

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

No'ach

The Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Efrayim Luntschitz, 16-17th c.) asks a fascinating question in his discussion of the creation of man (2:7): why does not Gd accord to the crown of His creation the approbation of, "And the Lord saw that it was good?" Earlier, on the sixth day, with reference to the creation of animals, the Torah does indeed record this approving phrase (1:25). Man, however, while blessed and mandated to multiply and rule over nature, does not enjoy Gd's endorsement of "ki tov, that it was good." Why not?

Other than the Kli Yakar's own excellent answer, I would like to suggest a parallel but different approach.

In the beginning of our Parsha, No'ach is praised as "a righteous man, perfect in his generation" (6:9). Rashi (ad loc) contrasts this description of No'ach with that of Avraham, about whom Gd portrays as one who shall, "... walk before Me and be perfect" (17:1). How might we understand the difference between these two characterizations?

The answer is to be found in appreciating how the Torah introduces Gd's mandate to Avraham. "... I am KEIL SHA-DAI; walk before me and be perfect." Why is Gd here denominated as KEIL SHA-DAI? The Talmud (Chagiga

12a) understands the name SHIN-DALET-YUD as meaning. "I who said to the world, DAI, enough." With this explanation, Rav Soloveitchik interprets his message to Avraham thusly: "My creation is not fully complete ... Man, you will be my partner, and together we will both be creators. You will pick up where I left off... [I]n spite of My unlimited power over natural causal processes, I need your help in perfecting and ennobling man. My primordial will ... cannot redeem man and elevate him to a higher existence. Only a concerted effort by man and Gd can shape a new personality and save mankind from a meaningless, brutish existence" (see his *Abraham's Journey*, pp. 95-96).

No'ach was certainly a great man. He walked with Gd and obeyed His every command. He responded to the Divine call and complied, but a pioneer, he was not. No'ach did not wade into the vile corruption of his generation and preach a courageous monotheistic ethic of righteousness in an effort to redeem that evil. Avraham's life, however, portrayed an entirely different character. Unlike No'ach, Avraham set out to do the impossible; he attempted to redeem his world.

And when, after years and years of wandering and questing for the truth, HaShem finally elects Avraham to be the progenitor of a chosen people, what exactly did HaShem see in Avraham that qualified him to be this intrepid pioneer?

Rambam (Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 1:3) details how, prior to the birth of Avraham, the world was rushing toward a yawning abyss of spiritual and moral wickedness. Once Avraham enters the world stage, without even hearing Gd's voice for the first 75 years of his life, he sets out on a journey that transforms both him and his surroundings. In describing this amazing odyssey, Rambam uses one word no less than four times - V'HIT-CHIL, and he began ... "As no term is redundant in Rambam's Mishneh Torah, it is fair to ask why Rambam chose to repeat this word?

The answer is rather clear. In Rambam's understanding, it was Avraham who established what we may call "the ethic of V'HIT-CHIL." Here's how his text reads: [While quite young, Avraham] began (HIT-CHIL) to contemplate ... and ponder day and night ... How can it be that the earth continually revolves without anyone propelling it? ... Avraham was 40 years old ... and he began (HIT-CHIL) to counter the [idolatrous] arguments of the people of Ur Kasdim ... He broke their idols and began (HIT-CHIL) teaching people to worship the true Gd of the world... [And when] the king tried to kill him, he was miraculously saved and went to Charan. And [there], he began (V'HIT-CHIL) to proclaim in a thunderous voice that there is only one Gd and to Him alone should one worship..."

What is this ethic of V'HIT-CHIL? It is that sense of mission that never gives

up, never surrenders no matter the physical obstacles, the derision and mocking of the masses, and the repeated failures and frustrations. It is that ethic that not only ignores insults and impediments, but even more amazingly, continues to chart new beginnings and uncover great possibilities. To begin again and again, with purposeful and undiminished energy, takes not only courage but a commitment to a higher order of values and belief.

And this was Avraham, our first patriarch, the pioneer of our faith!

With this insight, we may now answer the question of the Kli Yakar. Rashi, quoting the Midrash (B'reishit Rabah 4:6), tells us that the second day of creation did not merit the approbation of "ki tov, that is was good" because the work of that day was incomplete and "a thing which is unfinished is not in its state of fulness and goodness" (Rashi, 1:7, s.v. mei'al). If so, man's creation was also no different. He was created as a being who, while aspiring for completion, remains imperfect. He is, to use the popular expression, forever a "work in progress". His mandate is to adopt the ethic of V'HIT-CHIL and doggedly, with unflagging spirit, begin and begin again, forging ahead, pursuing the right and the good in achieving whatever it is his destiny to fulfill.

We are children of Avraham and "the deeds of Fathers are meant to be

signposts for their descendants." By emulating our great Forefather and cultivating this ethic of V'HIT-CHIL, we will discover that not only will we distinguish ourselves by our worthwhile and meaningful successes, but we will, in that very endeavor, much like Avraham, help redeem our world.