In the beginning God created. The basic idea expressed in these words is that creation took place place out of nothing, something [was created] from nothing, or creatio ex nihilo. This concept is a tenet of faith in Judaism. However, the Torah is not a guide to metaphysics; its focus is on moral imperatives. Each article of faith must therefore be converted into a moral norm.

King David emphasized in Psalms: To God is the earth and its fullness, the land and all who dwell there, because He established it on seas and firmed it on rivers (Ps. 24:2). David suggested that by virtue of having created the world, God is its Owner in the full legal sense.

One can clarify this idea through a halachic principle. There is a disagreement in the Talmud (Bava Kamma 98b) regarding the ownership rights of a craftsman who was given raw material by a second party and then fashioned it into something more valuable—whether or not we maintain that הבארשיPGA A תירא אליעם. Does the craftsman have ownership rights over the value that his craftsmanship added to the raw material? If so, the owner of the raw material must compensate the craftsman if he wishes to own the finished object (אוסדה). Alternatively, perhaps the craftsman has no rights to the finished object (הביאו ינוי) and he is only entitled to payment for his work. Maimonides (Hilchos Sechirus 10:4) and many Rishonim maintain that the craftsman has no ownership rights, while the Rosh (Bava Kamma 9:14) and others argue that he does.

But although there is a difference of opinion regarding a human craftsman, there is no controversy when discussing the Creator of the world. The Master of the universe unquestionably owns...
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1 In the beginning God created* the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth consisted of formless matter*, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit

the world by virtue of His having created it precisely because the world was created ex nihilo: He both created the raw material and also formed it into the world as we know it. There can thus be no contender for ownership rights.

The moral message of creation אַנְשָׁה יָם שֵׁם וְלָא רְצִיָּה is that all of a person’s organs, talents and capabilities actually belong to God and are only on loan from Him. With every sin he commits he misuses which has been lent to him and thus in a sense forgoes his very right to existence. Living a life of sin is thereby an act of theft and extortion. (Boston, 1971; Derashot Harav, p. 15)

We use the expression אַנְשָׁה יָם שֵׁם it is of lack of a better term, but in fact, before Creation there was no ש, there was Existence—there was God Himself. The popular Adon Olam prayer declares, וַיְהֵן יוֹם אֱלֹהִים שֵׁם הַיָּם מַסְמָר וְלָא רְצִיָּה, The Master of the universe, Who ruled before anything was created. Before the world was created there was infinite, absolute Being—God Himself existed.

It may be asked, however, that if God is infinite, encompassing all, how could He create a finite world extraneous to Himself? When God’s splendid majesty shines forth and stands revealed, everything reverts to chaos and void. To address this question, Lurianic mysticism asserts that God engaged in tzimtzum, contraction, thereby leaving “room” for the existence of the world (see Shemos Rabbah 34:1). The creation of the world took place on account of God’s goodness, for He descended, as it were, from absolute transcendence to the domain of concrete existence.

The task of man is to bring the Divine Presence down to the lower world, to this vale of tears. Man is able to reside together with His Creator in this world, and it is only through cultivating that togetherness in the here and now that man can acquire a share in the world to come. It is the will of God that His Shechinah, His Divine Presence, should contract and limit itself within the realm of empirical reality. (Halachic Man, pp. 51-52)

- In the beginning God created. The Targum Yerushalmi here translates the word כְּבָרָא הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבָרָא אֵין אַלְדוֹת as כְּבָרָא הַשָּׁמַיִם with wisdom; the verse thus should read, With wisdom God created the heavens and the earth. Wisdom is the beginning of everything, the spring from which all flows, the primal point, the beginning of a created world as regulated with mathematical exactitude. In the Kabbalistic tradition, wisdom is represented by the letter yud in the Ineffable Name. The letter yud is nothing more than a single point: it is dimensionless, lacking concreteness. Nonetheless, the point is the origin of all mathematical figures. Ancient mathematicians taught that by merely moving a point one creates a line, and by moving a line one creates a plane. Though it is intangible and dimensionless, the geometric world cannot exist without the point. The point cannot be explained, cannot be described and cannot be measured, yet it is the origin, the הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבָרָא of everything. The discursive thinking of man has no categories in which to accommodate anything dimensionless, a “something” which is “nothing.” Yet this “nothing,” this “unreality,” is actually the very origin of all reality. (The Rav Speaks, p. 167, Noraos Harav 15:119-120)

- Now the earth consisted of formless matter. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 1:9) asserts that the הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבָרָא—the primordial, amorphous matter, the hyle, was also part of creation. Science cannot postulate nor even address the origin of matter. The concept of something from nothing, is not scientific but rather metaphysical. Plato
could not accept the possibility that physical matter was created by a spiritual Being. Aristotle likewise believed that matter predated creation. They insisted that God could be only a Creator of preexisting matter, and not a legislator, the Creator of matter itself.

Religiously, it matters greatly whether or not one accepts the notion of סֵפָר הָאָרֶץ, because it suggests that God is omnipotent, that He is the Master of the universe, which He directs in accordance with His will. Creation is an assurance of His enduring involvement with the universe and with man in particular, whose very existence depends on His continuous support. To deny the concept of סֵפָר הָאָרֶץ is to posit a dualism, allowing for the eternal existence of something besides God. Such a limited God is not, however, the God of Israel, whose existence predates everything.

Although man cannot create לְהַכְּרַת הָאָרֶץ, the spiritual message behind the story of Creation is that man too must be creative. Man must conquer disease, control rivers, and alleviate misery. Man must also educate; education is creativity. Man too must be creative. Man must conquer disease, control rivers, and alleviate misery. Man must be creative.

Now the earth consisted of formless matter. The Midrash states, ||Rabbī Abahu said “Now the earth consisted of formless matter,” we learn that the Holy One Blessed Be He created worlds and destroyed them (Bereishis Rabbah 3:7). These worlds were fashioned out of נַפְשֵׁי הָיָה, the hyle, this potential, but then perished to make place for new worlds to be born. Between the destruction of previous worlds and the fashioning of this one, there is hidden the awesome mystery of what is known in Kabbalistic literature as קבליות, the shattering of the vessels. The world is conceptualized here as a vessel, a receptacle for God’s Presence, the Shechinah. The world exists only because God resides in it, and when each of these worlds rebelled against His Presence, the vessel was emptied and automatically broken—hence the term הַשְּׁכִינָה. The worlds which were born and collapsed are called וַהֲלֵיסָה, a reference to the fact that these worlds reverted to the primordial state of formlessness, to the יִתְנָה which became the basis for our own world. (Boston, 1974)

At first glance, this Midrash seems almost absurd. When man builds something, he may be dissatisfied with his initial design, destroy it and start over. Why would omniscient God need to engage in such experimentation, building worlds and then destroying them? This Midrash speaks to the imperative of הָשְׁכִיןָה בְּיוֹתֵרָה, and you shall walk in His ways (Deut. 28:10). Just as God builds and destroys, so must we. Parashas Bereishis not only challenges man to be a creator, but it challenges man, when
of God was hovering over the face of the water. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 And God saw the light that it was good, and God separated between the light and between the darkness. 5 And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night, and it was evening and it was morning, one day.

necessary, to rebuild as well. For example, Rabbi Akiva taught Torah to twenty-four thousand students who perished within a short period. The Talmud describes the result of this catastrophe as *vehaya ha’olam shamem*, the world became desolate (*Yevamos* 62b). Yet Rabbi Akiva persevered until he restored the glory of Torah to its former splendor, engaging in *imitatio dei*, emulating God, who created worlds after they were destroyed. Our history is replete with worlds created and destroyed: Jewish communities and Torah scholarship in Babylonia, the Byzantine empire, Spain, Poland and Germany. Following the destruction of one world, a new one was born. Our survival, our ability to persevere in the face of hardship and to rebuild, are founded upon this Midrashic principle. The saga of Jewish history is implied in this Midrash. (*Darosh Darash Yosef*, pp. 30-31)

*And God said*, “Let there be light,” and there was light. *Rashi* comments that God recognized that the world did not deserve to use the originally created light, and He therefore reserved it for the righteous of the eschatological era (*see Chagigah* 12a). He thus maintains that the *light* discussed here does not refer to the electromagnetic phenomenon of light. The light referred to in this verse was something that was “too good” for mankind at that time, so God reserved it for the future. This light will be the source of illumination for the righteous in the age of redemption, as mentioned in Isaiah: “Arise! Shine! For your light has come, and the glory of God has shined upon you” (*Is.* 60:1). Even now, however, each person is endowed with some degree of this metaphysical illumination. God implanted this *light* in the inner recesses of each person, and He affirms in our verse that this spiritual light is good—that something inherently redeeming resides in the human personality. The Kabbalah portrays man’s inner light as *נץ נזים*, sparks, which can never be completely extinguished. In the world to come, this clear light will emerge from out of the darkness that envelops it, and all the hidden potential within the heart of each person will emerge. (*Noraos Harav*, 16:119; *MiPeninei Harav*, p. 346)

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