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## GOD CREATED EVERYTHING ON THE FIRST DAY

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The Sages taught:<sup>17</sup>

Verse 1:1 states: *God (אֱלֹהִים) created the heavens and the earth.* But verse 2:4 uses a combination of Names for God, stating: *Hashem Elohim (י-ה-ו-ה אֱלֹהִים) made heavens and earth.*<sup>18</sup> The explanation is that initially God intended to create the world with the Attribute of Strict Justice.<sup>19</sup> But He saw that the world would not survive and so He introduced the Attribute of Mercy as well.<sup>20</sup>

The Sages also taught:<sup>21</sup>

Without toil and without effort God created the heavens, as it says (*Tehillim* 33:6), *With the word of God the heavens were made* — meaning: by His mere word they were already made. But what was created afterward involved effort, as the verse in *Tehillim* continues, *and with the breath of His mouth [God made] all the hosts of the heavens.*

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17. As cited by the Alshich, the teaching that follows most clearly parallels the last comment of Rashi on verse 1. That comment is based on statements of the Sages in *Bereishis Rabbah* 12:15 and 14:1.

18. The entire verse reads: אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹתָן ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם, *These are the products of heaven and earth when they were created, on the day that Hashem Elohim made earth and heaven.*

19. The Name אֱלֹהִים always refers to God's Attribute of Strict Justice.

20. The Name י-ה-ו-ה always refers to God's Attribute of Mercy. The Sages appear to be saying that the first verse of the Torah refers only to God's plan for Creation, whereas verse 2:4 speaks of the actual Creation. See Question 1 below.

21. As cited by the Alshich, the teaching that follows is a combination of *Bereishis Rabbah* 3:2 and *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*, beginning of Chapter 6 [Hager ed.].

### Consider the following questions:

1. How can the Sages say that the first verse in the Torah means that God only intended to create the world? The Torah states explicitly, "*Bereishis God created...*" which means that God actually created the world and did not only "intend" to do so?
2. How can the Sages say that God's subsequent creations involved effort? Surely it is impossible to ascribe the idea of effort and toil to God.
3. The verse from *Tehillim* that is brought to prove that the subsequent creations involved effort (*With the breath of His mouth...*) does not seem to contain any mention of effort whatsoever.

In order to answer these questions, let us try and understand what the Torah means when it mentions God's thoughts (i.e., intentions) or God's speech. In the human sphere, an idea is first formed in one's thoughts, then it is articulated through speech, and finally it is concretized through action. [Thought is obviously the most "spiritual" and least tangible; speech is somewhat more tangible, as it involves a flow of air from one's mouth; and action is of course fully physical and concrete.] So when our Sages say that "God intended to create the world," it refers to an actual act of creation, but one on a plane of existence that is intangible and on a principally spiritual level — and is a prelude to the creation of the physical realm. [This answers Question 1.]

This is the Creation referred to in the first *pasuk* of the Torah, which states that *God created the heavens and the earth* with the first of the Ten Divine Utterances (which was not speech but intention, or thought).<sup>22</sup> At this stage, everything that was destined

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22. See Alshich above, 1:1–8, where we learned that God brought the world into being with ten Divine Utterances. Verse 1:1, *With "reishis" God created the heavens and*

to be created in the subsequent days of Creation — every part of *the heavens and the earth* — was brought into being, but on an almost entirely spiritual plane. The subsequent nine Divine Utterances (which involved speech) brought everything into existence on the tangible, physical level.<sup>23</sup>

Accordingly, the first stage of Creation may be described as Divine thought and the second stage as Divine speech. And now we can understand what the Sages were saying when they described the first stage of Creation as not involving any effort on God's part and the second stage as requiring effort (Question 2). The Sages meant that since the first, spiritual stage of Creation came into being through mere thought, it may be described as not involving effort. The second, physical stage, on the other hand, involved speech, which requires a flow of air to emanate from the speaker's mouth, as stated above. The process of creating a physical level of existence through this more physical modality is described by the Sages as involving some level of exertion (even though from God's perspective, of course, nothing requires effort). [\[This answers Question 2.\]](#)

The Sages found hints to these ideas in the words they quoted

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*the earth* means that heaven and earth were created with the very first and most elevated of the ten; and that since that utterance was the most spiritual, it brought into existence a reality that was not yet properly physical. In our passage, the Alshich clarifies further: *With "reishis" God created the heavens and the earth* means that heavens and earth were created with thought — the first and most "spiritual" of the three modes of Creation (thought, speech, and action). In other words, the first of the Ten Utterances was not speech at all but just pure thought. (In his commentary to verse 2:11, the Alshich adds that this is why with regard to the first Utterance the Torah does not say "God said...") As such, on the first Day of Creation, the heaven and the earth were not completely material, existing primarily in potential.

23. The Alshich writes that this is alluded to in verse 2:4, which speaks of the creation of *תולדות השמים והארץ*, *the products of heaven and earth*. Everything in the heavens and the earth was created already in a potential sense on the first Day; however, each item came into actual existence on its own day of Creation. See Rashi to verse 2:4 and see the opinion of R' Yehudah in *Bereishis Rabbah* 12:4, as explained by *Yefeh To'ar* there. See further at the end of this essay.

from *Tehillim*: *With the word of God the heavens were made, and with the breath of His mouth [God made] all the hosts of the heavens.* The verse could have simply said, “With the word of God, the heavens and all their hosts were made.” Why, then, is it divided into two parts, with the heavens being made via God’s *word*, and the hosts of the heavens *with the breath of His mouth*? The answer is that each part refers to a different stage of Creation: the first part hints to the level of Divine thought,<sup>24</sup> and the second part refers to the level of Divine speech.

In addition, the first part of the verse reflects the concept of creation without effort. It does not say, “God *made* the heavens with His word”; rather, it says that *with His word the heavens “were made.”* This suggests that the heavens’ creation was immediate; as soon as *His word* was formulated (i.e., in thought — the first Utterance), the heavens were already formed. But the creation of *the hosts of the heavens* is described as having occurred *with the breath of His mouth*. The concretization of Creation required a flow of air (created through speech — the latter nine Utterances) to spread out into the world and become clothed in physicality and existence as we know it. This process is described as “involving effort,” as explained above. [This answers Question 3.]

What we have learned will help us understand the following Midrash:<sup>25</sup>

The first verse of the Torah states: בְּרָאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ. Now, the word אֶת always comes to include something.<sup>26</sup> R’ Yishmael says: אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם comes to include

24. The unexpressed *word* of God, i.e., God’s thought.

25. *Bereishis Rabbah* 1:14.

26. The word אֶת normally has no translation in English and is generally used simply for grammatical purposes, to indicate an upcoming object of a verb. As such, the word אֶת may be viewed as redundant. It is often expounded as coming to include something, presumably because the word אֶת can also mean “with.” (In his commentary to 49:22–26, the Alshich writes that this is in fact the usual meaning of the word אֶת in Tanach.)

[that together with the heavens, God created] the sun, the moon and the stars; and אַתְּ הָאָרֶץ comes to include [that together with the earth, God created] the trees, the plants, and Gan Eden.”<sup>27</sup>

**Consider the following additional question:**

4. The Torah says explicitly that the sun, moon and stars were created on the fourth Day of Creation, while the trees and plants were created on the third Day. How can R' Yishmael say that they were created together with the heavens and the earth on the first Day?

What R' Yishmael is explaining is that the first verse of the Torah is coming to ensure that a person does not, God forbid, mistakenly assume that God needed a certain amount of time to create the world. Rather, everything in the heavens and the earth was created in one instant, on the first Day of Creation. Not just the heavens and the earth, but also אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ — all the products of heaven (such as the sun, moon, and stars) and all the products of earth (such as the trees, the plants, and Gan Eden).<sup>28</sup> However, on the first Day they were created only on a highly elevated level — in potential rather than in reality. On the subsequent days of Creation, they became revealed in actuality, each on its appropriate day, some things emerging from the heavens and other things emerging from the earth.<sup>29</sup> [This answers Question 4.]

Answer to  
Question 4

27. The Alshich explains that the Gan Eden mentioned by R' Yishmael is located on earth.

28. See footnote 6.

29. The Alshich adds that this explains why the Torah states, תִּדְשֵׂא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא וְכוּ', *Let the earth sprout vegetation, etc.* (verse 11) and תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ וְכוּ', *Let the earth bring forth living creatures, etc.* (verse 24) — expressions which imply that these things already existed in some form and merely needed to be brought out.