

The Sages prove that the Torah came before all the others [from *Mishlei* 8:22 which states, *God acquired me (the Torah) at the beginning of His way*].

According to this understanding, the Torah would be prefacing its account of what God created in the seven Days of Creation by telling us what tools He used to create everything: *With the first thing [that God brought into existence] — namely, the Torah — God created the heavens and the earth*. But in what sense can one say that God created the world by using the Torah? One could answer that God used the different permutations of the letters of the Torah to bring everything into existence, as our Sages tell us:<sup>5</sup> “Betzael knew how to combine the letters [of the Torah] through which the heavens and the earth were created [in order to construct the *Mishkan*].”<sup>6</sup>

The Sages elsewhere agree that “*Bereishis*” means “with the first thing,” but say that it refers to a slightly different idea:<sup>7</sup>

It says in *Mishlei* (8:30), “*And I (the Torah, at the time of Creation) was reared (אָמוֹן) at His (God’s) side*.” The word אָמוֹן [may be understood as if it were written] אֹנִיָּן (*craftsman*). The Torah is accordingly saying, “I was the craftsman’s tool with which God created the world.” It is the way of the world that when a flesh-and-blood king builds a palace, he does not do it based on his own knowledge [but based on the knowledge

5. *Berachos* 55a.

6. God created the world by combining the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in different ways (Rashi, *Berachos* 55a). Betzael was able to do the same for the construction of the *Mishkan*. Ramban (*Shemos* 31:2) explains that Betzael was able to construct the *Mishkan* (which was God’s “residence” in this world) in a way that it would contain the secrets of heaven and earth.

7. *Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1.

of a craftsman. The craftsman likewise does not build it based purely on his own knowledge]; rather, he has papers and diagrams from which he can know how to make the rooms [and] how to make the doors, [etc.]. In the same way, God looked into the Torah and created the world, as it says, *With ראשית God created the heavens and the earth*; and the word ראשית refers only to the Torah, as it says (*Mishlei* 8:22), *God acquired me (the Torah) at the beginning of [ראשית] His way*.

According to this Midrash, instead of the Torah being called “the first thing” because it was the first to come into existence, it is “the first thing” because it is the blueprint of Creation that Hashem consulted prior to and in order to create the universe.

### Consider the following questions:

1. Why does the Midrash call the Torah both the “craftsman” of Creation and “the craftsman’s tool”?
2. Since the Torah recounts for us how the world was created, how can the Midrash say that God created the world by looking into the Torah (His blueprint)?
3. How can the Midrash say that “God looked into the Torah and created the world”? Does Hashem need to consult plans the way a craftsman does (God forbid!)?
4. When the Midrash begins by saying, “It is the way of the world that when a king builds a palace...” we would expect it to continue by telling how God acted differently than a human king.<sup>8</sup> Instead it continues, “In the same way, God looked into the Torah,” which implies that God acted in the same way as the king. So did God act like a human king in this instance or not?

8. As the Alshich writes, the phrase “it is the way of the world” used by the Midrash is used when one wishes to contrast something in the current discussion to how something is usually done.

We learned above that God used combinations of the letters of the Torah in order to bring everything into existence. In this sense, the letters were His tools. Yet we cannot compare God's use of these tools to the way a human craftsman uses his implements. A carpenter's tools are completely separate from the carpenter himself; furthermore, they are inanimate objects that can do nothing without the carpenter himself, who uses them according to how he wishes to shape the wood. But even though the letters of the Torah can be considered the tools of the Divine Craftsman, they cannot be regarded as something separate from God Himself. God and His wisdom — i.e., the Torah — are one. The letters of the Torah are living spiritual entities. They can therefore be considered the actual makers of the world, since they comprise His Divine Names and His Divine Wisdom, which are inseparable from His being. In this sense, the Torah can be considered not just the tool of the Master Craftsman but as the Master Craftsman Himself. This is why the Midrash begins by referring to the Torah as the craftsman of Creation and not just as the craftsman's tools.<sup>9</sup> [[This begins to answer Question 1.](#)]

Along with the text's plain sense, the Torah's account of the Six Days of Creation has Kabbalistic meaning, hinting at infinitely lofty spiritual ideas. Our Sages<sup>10</sup> tell us that the Torah preceded the creation of the world by 2,000 years. During that span of time, the Torah's account of Creation could be understood only in a Kabbalistic sense. Verses like *God created the heavens and the earth* could obviously not be taken in any literal sense, for they did not yet physically exist.<sup>11</sup> When God created

9. See *Nefesh HaChaim*, *Sha'ar* 4, Chapters 6 and 10, for a deeper understanding of these concepts.

10. *Bereishis Rabbah* 8:2.

11. The Alshich adds that it was the Kabbalistic sense of these verses [and indeed, of the whole Torah] that the angels sought to keep in heaven and not let Moshe take to earth (see *Shabbos* 89a).

the physical heavens and the earth and everything in them, He made everything — all the details of their form and structure and the order in which they were created — in accordance with the Kabbalistic “creation” that had already taken place.<sup>12</sup> When the Midrash says that “God looked into the Torah and created the world,” it means that He looked at the Kabbalistic manifestations alluded to in the letters and words of the Torah’s account of Creation. It was those manifestations that God used as the blueprint for creating the physical world. By looking at them, God transmitted the Divine *shefa* (spiritual outpouring) inherent in them down to earth and brought their physical counterparts into existence. [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to  
Question 2

This is all the Midrash means in comparing Hashem to a human craftsman. Just as the craftsman looks at the plan of the building and constructs the building according to that plan, so too God looked at the spiritual creation that existed in the heavenly spheres and, using the Divine *shefa* inherent in it, created its likeness in the physical universe. [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to  
Question 3

We can now understand how the Midrash called the Torah both “the craftsman” and “the craftsman’s tool.” As explained above, the Torah is God’s wisdom that is inseparable from His Being; in this sense the Torah is the actual “craftsman” of Creation. But in the sense that “God looked into the Torah and created the world,” the Torah is the “craftsman’s tool.” Both descriptions are thus correct. [This completes the answer to Question 1.]

Answer to  
Question 1

We asked above (Question 4) why the Midrash began by implying that the way that God acts is different than the way a human being acts (“It is the way of the world...”), but then proceeds to say they acted identically (“In the same way, God looked into

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12. In his commentary on later verses, the Alshich will speak of the Creation of a spiritual realm of existence on the first Day, and how everything that exists in a physical form in this material world has a spiritual source and counterpart in the heavenly realms.

the Torah...”) The answer to this is that in one way, the process of God’s creating the world is the same as that of a king building a palace, but in another way, they are different. They are the same in the sense that just as there are three elements in a human king’s building of a palace — himself, a craftsman, and the craftsman’s building plans — so too the same three elements are present in God’s creation of the world: God is the King, and the Torah is both the craftsman and the craftsman’s tool (or blueprint), as explained above. However, they are different in the fact that the Torah is both the craftsman and the craftsman’s tool [such that there are really only two elements present in God’s creation of the world].<sup>13</sup> [\[This answers Question 4.\]](#)

*Answer to  
Question 4*

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13. The Alshich also makes the point that the king and craftsman are two different people while Hashem and His “craftsman” [i.e., the Torah] are one and the same.