

Introduction to Tanach Education – specifically the study of Chumash Bereshit (Emuna 101)

Chazal say:

**”בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם.
ומה תלמוד לומר? והלא במאמר אחד יכול להבראות?
אלא להפרע מן הרשעים,
שמאבדין את העולם שנברא בעשרה מאמרות,
וליתן שכר טוב לצדיקים, שמקיימין את העולם
שנברא בעשרה מאמרות.”**

“The world was created in ten utterances.” In the description of creation in the book of *Bereshit*, it is written, “G-d said” nine times. For example, “G-d said, ‘Let there be light,’” and “G-d said, ‘Let there be a firmament.”

The words “In the beginning, G-d created” make up an additional, independent statement. So, in total, there are ten utterances.

The rabbis in the Mishnah ask, “Why did G-d need ten utterances? He could have created everything in just one.”

They answer: “In order to punish the wicked, who destroy the world that was created in ten utterances, and to reward the righteous who sustain the world that was created in ten utterances.”

This answer sounds strange and doesn't answer the question. After all, the same could be said regarding any number of utterances. For example, “Why did G-d create the world in x utterances? In order to punish the wicked who destroy the world created in x utterances and to reward the righteous who sustain the world that was created in x utterances.”

What is special about the number ten?

Let's take a look at what the Maharal, one of the 'later rabbis' (*Acharonim*), has to say. According to him (*Netivot Olam, Netiv Hatorah 1*), the number ten is not coincidental but rather expresses a key characteristic of the world. The number ten expresses a multitude but is actually one organism. The numbers one through nine express independent entities. Let's explain with an example: we have a bag of apples. If we take an apple out of the bag, does the apple change in any way? Of course not. How about the apples that remain in the bag — did they change? No!

Now let's try this with a person — if we remove his eye (G-d forbid), does the eye change? Of course! It has lost its purpose, function, and entity. The eye is no longer useful. And how about the person? He, too, is changed. He is now disabled.

What's the difference between the above examples?

The apples are a collection in a bag; they are not an organism. They are not connected. Each apple stands alone. The body, on the other hand, is not a collection of organs. It is an organism, so there is no significance to an organ outside the body. There is an existential connection between interdependent organs. What is it that makes the human body an organism rather than a collection? What unifies the organs?

The *neshamah*!

If we remove a doll's eye, the eye does not lose its entity because it never had one. When there is no soul-*neshamah*, the connection between the eye and the body is simply aesthetic. It's not real. Therefore, the doll's body is also unaffected by removing the eye.

The implication is that without a *neshamah*, the whole is simply a collection of individual things. When the unifying entity is missing, there is nothing to gather the parts into a whole, and it remains a mere collection. Only when the body contains a soul is there a unifying power, a force

that binds the organs into an organism. This life force enables each organ to fulfil its purpose.

According to the Maharal, the number ten expresses the unifying characteristic of the world,

“The letter yud is so small that it's almost a dot. It is not really possible to make it any smaller, and yet, its numeric value is ten.”

It is not coincidental that the numerical value of the letter yud is ten. On the one hand, it expresses multitude; on the other, it's a single entity.

Notice how the base-10 number system is used in mathematics. When we count using base-10, as is done throughout the world, we assign a symbol to each number — the digits 0 through 9. How do we symbolize the number ten? By using two digits: 1 and 0, and placing them together in a specific way. That is, 10 is a kind of an 'enlarged 1', the first number that is expressed as a multitude, but is actually a single entity.

So, what does it mean for us that the world was created in ten utterances?

First, it means that the world has a soul. We express this awareness in tefillah when we say in Kedushah, “*Kvodo Male Olam*” — “His honor fills the world.”

It means there is an ideal, divine substance that permeates reality everywhere, even when it appears hidden.

So we know the world has a soul. Now what?

In the morning, we open our day by stating, "My G-d! The soul you gave me is pure". Why do we need to begin the day by acknowledging this soul that is holy, lofty, and literally attached to G-d's throne?

This statement expresses the purpose of a Jew's daily life; everything we do, from morning to night, is an expression of the soul. Our learning, praying, helping others, and even our meals, everything we do should reveal our soul. Our actions are conduits through which we express our divine image, our *tzelem Elokim*.

If a person decides not to work toward discovering their G-dly side (G-d forbid), life loses its value. The same is true of the world. It has a soul, and the Torah instructs the world on the correct way to build a life that expresses its soul and ideal essence. The Maharal continues, "The world is organised such that it is 'one', because the world order is the Torah, which is an absolute 'one' ". That is, since the Torah is the blueprint of the world, the world cannot connect to its soul without the Torah.

Without the Torah, there is no value to the world's existence. At the end of the story of creation, it is written, “*Vayehi Erev, Vayehi Boker, Yom HaShishi*”. This “*Ha*” represents the definite article and appears only in the case of the sixth day of creation. Why?

Chazal, in *Midrash Tanchuma, Bereshit 1*, explain that, “...the sixth day” alludes to the sixth day of Sivan, the day on which we received the Torah.

Chazal continue by explaining that Hashem conditioned the creation of the world on *Am Yisrael* accepting the Torah. “If they don't,” said Hashem, “I will return the world to pre-creation chaos.”

This condition reflects the idea that if the world does not discover its soul, it lacks significance. To summarize, the fact that the world was created in ten utterances teaches us that we are obligated to discover the world's ideal essence.

There is another aspect of the world having a soul. The Maharal continues, “And when something is put together correctly, and one part is removed, it can ruin the entire thing. And, when each part works properly, the entire entity works correctly.”

To understand what the Maharal means, let's compare the world to a large orchestra with a conductor who established it and many musicians who play different instruments. Each musician has the perfect instrument for them, and their job is to produce the perfect sound that contributes to the orchestral composition the conductor chose.

How can one tell who a good musician is in the orchestra?

Of course, the deciding factor is the musician's commitment to the composition. If he plays well, clearly, and accurately, then his contribution to the general harmony will be greater.

Imagine if one musician decides to play a different melody from the one the conductor chose. In the middle of the concert, when everyone is playing one piece, he starts playing something entirely different. Without a doubt, he has ruined the concert.

Now we can better understand what the Maharal means when he says, "If one small piece is removed, it can ruin the whole thing." When the 'whole thing' is an organic life system, a flaw in one part can negatively affect the system. And when one part works to prevent his instrument from playing incorrectly, he adds to the general harmony. The

Maharal concludes that when each part works properly, the entire entity functions correctly.

Our world is like an orchestra. Hashem created many ‘musicians’ with varying means and talents, and their role is to proclaim the G-dly truth in the world. Twice a day, we say, “*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad.*” This is G-d calling upon *Am Yisrael* to listen to the general truth of the world and to proclaim it to others.

What is this general truth that we are commanded to be aware of constantly?

“*Hashem Elokeinu*” — The name Elokim is plural and teaches us that Hashem is the Master of all forces. “*Hashem Elokim*” is an expression of the multitude and variety of existing forces in reality, in *Am Yisrael*, and in all people. *Am Yisrael* hears, understands, and announces to the world that all forces are expressions of one ultimate purpose: *Hashem Echad*. In this ‘orchestra’, all the musicians, talents, instruments, and sounds were created to play this melody — the G-dly melody.

That's why all Jewish people have a constant ambition to channel their life's energy into exposing the Shechinah to the world.

How do we channel these energies? We accept the yoke of heaven; we commit to serving Hashem. Now we can understand our sages' answer to the question why G-d created the world in ten utterances: “In order to punish the wicked who destroy the world that was created in ten utterances and to reward the righteous who sustain the world that was created in ten utterances.”

The fact that the world was created in ten utterances creates a distinction between the righteous and wicked. If the world were not created in this way, it would not have had a *neshamah* — a single holy purpose that gives it life. And without a purpose, there are neither righteous nor wicked; everyone does what they want, and there is no difference between good and bad.

In a world with a unifying agenda, a high level of commitment is required. The wicked who channel their energies for egotistic ends create a terrible flaw in their lives. But since these wicked people live in the world “created in ten utterances,” their behavior not only hurts them, but also causes 'disharmonious sounds' in the entire world, that is, the wicked destroy the world created in ten utterances.

On the other hand, the righteous know that the world has a Boss, a *neshamah*, and therefore they spend their lives making a constant effort to channel their energies into revealing the *neshamah*.

The world is unified, and there is therefore a connection between its parts. The righteous form a basis for the world. That is, their blessed effect establishes a foundation for the world, and they spiritually elevate it through their righteousness. The righteous sustain the world that was created in ten utterances.

Rav Kook explains (*Middot haReaya, Tikkun 1*), “There is a very strong connection between the individual and the collective. Therefore, when an individual is elevated, the collective reality is elevated as well. That is how we improve endless worlds with every good deed that we do.”

The more aware we are of this connection, the more responsible we feel to elevate the overall reality, and the greater the power of our influence. That's why the Rambam teaches us to feel responsible for the whole world. In the Rambam's Laws of Repentance (3:4), he writes,

“Throughout the entire year, a person should always look at himself as equally balanced between merit

and sin, and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin. If he performs one sin, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of guilt and brings destruction upon himself.

[On the other hand,] if he performs one good deed, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others.” This is implied in Proverbs 10:25,

“A righteous man is the foundation of the world.”

The world that was created in ten utterances is one in which all its parts belong to this 'project' of revealing G-d's truth. People are not only individuals; they are all musicians in G-d's orchestra, whether we know it, want it, or not. This was how the world was created, and this is its essence.

We conclude that the second meaning of the world being created in ten utterances is that there is a strong connection between the individual and the whole, creating responsibility for each individual to elevate the whole.

We may ask, “Why must we play only what the conductor decides? Why can't we play what the musicians want? Why can't we each express our personal desires? Why are the individuals being seemingly ignored?”

The world was created in order to realize G-d's agenda, as it says in Isaiah (43:7), “Every one that is called by My name, and whom I created for My glory, I have formed and made him.” The world was created solely to proclaim the G-dly melody. All the world's instruments and talents were created in exact accordance with G-d's plan, which predated the world. Faithfulness to G-d's agenda does not ignore anyone; rather, the opposite is true. G-d's agenda brings about the actualization of each person's true nature. Therefore, commitment to this truth can lead to true happiness and the empowerment of our life forces and talents. The more loyal we are to G-d's goal, the better our energies are actualized, in the most beautiful and exalted manner.

Let's return to our orchestra to understand this concept better. Take the cymbalist — if we consider his role alone, we are likely to think that his instrument is as simple and primitive as can be. Any kindergartener can take two pieces of metal and bang them together. There's no need for specialized skill, and the sounds that emerge don't sound overly musical.

This is only true if the cymbalist isn't part of the orchestra. But if he is, then he has a pivotal role.

The cymbalist takes the piece to its extreme, and we witness the genius and superb musical ear that enable him to play at the correct volume at the right time. We see that absolute commitment to the orchestra's harmony doesn't belittle the player's talents; it maximizes their actualization.

When one shapes one's life based on the understanding that "I am G-d's servant," one's individual personality is not erased; rather, it can emerge in its true form — great, pure, and full of life.

The awareness that the world has a soul negates the worldview that the world is material and coincidental. It elevates the world in our eyes to a place that contains a great, comprehensive ideal truth, includes all its details, and echoes through them all. Therefore, life in all its details becomes enlightened by a new, eternal light full of value.

Rav Kook says (Orot HaTeshuva 15:1):

“The appreciation that the world, in all its details, is only a partial spark of the light of absolute G-dly truth plants in us a clear love of the truth.”

The awareness that the world carries within it an absolute G-dly truth and that all life is an expression of that truth causes us to love the world, love life, and love the truth encased within them. The more we appreciate the ideal

greatness of life, the more we become attached to it and want to be part of it. As a result, we channel our actions through this lens. This awareness of the ideal value of life causes us distress and regret for our flaws, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, we understand that the flaws are external and temporary. Therefore, Rav Kook continues:

“Because of this love of the truth embedded in life, people are elevated to sense the great 'lie' in all speech, movement, and actions that don't express this truth, and to understand that each 'lie' is actually a temporary illusion.”

All this was an introduction to help us understand the prophet Isaiah when he referred to Avraham and Sarah as one: “Look at Avraham your father and at Sarah who birthed you, for one I (referring to G-d) called **him**, and I blessed him and made him many.”

The question is, why does the verse not read, 'I called **them**...' if it is referring to both Avraham and Sarah?

The Maharal explains (*Chidushei Agadot, Bava Batra 58:1*): “Know that Avraham and Sarah are unified in their essence more than any couple in the world... and therefore about both of them the prophet says, ‘one I called him’ – Avraham and Sarah are a single unit.”

Avraham and Sarah lived this unified agenda of the world, first of all, internally. They understood their marriage as a meeting of two sides, both of which play G-d's melody in the world, and that it is not possible to have one without the other.

This awareness filled their lives to the point that a single entity emerged from both of them, with no separation between them.

This wonderful connection between them came from the general worldview that “G-d's glory fills the world,” and in this way, they discovered the G-dly substance of life, not only in themselves, but also in all that surrounded them.

From their faith in “The L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One,” they loved all of creation, felt a great responsibility for them, and performed endless kindness for them.

In this unified worldview, we see the difference between Avraham and Noach. It's explained in the Midrash which deals with the question: Why does the Torah say, “Noach walked with G-d,” but in the case of Avraham, “The L-rd, before Whom I walk...” claiming that Noach walked **with** G-d but Avraham walked **before** Him.

“This is analogous to a friend of the king who was sinking in thick mud. The king looked and saw him. He said to him, ‘Rather than sink in the mud, walk along with me.’ That is what is written regarding Noach: ‘Noach walked with G-d.’

To whom is Avraham compared? To a friend of the king who saw the king walking in dark alleys. His friend looked forward and began illuminating for him...”.

What does the Midrash mean when it says that Noach was stuck in the mud? Noach's worldview was negative at its core: the world, at its foundation, is full of mud and evil, and the purpose of life is to save oneself. This attitude does not enable people to deal with evil or to cleanse the world of it. Therefore, Hashem needed to support Noach, walking with him hand in hand, to prevent him from falling into sin.

Avraham, on the other hand, saw the King when walking in dark alleys. He was able to see G-d's goodness even in the darkest places because he believed the King is found in reality. This faith that the world, at its core, is good and that there is a soul that encompasses it all pushes away and destroys evil. That is why Avraham could walk before Hashem: in the places Hashem had not yet revealed Himself, Avraham was able to reveal Him.

Avraham was not impressed or influenced by evil actions. He knew that evil is external, like garlic peels that fly away in the wind and have no bearing on reality.

Rav Kook describes Avraham's soul: It is an enormous soul, full of spiritual ambitions and yearning for freedom (from the evil inclination) and for heavenly light. It feels great sorrow and deep pain at the world's lowliness. Avraham's

soul is embittered when he sees the great joy and light available to the world, a light that is shouting, 'Let there be light!', but the world is far from expressing this light. The light is begging each creation, 'be filled with joy, greatness, calm, goodness, heroism, love, and pleasantness...' but the wells are blocked, as the Torah says, "The Philistines blocked the wells and filled them with dirt." Avraham's soul arose like a lion freed from a cage, he raised his staff in rage, broke the idols, and called in a loud voice for the great light to reveal itself — for the one G-d, the G-d of the world.