

The Ruler Made in His Image

PARSHAS BEREISHIS

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כ"ט תשרי תשפ"ז

פרשת בראשית

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדֹמוֹתֵינוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בְּדֶגְתַּי הַיָּם ...

"And G-d said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea..."

BEREISHIS 1:26 • EXCERPT

Both Rachamim and Din

HASHEM SAYS “naaseh” — “let Us make man” — in the plural. Ohr HaChaim gives two explanations: humility, and also that Hashem’s middos are many: the Thirteen Middos of Rachamim and the Name Elokim, which is Middas HaDin, agreed together to create man.

So “in Our image” may mean that man is made with a side of Rachamim and a side of Din, to use each as it is needed. That is why it is fitting that he rules over creation: he can show mercy to one who is worthy and in need, and put to death one who is liable under Din.

OHR HACHAIM
Bereishis 1:26
“naaseh”

נַעֲשֶׂה

The Order That Flips

Here the animals are listed as fish, birds, land animals. In Parshas Noach (9:2) and in Tehillim 8:7–9, the order is reversed: land animals, birds, fish. Rashi notes that “veyirdu” can mean both “rule” and “descend,” and Kli Yakar builds the order on that: if man is not worthy, he becomes lower than them.

So here the verse builds from the least surprising failure to the most surprising. Not only will he not rule the fish, which he can neither follow nor see — no surprise there — but not even the birds, which he can at least see, and not even the land animals beside him. Noach and Tehillim speak of when man is worthy, so the order reverses: not only land animals, but even birds, and not only birds, but even fish.

KLI YAKAR
Bereishis 1:26
“veyirdu”

וְיִרְדּוּ

The Image and the Power to Choose

Hashem says man will be made “b’tzalmeinu” — in Our image. What is that image? Malbim says the Rambam’s view, that the image is the intellect, is not precise enough, since intellect already exists in the separate spiritual beings. He looks for something found in man and in nothing else in all of creation, and finds it in bechirah: the freedom to act against his own nature.

Malachim act only as Hashem wills, and everything in the physical world is compelled in its actions. Only man was given rule over himself, to act or to hold back even against his nature — and Malbim says this parallels Hashem’s own power to change the nature of the world. He then limits the parallel: man can also choose evil, while Hashem chooses only good, so the likeness holds when man uses his freedom for good.

MALBIM
Bereishis 1:26
“b’tzalmeinu”

בְּצַלְמֵנוּ

Notice one moment today when your first instinct pulls one way. Pause, decide what is right, and choose deliberately, even if that means going against your instinct.

Putting Ohr HaChaim and Malbim together: why would Hashem give man both Rachamim and Din, and the freedom to choose between them?

FOR THE TABLE

WORTH ASKING