

- (1) With the first thing, God created the heavens and the earth.
- (2) The earth was desolate and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering upon the face of the waters.
- (3) God said, “Let there be light!” and there was light.
- (4) God saw that the light was good and God divided between the light and the darkness.
- (5) God called the light “day” and the darkness He called “night.” It was evening and it was morning, Day One.
- (6) God said, “Let there be a sky in the midst of the waters, and let it divide between water and water.”
- (7) God made the sky and divided the waters that were under the sky from the waters that were above the sky, and it was so.
- (8) God called the sky “heaven.” It was evening and it was morning, the second Day.

THE TEN DIVINE UTTERANCES WITH WHICH GOD CREATED THE WORLD

Before delving into the details of these verses, there are two general concepts that we should explain. The first comes from a passage in the Talmud discussing the Creation as a whole, and the second comes from a Midrash that discusses the creation of the sky. There is a statement of the Sages in *Pirkei Avos* (5:1) that the world was created “with ten Utterances.” Quoting the phrase, the Gemara¹⁴ explains that each time it says in the Torah, “*God said*” (וַיֹּאמֶר) in recounting the Six Days of Creation, it counts as one

14. *Rosh Hashanah* 32a.

- (א) בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.
 (ב) וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוֹ וּבְהוּ וַחֲשָׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים
 מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם.
 (ג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר.
 (ד) וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין
 הַחֹשֶׁךְ.
 (ה) וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר
 יוֹם אֶחָד.
 (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לְמַיִם.
 (ז) וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַרְקִיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לַרְקִיעַ
 וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לַרְקִיעַ וַיְהִי־כֵן.
 (ח) וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַרְקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי.

Utterance. And although this phrase appears only nine times, the first verse in the Torah also counts as one of the Ten Utterances, as we shall explain below.

In addition, *Bereishis Rabbah* 4:2 is troubled by verse 1:6. What need is there for God to say, “*Let there be a sky...*” after God already *created the heavens and the earth*? The Midrash explains that the heavens were of a fluid nature on the first Day of Creation, and on the second Day they solidified. When the Torah says, “*Let there be a sky...*” it means: “Let the sky solidify.”

Consider the following questions:

1. If the first verse in the Torah is also one of the Ten Utterances (as stated in the Gemara cited above), why didn't the Torah write, “And God said, ‘Let there be the heavens and the earth,’” in the same style as all the other Utterances?

2. What do the unusual words *sohu* (תֹהוּ) and *vohu* (בֹהוּ) in verse 2 really mean?
3. The Sages in the Midrash (cited above) say that the heavens were created in an incomplete form on the first Day and solidified on the second. This is most strange: Why did God create it in a two-stage process, with two separate Utterances? Could He not have created it in one stage like everything else? Furthermore, if verse 2 is indeed coming to tell us that the sky solidified on the second Day, why does it say, “Let there be a sky,” instead of “Let the sky solidify”?
4. Since light is seemingly more ethereal (and thus more spiritual) than anything else in Creation, why wasn’t it created first, before the heavens and earth?

In order to answer these questions, let us try and understand how the world was created through Divine Utterances and also why there were exactly ten of them. Our Sages tell us that when God decided to create the world, He put in place certain exalted spiritual forces through which to transmit Divine *shefa* (spiritual outpouring) and bring the world into existence. As *Sefer Yetzirah* states, these forces are exactly ten in number.¹⁵

Each of the Divine Utterances represents one of these forces and brings about the corresponding outpouring of *shefa*. Each individual *shefa* then brings into existence a corresponding part of Creation.

The first Divine Utterance transmitted the *shefa* from the first and highest of the ten spiritual forces. This Utterance was verse 1, *With the first thing God created the heavens and the earth.*

15. See *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:4. The Alshich adds here that the Torah contains all ten of these forces, and therefore learning Torah has the power to bring *shefa* down to the world from all of them.

This tells us that the first Divine spiritual outpouring brought *the heavens and the earth* into existence. The second Divine Utterance was “*Let there be light*,” which means that the second Divine *shefa* brought light into existence. This was the method used with each of the other eight Utterances as well.

Since the first Divine Utterance transmitted the highest and most elevated spiritual outpouring, what it brought into existence on the physical level was also extremely elevated. In fact, what it brought into existence could not really be described as “physical” altogether except in a very limited sense. In other words, the heavens and the earth mentioned in the first verse of the Torah were not yet completely material in nature; they still needed further Divine Utterances to solidify their existence as something essentially physical.

This is what the Torah meant when it said (verse 2), *The earth was “sohu”* (תהו). The earth lacked a solid physical exterior. It was something about which a person would be astounded (תוהוה) if he saw it. But at the same time, the earth was *vohu* (בהו), which literally means “contained in it (בה הוא).” What was contained in it? The potential spiritual form of everything that would later emerge in the physical earth.¹⁶ [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to
Question 2

This is what the Sages meant when they said that the heavens were of a fluid nature on the first Day of Creation and on the second Day it solidified — i.e., with the third Utterance (in verse 6), “*Let there be a sky*,” when it acquired its completed form.

It also explains why God said, “*Let there be a sky*,” rather than “*Let the sky solidify*.” Since the heavens had not come completely into existence with the first Utterance, and were only now coming properly into being, it was more accurate to say, “*Let there be a sky*.” [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to
Question 3

16. See Alshich below, “God Created Everything on the First Day” (p. 13) for the full explanation of this concept.

The earth, too, was created only on a partially physical level on the first Day. [Its full existence was completed only on the third Day (rather than the second, like the heavens), namely when God said (1:9): “*Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place and let the dry land appear.*”]

This also helps us answer why light was not created before the heavens and earth (Question 4). It is because when light was created with the second Utterance, it came into being in a more completed state. The unfinished heavens and earth of the first Day were actually more incomplete relative to what they would become than the light created on that same day; and they were therefore considered more spiritual and created first. Nevertheless, the completed light was still more ethereal and spiritual than the completed form of the heavens. Therefore, light was created with the second Utterance and the completed heavens were created only with the third Utterance (on the next day). [This answers Question 4.]

Answer to
Question 4

What we have explained also helps us understand why the first Utterance of Creation was formulated differently than the other nine (Question 1). If the Torah had begun, “And God said, ‘Let there be the heavens and the earth,’” we would have assumed that they were created in their completed form, as were the parts of Creation brought into existence by subsequent Divine Utterances. The Torah’s repetition, “*Let there be a sky,*” on the second Day [and “*Let the dry land appear,*” on the third Day] would not have been comprehensible.

Thus, in order for us to understand the matter correctly, the Torah begins, *With the first thing* — the highest of the ten spiritual forces of Creation — *God created the heaven and the earth.* Since this first force of Creation is so elevated, the existence it brought about was only partially physical in nature and needed to be brought into more complete physical existence through further Divine Utterances. [This answers Question 1.]

Answer to
Question 1

In the next piece we will God-willing further our understanding of this initial stage of Creation.