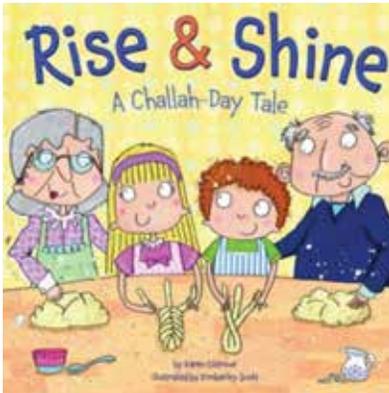


Global Day of Jewish Learning

Curriculum: Creating Together



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A Project of the Aleph Society

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Introduction (7 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning. Today, Jews from 400 communities around the world are dedicating their time to Jewish learning. By learning together at the same time we are creating a new community.

The book of Genesis outlines the way that God created the world. Today we will explore the world God created, while also looking into the smaller worlds that each and every one of us creates.

- **Take this opportunity to have everyone in the group introduce themselves by asking if they consider themselves to be creative people. Have them share with the group one thing they are proud to have created (their child, a piece of art, a gourmet meal, etc.).**

At the start of the book of Genesis, God sets out to create the world. It is a thoughtful creation.

Part One: Creation (15 minutes)

Take a few minutes to read the text below. It outlines what God created each day.

Text #1: Genesis 1:5–2:3 (selected verses)

בראשית א,ה ח יא יג טז כא כג כה כז לא ב,ג:
 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹר יוֹם וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קִרְיָ לַיְלָה; וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד...
 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְרִקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם; וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי....
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תְּדַשָּׂא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזֵּרֶע זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֵהוּ אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּ בּוֹ עַל הָאָרֶץ; וַיְהִי כֵן.
 וַתֵּצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזֵּרֶע זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּ בּוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ; וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב.
 וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי...
 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֵת שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים: אֵת הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים לְמַשְׁכֵּל הַיּוֹם וְאֵת הַמְּאֹרֹת הַקְּטָנִים לְמַשְׁכֵּל הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים.
 וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרַקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל הָאָרֶץ.
 וַלְמַשְׁלַל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ; וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב.
 וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם רְבִיעִי.
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה; וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל הָאָרֶץ עַל פְּנֵי רִקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם.
 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַתַּיִמָּנִים הַגְּדֹלִים; וְאֵת כָּל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הַרְמֵשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵהֶם וְאֵת כָּל עוֹף כְּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב...
 וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם חַמִּישִׁי.
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תֵּצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וְרִמָּשׁ וְחַיְתוֹ אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ; וַיְהִי כֵן.
 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֵת חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל רִמָּשׁ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינָהּ; וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב...
 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם...
 וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד; וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי...
 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֵת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְקַל מְלֶאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

5. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day...

8. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day...

11–13. And God said: 'Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth.' And it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day..

16–21. And God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good.

And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

And God said: 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let fowl fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.' And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that creeps, wherewith the waters swarmed, after its kind, and every winged fowl after its kind; and God saw that it was good...23-25.

And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

And God said: 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind.' And it was so.

And God made the beast of the earth after its kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. 27. And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them... 31. And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day...2:3 And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all His work which God in creating had made.

➤ Ask:

1. Draw a connection between day 1 and 4, 2 and 5, and 3 and 6. Why did God choose to create the world this way?
2. Creating the world can be seen as the ultimate act of creativity. God is creating something from nothing. If that is the case, it is interesting to note the level of structure in the world's creation. What is the benefit of adding structure to the creative process?

God took six days to create the world. If you look closely, you will discover that on the first three days, God creates the infrastructure of the universe and the next three days God adds to his initial creations. Each day brings something new.

It is a noteworthy point that only on the sixth day did God create humans.

Text #2: Genesis 1:26-27

בראשית א, כו כז:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ; וְיִרְדּוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ
הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ.
וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם.

26 And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." **27** And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

➤ Ask:

1. Why do you think God waited to create people until after the rest of the world was created?
2. What jobs are the first people given? What parallels might there be in terms of modern day expectations of humankind?

Part Two: Taking Care of Our World (20 minutes)

Think of your most prized possession. How do you care for it and protect it?

We take special care with how we treat our prized possessions. God feels the same way about the world He created.

Read the following text. It describes God's command to Adam instructing him to care for and about the world that God created.

Text #3: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13

קהלת רבה (וילנא) פרשה ז, יג
בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי, תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי, שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך.

When God created Adam, God led him around all the trees in the Garden of Eden. God said to him, "See how beautiful and praiseworthy all of My works are? Everything I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy my world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you."

➤ Ask:

1. Why does God take Adam on a tour of the Garden of Eden? What does God point out to Adam? What is the underlying message God gave to Adam?
2. God's creation is important and meaningful to Him. Have you ever created anything that is meaningful to you?

After God created the world, He told Adam that everything was created for the sake of humankind. God tells Adam that it is his responsibility to take good care of the earth.

Read this story about Honi the Circle Drawer and the old man.

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 23a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כג עמוד א

יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא, חזייה לההוא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא, אמר ליה: האי, עד כמה שנין טעין? אמר ליה: עד שבעין שנין. אמר ליה: פשיטא לך דחיית שבעין שנין? אמר ליה: האי [גברא] עלמא בחרובא אשכחתי, כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי שתלי נמי לבראי.

One day he [Honi the Circle Drawer] was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree; he asked him, How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit? The man replied: Seventy years. He then further asked him: Are you certain that you will live another seventy years? The man replied: I found [ready grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children.

➤ Ask:

1. Why is the old man planting fruit? Why do you think Honi is surprised to see the old man planting fruit?
2. What else can we learn from this story?
3. The passage also deals with the concept of legacy. What does legacy mean to you? What would you like your legacy to be?

Part Three: Our Role as Creators (15 minutes)

While God created the world, it is humankind that is given the responsibility for taking care of the world.

➤ Ask:

1. If God's creation is such a thoughtful one, why doesn't He just create a self-sustaining planet? What is the value in creating a universe that needs our constant care and attention?

Text #5: Adapted from Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz's video class on "Creativity"

God created the world in order for man "to do". We are basically driven and, in a way, obliged, to be progressive. Progress is something that we have to do. Not only are we never fighting against God when we are creative; in fact we are fighting with him. There are silly people—in fact, very intelligent people—who say that if God wanted us to fly he would have created us with wings. No. He created us without wings but with the ability to outfly any bird. He created us without all kinds of parts but we can outrun any animal, we can outdo any fish in the water. This is called the drive to do better.

Rabbi Steinsaltz gives importance to progress. We are given structure and limitations specifically because God wants to challenge us to find creative and innovative ways to progress in the world. A world with no challenges would give us no opportunity to partner with God in creating and developing the world. Our final source today really drives this point home.

Text #6: Midrash Tanhuma, Parashat Tazriah 7

This *midrash* speaks of the encounter between Turnus Rufus (the Roman governor) and Rabbi Akiva.

מדרש תנחומא (בובר) פרשת תזריע סימן ז
שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את ר' עקיבא
איזה מעשים נאים של הקדוש ברוך הוא או של בשר ודם? אמר לו של בשר ודם נאים.
אמר לו טורנוסרופוס הרשע הרי השמים והארץ יכול אתה לעשות כהם? אמר לו ר' עקיבא לא תאמר לי בדבר
שהוא למעלה מן הבריות, שאין שולטין בהן, אלא בדברים שהן מצויין בבני אדם.
אמר לו למה אתם מולים? אמר לו אף אני הייתי יודע שאתה עתיד לומר לי כן, לכך הקדמתי ואמרתי לך
מעשה בשר ודם הם נאים משל הקדוש ברוך הוא. הביאו לי שבולים וגלוסקאות... אמר לו אלו מעשה הקדוש
ברוך הוא ואלו מעשה בשר ודם: אין אלו נאים?
אמר לו טורנוסרופוס הואיל הוא חפץ במילה, למה אינו יוצא מהול ממעי אמו? אמר לו ר' עקיבא ולמה שוררו
יוצא בו, לא תחתוך אמו שוררו? ולמה אינו יוצא מהול, לפי שלא נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל את המצות
אלא כדי לצרף בהן, לכך אמר דוד, "אמרת אלוך צרופה וגו'" (משלי ל, ה).

The evil Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva:

What is better, the creation of God or that of flesh and blood? He responded: That of flesh and blood.

The evil Turnus Rufus said to him: Can you make the heavens and the earth? Rabbi Akiva answered: Don't give me an example of something that is above mankind, and out of their control; but of things that are common among people.

He said to him: Why do you circumcise? He responded: I knew you were going to ask me that; this is the reason I immediately said the deeds of man are better than those of God. Bring me wheat and bread...he said to him: these are the creation of God and these are the creation of man; aren't these better?

The evil Turnus Rufus said to him: "If God wanted man to be circumcised, then why does he not emerge circumcised from the womb of his mother? Rabbi Akiva said to him: And why does the placenta emerge along with the baby?

Should the mother not cut the umbilical cord? Rather, God has provided the commandments for the nation of Israel so that they may improve themselves, as David said, "The word of God is flawless" (Prov. 30:5)

► Ask:

1. What message is Rabbi Akiva trying to give to Turnus Rufus?
2. Define the creative collaboration between God and humankind.
3. Does this somehow make us partners in creation?

Conclusion (3 minutes)

God created the world thoughtfully, and with great care. Part of that care was to entrust His creation to humankind. Our duties to protect the world and create within it are still evident in today's world. By progressing, creating and caring, we work and exist in partnership with God.

Text #1: Genesis 1:5-2:3 (selected verses)

Genesis 1:5

And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

בראשית א,ה:

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ לַיְלָה; וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד.

Genesis 1:8

And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

בראשית א,ח:

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְרָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם; וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי.

Genesis 1:11-13

And God said: 'Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth.'

And it was so.

And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

בראשית א,יא-יג:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תְּדַשָּׂא הָאָרֶץ דְּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעֹו בּוֹ עַל הָאָרֶץ; וַיְהִי כֵן.

וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דְּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעֹו בּוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ; וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב.

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי.

Genesis 1:16-21:

And God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars.

And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good.

And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

And God said: 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let fowl fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.'

And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that creeps, wherewith the waters swarmed, after its kind, and every winged fowl after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

בראשית א,טז-כא:

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים: אֶת הַמְּאֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמַשְׁלַת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַשְׁלַת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים.

וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל הָאָרֶץ.

וְלַמְשַׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ; וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב.

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם רְבִיעִי.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה; וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל הָאָרֶץ עַל פְּנֵי רָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַתַּנִּינִם הַגְּדֹלִים; וְאֶת כָּל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הַרְמֵשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵהֶם וְאֶת כָּל עוֹף כְּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב.

Genesis 1:23-25:

And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

And God said: 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind.' And it was so.

And God made the beast of the earth after its kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:27:

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

Genesis 1:31:

And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2:3:

And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all His work which God in creating had made.

Text #2: Genesis 1:26-27**בראשית א, כג כה:**

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם חַמִּישִׁי.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וְרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיְתוֹ
אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ; וַיְהִי כֵן.

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֵת חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל
רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינָהּ; וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב.

בראשית א, כז:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר
וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם

בראשית א, לא:

וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד; וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי
בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי.

בראשית ב, ג:

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֵת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכֹל
מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

בראשית א, כו כז:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֵׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדֹמֹתֵינוּ; וַיִּרְדּוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ
הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ.
וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם.

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Text #3: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13

קהלת רבה (וילנא) פרשה ז, יג

בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי, תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי, שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך.

When God created Adam, God led him around all the trees in the Garden of Eden. God said to him, “See how beautiful and praiseworthy all of My works are? Everything I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy my world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you.”

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Ta’anit 23a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כג עמוד א

יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא, חזייה לההוא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא, אמר ליה: האי, עד כמה שנין טעין? אמר ליה: עד שבעין שנין. אמר ליה: פשיטא לך דחייט שבעין שנין? אמר ליה: האי [גברא] עלמא בחרובא אשכחתי, כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי שתלי נמי לבראי.

One day he [Honi the Circle Drawer] was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree; he asked him, How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit? The man replied: Seventy years. He then further asked him: Are you certain that you will live another seventy years? The man replied: I found [ready grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children.

Text #5: Adapted from Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz’s video class on “Creativity”

God created the world in order for man “to do”. We are basically driven and, in a way, obliged, to be progressive. Progress is something that we have to do. Not only are we never fighting against God when we are creative; in fact we are fighting with him. There are silly people—in fact, very intelligent people—who say that if God wanted us to fly he would have created us with wings. No. He created us without wings but with the ability to outfly any bird. He created us without all kinds of parts but we can outrun any animal, we can outdo any fish in the water. This is called the drive to do better.

Text #6: Midrash Tanhuma, Parashat Tazriah 7

מדרש תנחומא (בובר) פרשת תזריע סימן ז
 שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את ר' עקיבא
 איזה מעשים נאים של הקדוש ברוך הוא או של בשר ודם? אמר לו של בשר ודם נאים.
 אמר לו טורנוסרופוס הרשע הרי השמים והארץ יכול אתה לעשות כהם? אמר לו ר' עקיבא לא תאמר לי בדבר
 שהוא למעלה מן הבריות, שאין שולטין בהן, אלא בדברים שהן מצויין בבני אדם.
 אמר לו למה אתם מולים? אמר לו אף אני הייתי יודע שאתה עתיד לומר לי כן, לכך הקדמתי ואמרתי לך
 מעשה בשר ודם הם נאים משל הקדוש ברוך הוא. הביאו לי שבולים וגלוסקאות... אמר לו אלו מעשה הקדוש
 ברוך הוא ואלו מעשה בשר ודם: אין אלו נאים?
 אמר לו טורנוסרופוס הואיל הוא חפץ במילה, למה אינו יוצא מהול ממעי אמו? אמר לו ר' עקיבא ולמה שוררו
 יוצא בו, לא תחתוך אמו שוררו? ולמה אינו יוצא מהול, לפי שלא נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל את המצות
 אלא כדי לצרף בהן, לכך אמר דוד, "אמרת אלוך צרופה וגו'" (משלי ל, ה).

The evil Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva:

What is better, the creation of God or that of flesh and blood? He responded: That of flesh and blood.

The evil Turnus Rufus said to him: Can you make the heavens and the earth? Rabbi Akiva answered: Don't give me an example of something that is above mankind, and out of their control; but of things that are common among people.

He said to him: Why do you circumcise? He responded: I knew you were going to ask me that; this is the reason I immediately said the deeds of man are better than those of God. Bring me wheat and bread...he said to him: these are the creation of God and these are the creation of man; aren't these better?

The evil Turnus Rufus said to him: "If God wanted man to be circumcised, then why does he not emerge circumcised from the womb of his mother? Rabbi Akiva said to him: And why does the placenta emerge along with the baby? Should the mother not cut the umbilical cord? Rather, God has provided the commandments for the nation of Israel so that they may improve themselves, as David said, "The word of God is flawless" (Prov. 30:5)



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