

Fill Your Own Cup 5786 *Fall Series – Session One – Heaven and Earth*

Genesis 1:1-2

*In the Beginning, God created heaven and earth—
the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface
of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—*

*בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:
וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוֹמָה וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹמֹת הָרָחוֹק
וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם:*

I. In the Beginning God Created, By Rivka Miriam

In the beginning God created
the heavens that aren't actually
and the earth that wants to touch them.
In the beginning God created threads stretched out
between them -
between the heavens that aren't actually
and the earth that cries out for salvation,
And God fashioned humankind
Such that a person is a prayer and is a thread
touching what is not
with a touch of tenderness and subtlety.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים
אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם שֶׁבִּעֲצָם אֵינָם
וְאֶת הָאֲדָמָה שְׂרוּצָה בָּם לִגְעֹת,
בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים חוּטִים מְתוּחִים
בֵּינָהֶם
בֵּין הַשָּׁמַיִם שֶׁבִּעֲצָם אֵינָם
וּבֵין הָאֲדָמָה הַמְּשׁוּנָעֶת,
וְאֵת הָאָדָם הוּא יֶצֶר
שֶׁהָאִישׁ הוּא תַפְלָה וְהוּא חוּט
נוֹגֵעַ בָּמָה שְׂאִינָנו
בְּמַגֵּעַ שֶׁל רֹךְ וְנִדְקוּת.

*(For a beautiful explanation of this poem – please see Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's article:
<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/beginning-god-created-prayer>)*

II. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Chagigah 12a

The Sages taught: Beit Shammai say: The heavens were created first and afterward the earth was created, as it is stated: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

And Beit Hillel say: The earth was created first, and heaven after it, as it is stated: “On the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven” (Genesis 2:4). Beit Hillel said to Beit Shammai: According to your words, does a person build a second floor and build the first floor of the house afterward? As it is stated: “It is the One Who builds God’s upper chambers in the heaven, and has founded God’s vault upon the earth” (Amos 9:6).

Beit Shammai said to Beit Hillel: According to your words, does a person make a stool for their feet, and make a seat afterward? As it is stated: “So said the Lord: The heavens are My seat, and the earth My footstool” (Isaiah 66:1).

But the Rabbis say: Both this and that were created as one, for it is stated: “Indeed, My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand up together” (Isaiah 48:13).
And the others, Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, what, in their opinion, is the meaning of “together”? It means that they do not separate from each other. (The term “together” is referring not to the moment of their creation but to the manner of their positioning.)
In any case, the verses contradict each other.

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן, בֵּית שְׁמַאי אוֹמְרִים: שָׁמַיִם
נִבְרְאוּ תַחְלָה וְאַחֵר כּוֹךְ נִבְרְאָת הָאָרֶץ,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר: “בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.”
וּבֵית הֵלֵל אוֹמְרִים: אֶרֶץ נִבְרְאָת
תַּחְלָה וְאַחֵר כּוֹךְ שָׁמַיִם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר:
”בְּיוֹם עָשׂוֹת ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם.”
אָמְרוּ לָהֶם בֵּית הֵלֵל לְבֵית שְׁמַאי:
לְדַבְּרִיכֶם, אֵדָם בּוֹנֶה עֲלֵיָהּ וְאַחֵר כּוֹךְ
בּוֹנֶה בִּית? שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר: “הַבּוֹנֶה בַּשָּׁמַיִם
מַעֲלֹתָיו וְנֹאגֶדְתּוֹ עַל אֶרֶץ יִסְדָּה.”
אָמְרוּ לָהֶם בֵּית שְׁמַאי לְבֵית הֵלֵל:
לְדַבְּרִיכֶם, אֵדָם עוֹשֶׂה שֶׁרָפְרָף, וְאַחֵר
כּוֹךְ עוֹשֶׂה כֶּסֶּא? שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר: “כֹּה אָמַר
ה' הַשָּׁמַיִם כֶּסֶּא וְהָאָרֶץ הָדוּם רִגְלִי.”
וְחֻכָּמִים אוֹמְרִים: זֶה וְזֶה כְּאַחַת
נִבְרְאוּ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר: “אֶף יְדֵי יִסְדָּה אֶרֶץ
וַיִּמְנִי טַפְחָהּ שָׁמַיִם קוֹרָא אֲנִי אֱלֹהִים
יַעֲמְדוּ יַחְדָּו.”
וְאֵידָּהּ, מֵאֵי “יַחְדָּו”? דָּלָא מִשְׁתַּלְפִּי
מִהֲדָדִי.

קָשׁוּ קְרָאֵי אֶהְדִּדִּי!

Reish Lakish said: When they were created, God first created the heavens and afterward created the earth, but when God spread them out and fixed them in their places, God spread out the earth and afterward God spread out the heavens.

אמר ריש לקיש: קשנבראו — ברא
שמים ואחר כך ברא הארץ, וכשנטה
— נטה הארץ ואחר כך נטה שמים.

III. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Beitza 16a

It is taught in a *baraita*: They said about Shammai the Elder that all his days he would eat in honor of Shabbat. How so? If he found a choice animal, he would say: This is for Shabbat. If he subsequently found another one better than it, he would set aside the second for Shabbat and eat the first.

However, Hillel the Elder had a different trait, that all his actions were for the sake of Heaven, as it is stated: “Blessed be the Lord, day by day;

That is also taught in a *baraita* (in more general terms): Beit Shammai say: From the first day of the week, Sunday, start preparing already for your Shabbat. And Beit Hillel say: “Blessed be the Lord, day by day.”

תנא: אמרו עליו על שמאי הזקן, כל ימיו
היה אוכל לכבוד שבת. מצא בהמה נאה,
אומר: זו לשבת. מצא אחרת נאה הימנה —
מניח את השניה ואוכל את הראשונה.

אבל הלל הזקן — מזה אחרת היתה לו,
שכל מעשיו לשם שמים, שנאמר: “ברוך ה'
יום יום”.

תנא נמי הכי, בית שמאי אומרים: מחד
שביד לשבתיה, ובית הלל אומרים: “ברוך
ה' יום יום”.

IV. Reb Mimi Feigelson, Heaven and Earth Kiss

<https://www.aju.edu/ziegler-school-rabbinic-studies/our-torah/back-issues/heaven-and-earth-kiss>

... We find ourselves asking foundational questions as to how we live our lives. What are the guiding principles with which we interpret the reality that we live in? Do we need to be grounded in this world before we aspire to reach for the heavens, as Beit Hillel is asking of us? Or, perhaps, without first being able to answer questions of meaning and purpose we can't really take a step forward, as Beit Shamai would suggest. The controversy between the two is therefore not a technical question of the accuracy of the verses or even the process of creation, but rather a core question that we each need to answer for ourselves. What is it that we need to function in God's world - an earth beneath our feet or a heaven above our head?

It was only a couple of weeks ago when we read the Torah portion of Ha'azinu where there, too, earth and heaven are called into center field. Moshe calls for the heavens to listen and for the earth to hear ([Deuteronomy 32:1](#)). The Ishbitzer rebbe (d.1853) in his interpretation of this verse aligns the heaven with the mind and the earth with the heart. For the Ishbitzer rebbe the key difference between the two is that the mind can hold onto dichotomies, realities that seem unfathomable. The mind can comprehend simultaneously juxtapositions that the heart can not. The heart, he teaches, seeks for peace and harmony. The mind can accept everything while the heart will only hold on to that which in the immediate present beckons quiet and integration...

I'm left with the challenge of connecting heaven and earth. Regardless to whether we stand in the world as a disciple of Beit Hillel or Beit Shamai we cannot live without both. That was never the rabbi's question - heaven and earth are a given. I know that when the Torah will be taken out of the ark this Shabbat I will lean to kiss it as it passes me by. I know that it is only when my upper lip, the lip closer to the heaven connects with my lower lip, the lip closer to the earth, that this kiss possible.

With the conclusion of 'the chaggim' (holidays) and as we start our individual trek into this new year, may we find our path to serve God with our minds and hearts. May our minds and hearts find a language to feed each other with, a co-existence that will enable us to kiss the Torah every time it passes us by.