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Bereishis: Let it be Good

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The Torah provides us with the rules, laws and framework through which to live a fully actualized life. The *mitzvos* are an expression of Divine will designed to help us attain personal holiness. Yet, this all-important Book of Laws doesn't begin with instructions or commandments; it begins with a story. Not just any story. The story of creation.

We are told in great detail what God created on each day, culminating with Divine rest on Shabbos. It is a story we all know, yet, cannot comprehend. What is a "day" in the eyes of God? What does it mean to "create something from nothing?" Why include a story which the human mind cannot totally grasp and understand?

It is quite simple, actually. God teaches us how He built His world so that we may use the same strategies to build our own. We are each creators of our personal worlds. While it is true that we cannot choose so many of our circumstances, we create our reactions, we create relationships and we create many different realities. There are deep lessons embedded in the Genesis narrative that we can use to fashion and create meaningful lives and meaningful worlds.

"And God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, and let it be a separation between water and water.' And God made the expanse and it separated between the water that was below the expanse and the water that was above the expanse, and it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven, and it was evening, and it was morning, a second day." (Bereishis 1:6-8)

The commentaries point out the glaring omission – this verse omits "*and God saw all that He did, and it was good (ki tov).*"

Rashi explains:

Now why does it not say, "that it was good" on the second day? Because the work involving the water was not completed until the third day, although He commenced it on the second day, and an unfinished thing is not in its fullness and its goodness; and on the third day, when He completed the work involving the water and He commenced and completed another work, He repeated therein "that it was good" twice (sic): once for the completion of the work of the second day and once for the completion of the work of that [third] day. — [Gen. Rabbah 4:6]

The verse is indicating that success is measured by results, not just effort. But this verse is describing God. God only says, "*ki tov*" (*it was good*) when the job is done, for He controls the results. Man says "*ki tov*" every time he expends the necessary effort. Although we are made in the image of God, we do not use the same metric for success. God's success is measured by results, our success is measured by effort. There are many times in life when we try and fail. We have dreams and aspirations and despite herculean effort, they never materialize. We take on initiatives and projects and we find ourselves unable to carry through. In those moments, we lament the failure, wasted time and resources. But it is in those very moments of perceived failure that we must remember that any time we try, we succeed. "I am a creator. In my world, '*ki tov*' is the phrase that describes meaningful effort. If I try to make my dreams a reality, if I expend the energy to move myself forward, I have created a '*ki tov*' moment. I am not God, I can't control the results, I can't guarantee success, but I can always guarantee maximum effort."

As we enter this beautiful and incredible new year, we each begin to create new worlds. For some we must deconstruct old worlds to make room for the new, others we'll build and add to already existing worlds. Let us remember that our ultimate legacy is the effort we expend and not the results we attain.