



ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרק בראשית

SERIES 2: ISSUE 1

MAN'S DOMINION OVER THE NATURAL WORLD

Chapter 1

26 God said, "Let us make man (אָדָם) with our image (בָּצָלָמֵנוּ), according to our likeness (כְּמַוְתָּנוּ). They will rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the animals (בְּבָהָמָה) and over the whole earth and over everything that creeps upon the earth.

(כו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נָשָׁה אָדָם בָּצָלָמֵנוּ כְּמַוְתָּנוּ וַיַּרְדֵּו בְּדִינָת הַיּוֹם וַיַּעֲזֹב הַשָּׁמָיִם וַיַּבְהַמֵּה וַיַּכְלֵל הָאָרֶץ וַיַּכְלֵל הַרְמֵשׁ הַרְמֵשׁ עַל הָאָרֶץ.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does God say, "Let us make man..." in the plural, instead of "Let Me make man..."?
2. What is the difference between the expression "with our image" (בָּצָלָמֵנוּ) and the expression "according to our likeness" (כְּמַוְתָּנוּ)? Why do we need both?
3. Having stated "Let us make man," the verse should have continued, "He (man) will rule." Why does it switch to the plural form, "They will rule"?

In order to answer these questions, we will start with a general introduction to certain fundamental concepts.

We know that the existence of a person depends on the Divine soul within him; without the soul his physical body will not survive. So too, the physical world cannot exist unless it is imbued with a Divine spiritual force (*shefa*). But how can a spiritual force that emanates from the highest spiritual world connect to the lowest world that is completely physical? The answer is that God created other realms in descending levels of spirituality in between the Godly realm and our physical universe – the realms of angels and of the constellations. The intensity of the Divine *shefa* emanating from the uppermost realm would be gradually reduced as it traveled down through these two additional realms until it could be received successfully in our coarse, physical world.

But something else was needed that would link all four levels together and enable the spiritual force to move between them. For this purpose, God created man, who contains within himself each of these four realms. (a) His body comes from the lowest, physical realm; (b) his basic (animal) soul (*נַפְשׁ*), which animates him and enables him to move, comes from the level of the constellations (which, similarly, are always in motion); (c) his middle-level soul (*רוּחַ*) comes from the realm of the angelic beings (who are described in *Tehillim* 104:4 as *רוּחוֹת*); and (d) his higher-level soul (*נְשָׁמָה*) comes from the loftiest spiritual realm.

When man serves his Creator appropriately, the four parts of him become sanctified and his body becomes fully attached to his higher soul. Since each part of him remains connected to the corresponding realm from which it came, these domains also become sanctified and connected to each other. This allows the highest realm to transmit the necessary *shefa* down through each realm to the lowest, physical realm.

All of this occurs through man's fulfilling the precepts of the Torah, which itself contains the same four interconnected levels: (a) the *peshat* level corresponds to the physical realm; (b) the level of *remez* (hints and allusions) corresponds to the realm of the constellations; (c) the level of *derash* (expositions) corresponds to the angelic realm; and (d) the level of *sod* (secrets; mysticism) corresponds to the highest spiritual level.

Now, our Sages (*Bereishis Rabbah* 8:5) tell us that when God was about to create man, the angels voiced great opposition (*Tehillim* 8:5): **מַה אָנוֹשׁ כִּי תִזְפְּרָנוּ**, "What is man that You should remember him?" they said. They felt that it was dangerous to create a being who was likely to sin and cause damage to the world. At the time of the Flood, the angels approached God once again, claiming that their fears had been substantiated. They said, "Man has sinned greatly and brought destruction on the world, just as we predicted!"

God's response to the angels appears in our verse, as He explains to them that the creation of man was to their benefit as well: Their function is to serve as a conduit for the necessary *shefa* to descend to and sustain the lower worlds. Without the existence of man, who connects all levels of Creation through his righteous conduct, they would not be able to fulfill their purpose.

So when God said, "Let **us** make man," using the plural form, He was addressing the angels and meant as follows: "Let all the four levels of Creation — including yours — collaborate with Me in the construction of man so that he will link the four realms together." **[This answers Question 1.]** The way he will do so is as follows: The word **אָדָם** is connected to the Hebrew word for earth, **אָדָם**. God was telling the angels, "Let us make man (**אָדָם**) from the lowest realm, the physical earth (**אָדָם**)."¹ The verse then continues, "with our image" (**בָצָלְמָנוּ**) — i.e., let us also include within him both My *tzelem* (spiritual forces) and yours. From My *tzelem* will come the *neshama* which belongs to the highest spiritual realm; from your *tzelem* will come the *ruach* that belongs to your angelic realm. Finally, the verse says, "according to our likeness" (**כִּדְמֹותָנוּ**): "Let us also include something that is 'like us' in some smaller way." This refers to the *nefesh*, which belongs to the realm of the constellations, as explained above. **[This answers Question 2.]**

When the verse continues, *They* will rule over the fish..., the plural word *they* does not refer to man (as assumed in Question 3) but to the three higher realms that have just been mentioned (the two included in **אָדָם** and the one included in **כִּדְמֹותָנוּ**) that will "rule over" and send their spiritual influence to all four basic elements of the lowest, physical realm: fire, air, water and earth. Not only will they rule over and influence fire, which is the highest of the four elements and the closest to the spiritual realm (and therefore their influence over it is relatively obvious and does not need to be mentioned in the verse), they will rule over the other three as well: *the fish of the sea* — the element of water; *the birds of the heavens* — the element of air; and *the animals* — the element of earth. Without man, the higher worlds would not be able to rule over and send down the necessary spiritual influence to maintain the physical world. **[This answers Question 3.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 – 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title "HaKodosh" (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.