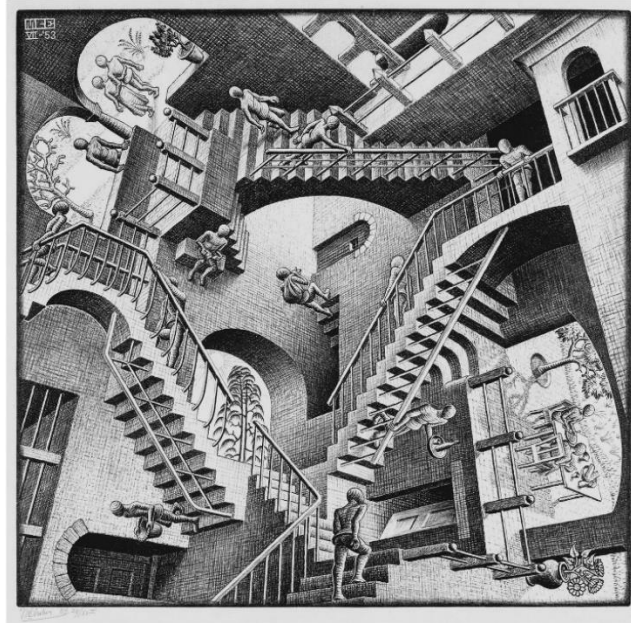


PARSHAT B'REISHIT
27 TISHREI 5781/15 OCTOBER 2020



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WHERE TO BEGIN?

1. “Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?” he asked. “Begin at the beginning,” the King said gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.” (Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*)
2. בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְהוֹ וּבְהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי־אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר
3. The text cries out: “Explain m/Me!” (Rashi)

The verse cannot be read as “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” since the first act of God was “Let there be light.” Thus, verse 1 does not come to teach us the order of Creation. (Rashi)

It is as our Rabbis have taught: For the sake of Torah, which is called רֵאשִׁית דְּרָכּוֹ (“the first/beginning/chief of God’s way” from יְהִיָה קִנְיִי רֵאשִׁית דְּרָכּוֹ “God created me, the beginning of God’s way,” Proverbs 8:22)

4. Torah opens with a text that requires our involvement and intervention in order to achieve some meaning. And we can only achieve some meaning by controlling the text through some active participation....God's Torah requires human involvement in order to achieve its meaning – it is incomplete without the participation of humankind. (Rabbi Robert Harris)
5. A beginning is a first step in the intentional production of meaning and the production of difference from preexisting traditions. It authorizes subsequent texts. It both enables them and limits what is acceptable. (Edward Said, *Beginnings*)
6. “God separated the waters below from the waters above.” (Genesis 1:7)
7. They are crying like a family being torn apart. The lower waters long to go up in order to be reunited with their other half. (Midrash, B'reishit Rabbah 5:4)
8. ...מִן־הָאָרֶץ יַעֲלֶה מִן־הָאָרֶץ (Genesis 2:6)

מִן - mist; יַעֲלֶה - distress, calamity; מִן - be curved, bent; also, to burden, oppress

9. For all of Creation alludes to the human psyche. The “destroyed worlds” are lived out in the heart broken by failing. In that way alone can one ever attain understanding....”A mist rose up from the ground and watered the whole surface of the earth” (Genesis 2:6). That is, a cry rose from the worlds that were destroyed....Arousal must move from below to above; only then the earth was watered. (Rabbi Ya'akov of Izbica-Radzyn)