

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter I: Bereisheet (Gen. 1:1-6:8)

Essay 16. The creation of gold

מדרש רבה על פסוק "וזהב הארץ ההוא טוב", אומר ר' שמעון בן לקיש לא היה העולם ראוי להשתמש בזהב, ולמה נברא? בשביל המשכן והמקדש, שנאמר "וזהב הארץ ההוא טוב", כמה דאת אמר "ההר הטוב הזה והלבנון" עכ"ל. קשה דמאי אולמיה דזהב, שלא היה ראוי להשתמש בו? אי משום שהוא דבר חשוב, היה לנו לומר פן אף באבנים טובות ומרגליות שהם יותר חשובים מזהב, כמו שסיים הכתוב "שם הבדלח ואבן השהם".

There is a **Midrash Gen. Rabbah 16:2 on the verse, “and the gold of that land is good; there is precious stone and the onyx stone” (Gen. 2:12). “Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: The world did not deserve to use gold, so why was it created? Because of the Tabernacle and the Temple,¹ as it is said, ‘and the gold of that land is good,’ as you would say, ‘that good hill country, and the Lebanon’ (Deut. 3:25),”** which is understood as a synonym for the Temple.

A question is how is gold superior, that [the world] does not deserve to use it, according to Reish Lakish? If it’s because it’s a highly regarded material, we could say that there are good stones and pearls that are more highly regarded than gold, as the verse Gen. 2:12 concludes, “there is precious stone and the onyx stone.”

ויש לומר דהגם שהאבנים טובות ומרגליות חשובות יותר מהזהב מפל מקום לא דמו לזהב, שהרי המרגליות נעשו לתכשיט לשרים למלכים ולעשירים. והואיל דבלאו הכי הקב"ה נתן להם כבוד וגדולה יכולים להתקשט בהם שזו היא הגדולה שלהם, אבל הזהב פל העולם משתמשים בו בין העניים בין העשירים, ולכן קאמר שלא היה עולם ראוי להשתמש בזהב.

It can be said that even though the good stones and pearls are more highly regarded than gold, in any case, they are not similar to gold, as pearls are used as an adornment for ministers to kings and for the wealthy. Besides, the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave [the ministers and wealthy] honor and greatness, they have the right to adorn themselves with [the pearls], for this is their greatness. But regarding gold, we see that the entire world uses it, whether the poor or the rich. Of course, the truly impoverished person, who lacks clothing and food, may not have gold, but we see many people living in poverty who nevertheless have thin rings, bracelets, or necklaces made of gold. Therefore, we see that it is almost as if the entire

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¹ For the gold used in the Tabernacle, see Exodus chapter 37. For the Temple, see I Kings chapters 6 and 7.

world uses gold, and so how do we understand the comment, **as it is said** by Reish Lakish, that **the world is not fit to use gold?**

ועוד יש לומר דהואיל שמצאנו שבפסוק "וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב" דרשו רז"ל שבשביל שהנה טוב עמד וגנזו לעתיד לבוא לפי שאין העולם הנה ראוי להשתמש במה שהוא טוב. משום הכי מקשה דהכי נמי דכתיב "וזהב הארץ הוא טוב" לא הנה העולם ראוי להשתמש בו, ולא די שאין ראוי להשתמש אלא שלא הנה לו להיות נברא כלל, דבשלקמא האור שהוא דבר רוחני הנה יכול לגנוזו אבל הנהב שהוא דבר גשמי אין סברא לגנוזו לעתיד לבוא שהוא פולו רוחני, ואם כן למה נברא, ותיירץ משום המשכן והמקדש.

It can also be said that we find for the verse, “G-d saw that the light was good” (Gen. 1:4), that the rabbis of blessed memory expounded that because it was good, i.e., it should be for the use of righteous people, and G-d realized that the people were corrupt and might misuse this light for evil. Therefore, He rose and concealed it from them, from the corrupt people. He did so in order to preserve this light for the righteous in the Future to Come, after the resurrection of the dead, for this corrupt world did not deserve to use this thing that was good.²

Because of this, another difficulty is that it’s also written “and the gold of that land is good,” i.e., just as the “light [that] was good” was reserved for the righteous, we could say the same thing about the “gold of that land [that] is good,” that it should be reserved for the righteous. The corrupt world does not deserve to use it. Not only does the world not deserve to use it, but maybe it shouldn’t have been created at all? Granted, the light, which was a spiritual thing rather than a tangible form of energy, was able to be hidden away. But regarding the gold, which is something tangible, there was no thought to hide it away for the Future to Come, which is entirely spiritual, and which will have no need for a material substance.³ If so, why was it created? The solution is because of the Tabernacle and the Temple, both of which used gold.

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² Chagiga 12a: “Rabbi Elazar said: [The] light that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created on the first day [was not that of the sun but a different kind of light], through which man could observe from one end of the world to the other. But when the Holy One, Blessed be He, looked upon the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion and saw that their ways were corrupt [and that they might misuse this light for evil], He arose and concealed it from them, as it is stated: ‘And from the wicked their light is withheld’ (Job 38:15). And for whom did He conceal it? For the righteous people in the future, as it is stated: ‘And G-d saw the light, that it was good’ (Gen. 1:4), and ‘good’ is referring to none other than the righteous, as it is stated: ‘Say of the righteous that it shall be good for them, for they shall eat the fruit of their actions’ (Isaiah 3:10).”

³ Some rabbis, such as Maimonides (Rambam), believe that the World-to-Come (*olam haba*) or synonymous Future to Come (*atid lavo*) describe an entirely spiritual existence for souls, whereas Nachmanides (Ramban) believes it relates to an existence on Earth where spirituality and physicality are merged.