soundlessly scream: we are here for You, and You are here for us, and the world is a place of love and beauty.

As *the baal tokei'a* lifts the shofar to his lips and lets out a *tekiah*, that blast is not the first sound that is heard on Rosh HaShanah. There is a noise that we don't hear. It is the cry of the world at its creation. It is the *tza'akah*, the great cry, produced when Hashem's light enters the physical world and must be concealed and silenced. But we blow back. And when we do, **the entire creation vibrates the timber of the shofar.** And it says: True. Perhaps it is not always comfortable to be alive. But it is good.

And it is good because this life comes from Hashem's lovingkindness—**and it is a kindness and a clarity that we can access, that we find each day anew.**

We may find it in the shofar, or in our *tefillos*.

We may find it in an insight, or in the rush of satisfaction that comes from an act of giving, **or the delicate gratitude when we accept a kindness.**

We may find it in the expansiveness of forgiveness, or in the humility of saying that we slipped up and we're sorry.

We may find it in a child's eyes, filled with hope or excitement or joy.

We may find it in a hospital ward.

We may find it in the light of the Shabbos candles, or **in the quiet of the predawn silence.**

We may find it in the melody of a stirring song.

It has been implanted in the world **for us to open ourselves up to it, even in the most unexpected places.**

It is here for the taking.

## The Delight of Hashem

Not every Rosh HaShanah sees us on the highest spiritual level. In *Sefer Nechemiah* (8:10) Rosh HaShanah sees Ezra rebuking Klal Yisrael for serious *aveiros*, including taking non-Jewish wives. When they begin to cry, however, Ezra gently tells them not to be sad, but to rejoice: “For Hashem’s delight is your strength.”

The *Ohr HaMeir* highlights these words: Hashem’s delight, His *chedvah*, is derived from “your strength.” When Hashem sees that you are joyous and filled with the energy of renewal—then He is filled with *chedvah*, delight. When He sees that we are entering into a sphere in which, although we may not feel comfortable in this world, we see the good in it, then He rejoices. **When we are able to find the clarity and light, and comfort ourselves by finding meaning**, then His original desire to create the world and bestow good upon us is fulfilled.

## Day of Light, Day of Joy

Rosh HaShanah is a time of awe and trembling, yes, but it is also a time when we

can renew our consciousness of the gift of life. The wish that we have for a future. The wish that **we can live with vitality and energy in the present of each moment.** Every year at this time, that original *ratzon* of Hashem, to bestow good upon the world, upon us, is especially manifest. And we can become conscious and aware of it, by both opening ourselves up to His light and by channeling His kindness and being a force of good in the lives of others.

It’s a day when both the future and the past are folded up in the cosmic struggle of today—but when **we know that that struggle is the ultimate good.** That Hashem’s gifts will surround us and comfort us and bring us to a place of closeness.

It’s a day when we blow the shofar and remind ourselves that we have the ability to pierce through the concealment, to return to the place of Hashem’s love and closeness and find within ourselves an openness to His presence.

## Truth Cast to the Earth

We daven for life. But we’re so aware of our struggles, of the pain and sadness and suffering that exists in the world. We’re praying for the renewal of the world and the continuation of our lives, but those lives can be so very filled with darkness.

In the original debate over mankind’s creation, Tzedek and Chesed’s arguments were accepted: People can do kindness. They can



be righteous. They can act as ambassadors of Hashem's goodness in this world. And so it was worthwhile for man to be created. As for Truth? Even as it was presenting its opposing claim, it was cast to the earth.

What does this mean? In the so-called earth—in the detritus of our daily lives, in the mundane details and the days that whizz by and the hours that drag, in the places that don't look pretty, where the sky seems far away—**there the truth will sprout.**

What is that truth? That even if it's not comfortable, even if it's not *no'ach*—it's good. We can feel Hashem. We can find Him. He will embrace us, **no matter where and no matter when.** Whether we're waiting for a child to pull himself up from the mud, or for a doctor to deliver good news, whether we're waiting for a shidduch or a job, or peace of mind, or simply not to feel so very, very lost in this world... the truth can be found.

The shofar, here on earth, shows us that each of us has the ability **to break through all the voices, the naysayers**, the people and thoughts that say, "It's not worth it. You can't do it. You can't be there. You'll stay stuck in the

darkness." And it helps us to pierce through those views and connect with the truth: that Hashem gave us life because He loves us.

And it is this which enables us to rejoice on Rosh Hashanah. *Chedvas Hashem ma'uzechem.* Your strength is Hashem's delight. What strength is this? Perhaps it is the **strength of our determination to go through creation.** To constantly birth ourselves anew, to rediscover what we have and what we want and what brings us joy and who we are.

This year, on the first day of Yom Tov, we don't have shofar, but we have Shabbos. We have Shabbos candles and Kiddush and *zemiros*. We have "*Az tisanag al Hashem.*" Then you will bask in Hashem's light. In the realization that when He created the world, He infused it with spirituality, and it is this, **the inner place, that gives it life and light, and we have access to it.** It is our privilege to light the Shabbos lights, to feel the renewal of Creation and of us.

This year, may we all be *zocheh* to feel the joy of recreation. May we be lifted up to a place where we can **feel the delight of Hashem, and pierce the darkness and confusion through our shofar call of clarity and love.**

כתיבה וחתימה טובה,

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