Rabbi Steinsaltz Video Class on “Creativity”

Texts and Questions for Discussion

Note to Facilitator:
The video class by Rabbi Steinsaltz is 15 minutes long. The sources below can be used to foster discussion after viewing the video. Some of the sources were referenced in the video and the additional sources can be used throughout your session. The sources are followed by discussion questions.

Texts

Text #1: Genesis 1:31-2:3 (underlined part is also recited as part of Friday night Kiddush)

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.
1 And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.
2 And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.
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: Psalms 8:4-7

4 When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast established;
5 What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou thinkest of him?
6 Yet Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.
7 Thou hast made him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet:
The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to mankind.

Man's sin is in his failure to live what he is. Being the master of the earth, man forgets that he is the servant of God.

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.”

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 him 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)
Discussion Questions

1. How does God’s world help inspire creativity and progress?

2. Rabbi Steinsaltz mentions that our world comes with a set of limitations. What is the value of offering us limitations?

3. What is our partnership with God? When we create using materials that God created, are we doing our work or God’s? How do you think God feels about our creative spirit?

4. Why would God create an incomplete world?

5. In which ways can each person offer his or her own individual creative contributions to the world?