

Shavuot and Creation

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In the beginning, the spirit of Elokim hovered in the darkness over the deep. There was no light and no life. God was alone.

Then He made light; and then a great tent, separating the waters and exposing dry land. He brought forth grasses and trees, hung luminaries in the sky, called out fish and birds and animals and human beings. By the end of day seven, Elokim, who a week before hovered in that lifeless darkness, now beheld a tremendous world-tent; a palace of light and color and movement and life. What was He seeking?

The sages (Ber Rab 4:9) learn about God's earliest intentions through an oddity in the numbering of the days of creation (Gen 1). This is the order as it appears in Breshit:

One
Second
Third
Fourth
Fifth
The Sixth

The sages say it should either be *one* and then *two*, or *first* and then *second*, but not *one* and then *second*; *etmahah!* (=what could this mean!?).

Thinking about this strange numbering, the sages stepped back to see the holy story in a wider perspective, and they sifted through sacred verses, until one pasuk stood up and offered a word to unravel the mystery of that misplaced "day one": "And he that presented his offering the *first day* was Nachshon..." (Bemidbar 7:12). Nachshon was the first to bring offering in dedicating the *mishkan*, the "dwelling place". In this tent, constructed of metal and cloth, priests and sacrifices, blood and spices and the tablets of the covenant, God was to dwell among His people Israel (cf. Shemot 25:8).

On the "*first day*". R' Shmuel Bar Ami *darash* (= interpreted in the literary/religious state of consciousness in which the sages seek the meaning of Written Torah): this is the missing "first day" that should have come before the "second day" of creation! Why does it appear so late, when Israel dedicated the *mishkan*? And why in creation does it say "day *one*" instead? Because "one" was the Holy One's state at the very beginning: He was completely alone. And the "first day" appears only at the time of the *mishkan* because then God *first* dwelled among His creatures: He was no longer alone. Later, about these first days of indwelling, He would say, "I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, the way you followed me in the desert, in a land of wilderness" (Jer. 2:2). The oddity in numbering encoded God's first intention: He sought union with His creatures by dwelling in the *mishkan*. In this sense, the dedication of the *mishkan* was the most important *first day*.

And why does it say "*the sixth*"? Reish Lakish said (Shabbat 88a), it teaches that God made a condition with Creation: "if Israel accepts the Torah, you will endure; if not, I will return you to *tohu vevohu* (unformed void)!" Why? Because accepting the Torah makes the purpose of creation, God's indwelling, possible. Therefore "*the sixth*", it refers to that well-known sixth, Shavuot, *the sixth of Sivan*: the day of covenant that opened the gate to "the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal".

And so the "One" of Day One hints at God's first intent. "*The Sixth*" encodes the giving of the Torah on Shavuot, the means necessary for realizing that divine intention. Even the numbering of days is pregnant with meanings in God's mysterious Word.