

Torah and Nature



4 Relations of Nature and Humanity

1. Telling the Glory of G-d

הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֱלֹהִים וְיַמְעֵשָׂה יְדִיו מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ:

The heavens declare the glory of God,
the sky proclaims His handiwork.

Ps. 19



מִה־רַבּוֹ מִעֲשִׂיָךְ | יְהוָה כָּל־עַמּוּךְ בְּחָכְמָה עָשִׂיתָ מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ קִנְיָנֶךָ:

How many are the things You have made, O LORD;

You have made them all with wisdom;

the earth is full of Your creations.

Ps 104, Borchit Nafshi

1b. Nature as the impetus of faith, Rambam Yesodei

Hatorah

Ch. 2

But how may one discover the way to love and fear Him? When man will reflect concerning His works, and His great and wonderful creatures,¹*But he must make thorough study. C.* and will behold through them His wonderful, matchless and infinite wisdom, he will spontaneously be filled with love, praise and exaltation and become possessed of a great longing to know the Great Name, even as David said: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God," (Ps. 42,2); and when he will think of all these matters,²*Sifre, Deut. 6.5; Shabbat, 30–31. G.* he will be taken aback in a moment and stricken with awe, and realize that he is an infinitesimal creature, humble and dark, standing with an insignificant and slight knowledge in the presence of the All Wise, as David said: "For when I see Thy heavens, the wonderful works of Thy fingers, of what use is man that Thou mayest remember him?" (Ibid. 8,4). And, in harmony with these matters, I elucidate great, general principles of the works of the Lord of the universe, so that they might serve as an opening for one who understands by which to love the Name, as some sages said on the subject of love: "Out of it thou wilt recognize the One who spoke, and the universe was called into existence."

1c. The smallness of the human

Job 40

Can you draw out Leviathan by a fishhook?

Can you press down his tongue by a rope?

הַתְּשִׁים אֶגְמֹן בְּאַפּוֹ וּבְחֹחַ תִּקַּב לְחִיוֹ:

Can you put a ring through his nose,

Or pierce his jaw with a barb?

2. Morality in nature

Eruvin 100b

As Rabbi Ḥiyya said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “Who teaches us by the beasts of the earth, and makes us wiser by the birds of the sky” (Job 35:11)? He explains: “Who teaches us by the beasts of the earth”; this is the female mule, which crouches and urinates and from which we learn modesty. “And makes us wiser by the birds of the sky”; this is the rooster, which first cajoles the hen and then mates with it.

אָמַר

רַ

בְּיַתְבָּה תוֹרָה, הָיִינוּ לְמִידֵין צְנִיעוֹת מִחֲתוּל, וְגִזְל מִנְמָלָה, וְעֵרִיוֹת מִיוֹנָה. דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ מִתְרַנְגוּל — שְׂמִפְיִיס וְאַחַר כֵּן בּוֹעֵל
nonetheless **have learned modesty from the cat**, which covers its excrement, **and that stealing is objectionable from the ant**, which does not take grain from another ant, **and forbidden relations from the dove**, which is faithful to its partner, **and proper relations from the rooster**, which first **appeases** the hen **and then mates** with it.

Go learn from the ant! Proverbs 6

לְרֵ-אֶל-נִמְלָה עֲצֹל רְאֵה דַרְכֶיהָ וְחִכְמָם:

Lazybones, go to the ant;

Study its ways and learn.

אֲשֶׁר אֵין-לָהּ קִצִּין שֹׁטֵר וּמֹשֵׁל:

Without leaders, officers, or rulers,

תִּכְוֶן בְּקִיץ לַחֲמָה אֲגָרָה בְּקִצִּיר מֵאֲכֹלָהּ:

It lays up its stores during the summer,

Morality of G-d from nature

Morning Psalms 147

נוֹתֵן לְבַהֲמָה לַחֲמָה לְבָנֵי עֹרֹב אֲשֶׁר יִקְרְאוּ:

who gives the beasts their food,

to the raven's brood what they cry for.

Psalm 104 Borchy Nafshi

כָּל־אֶחָד מֵהֶם יִשְׁבֹּרְאוּ לָתֵת אֲכֻלָּם בְּעֵתוֹ:

All of them look to You

to give them their food when it is due.

תִּתֵּן לָהֶם יְלִקְטוּן תִּפְתַּח יָדְךָ יִשְׂבְּעוּן טוֹב:

Give it to them, they gather it up;

open Your hand, they are well satisfied;

Morning Psalms 146

עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט | לְעֲשׂוּלָיִם נִתֵּן לֶחֶם לְרַעֲבִים יְהוָה מִתִּיר אֲסוּרִים:

who secures justice for those who are wronged,

gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free; | יְהוָה |

פִּקְחַ עֲוֵרִים יְהוָה זִקְרָף כְּפוּנָיִם יְהוָה אֲהַב צַדִּיקִים:

The LORD restores sight to the blind; the LORD makes those who are bent stand straight;

the LORD loves the righteous; | יְהוָה |

שׁוֹמֵר אֶת־גְּוִיִּם יְתוֹם וְאַלְמָנָה יְעוֹדֵד וְדַרְךְ רָשָׁעִים יַעֲוִת: The LORD watches over the stranger; He gives courage to the orphan and widow, but makes the path of the wicked tortuous.

Parashat Ekev

וְהָאֱלֹהִים הוּא אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֲדֹנֵי הָאֲדֹנִים הָאֵל הַגָּדֹל הַגִּבֹּר וְהַנּוֹרָא אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִשָּׂא פָנָיו וְלֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד: כ:
supreme Lit. “the god of gods and the lord of lords.” Heb. ’adon (“lord”) normally denotes a man in a position of authority. Here it is used to claim that Israel’s God is beyond the men who sit atop the social hierarchies of rank and gender. the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe,

וְעֹשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט יְתוּם וְאַלְמָנָה וְאֹהֵב גֵּר לִתְתּוֹ לוֹ לֶחֶם וְשִׂמְלָה: but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing food and clothing.—

Ashrei

פֹּתַח אֶת־יָדְךָ וּמִשְׁבִּיעַ לְכָל־חַי רָצוֹן:

You give it openhandedly,
feeding every creature to its heart's content.

טוֹב־יְהוָה לְכָל אֲרָחֵי־מַי עַל־כָּל־מַעֲשָׂיו:

The LORD is good to all,
and His mercy is upon all His works.

3. Nature one day will be in sync with G-d

Ex 11

וְלֹכֵל |

שָׂרָאֵל לֹא יִחַר־צֶלֶב לְשִׁנּוֹ לְמֵאִישׁ וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה לְמַעַן תִּדְעוּן אֲשֶׁר יִפְלֶה יְהוָה בֵּין מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל:

but not a dog shall snarl* or “*move his tongue.*” at any of the Israelites, at human or beast—in order that you may know that “” makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

Psalm 99

יְרַנְּנוּ: יְרֵמוֹת יְמִינֵי-יְהוָה יִתְקַדְּדוּ יְרֵמוֹת יְמִינֵי-יְהוָה let the rivers clap their hands,

the mountains sing joyously together

לְפָנֵי-יְהוָה כִּי בָא לְשֹׁפֵט הָאָרֶץ יִשְׁפֹּט-תִּבְלָה בְּצֶדֶק וְעֲמִים בְּמִישָׁרִים: at the presence of the LORD,

for He is coming to rule the earth;

He will rule the world justly,

and its peoples with equity.

Hallel

מִלְפָּנֵי אֲדוֹן חוּלֵי אָרֶץ מִלְפָּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב:

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,

הַהִפְּכֵי הַצּוּר אֲגָם-מַיִם חֲלֹמֵי־שׁ לְמַעַיְנוּ-מַיִם:

who turned the rock into a pool of water,
the flinty rock into a fountain.

4. We are part of nature and...

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל-הַבְּהֵמָה וְלָעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכְל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְלָאָדָם לֹא-מָצָא עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:

And the Human gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but no fitting counterpart for a human being was found.

The Rav: We are part of nature and outside it.

We have to transcend it.

The Rav based on Family Redeemed

Both humans and animals "belong to nature; both sprang forth from the soil." The difference is that humans are created in "the image of God." This is "not a gratuitous grant...but rather a challenge." Man "is encouraged (to use his distinctiveness) to build, to plant, to beautify his life, to enjoy his life as much as he can (within reason)." His earthly role is to create "change, improvement and progress."

Yoram Hazony on the Rav Emergence of Ethical Man

[M]an as a natural being suddenly begins to discover in himself not only identity but also incommensurability with nature. Thus he enters a new phase of viewing nature from a distance.... [His] personality begins to assume shape and the ethical norm attains its full meaning. Man experiences the ethical must, not as a natural necessity which he cannot flee but as a unique imperative which, if he decides so, he may disobey and ignore.... [T]he consciousness of freedom begins to dawn on him.[\[10\]](#)

In a sense, then, the image of God does, for Soloveitchik, involve the ability to overcome natural life. But Soloveitchik emphasizes that this distancing of man from natural life does not, in Hebrew Scripture, involve any turn to the supernatural. What he calls “personality,” or the freedom to choose between natural drives and the ethical impulse, “does not connote anything supernatural or transcendental. It signifies only the emergence of subjectivity in man.” It signifies, in other words, the development of the ability to mount a critique of nature as man finds it—something that no other living things can do. Man comes to regard nature as being to a certain extent alien, and therefore discerns the possibility of choosing against nature.[\[11\]](#)

How does man appear in Genesis?

As part of creation or separate from it?

Why is man compared to a tree?

All man is flesh Is. 40

Man is no more than an animal for all is vanity: Kohelet 3

Philosophy of the Halacha

We have prohibitions on organic matter, we do not own the land, can't plant or reap during shemitta, some food is forbidden till we tithe it.

There is no relationship, no mitzvot to the inorganic.

Hagigah 16a

לְאֲכִי הַשָּׁרֵת. שְׁלֹשָׁה כְּבַהֲמָה — אוֹכְלִין וְשׁוֹתִין כְּבַהֲמָה, וּפָרִין וְרִבִּין כְּבַהֲמָה, וּמוֹצִיִּין רְעֵי כְּבַהֲמָה
are **like ministering angels**, and in **three** ways they are **like animals**. The *baraita* explains: In **three** ways they are **like ministering angels**: They have **intelligence like ministering angels**; and they walk upright like **ministering angels**; and they speak in the holy tongue like **ministering angels**. In **three** ways humans are **like animals**: They eat and drink like **animals**; and they multiply like **animals**; and they emit excrement like **animals**.

How does man become a spiritual being?

Rav: Man as animal needs faith

Adam can't find community in the natural world

Avraham is forced to be lonely and finds G-d

Image of G-d is due to Divine communication and revelation

By being alone and longing for G-d

The relation of natural impulse and longing for G-d

And From There You Shall Seek pg 48

This longing.. Born of the instinct to continue one's biological existence that is implanted in man, finds its expression in man's running toward G-d.

Man is organic. If man was defined by logos as Maimonides said, then....

The unborn baby would not have any status

The dying patient would have no rights

Back to last week: Torah and evolution
Do we disagree that we are part of the
continuum of life?

But... the Limitations of Nature

It may sing G-d's praises but it doesn't tell you what to do, it doesn't command

CS Lewis: The Four Loves

If you take nature as a teacher she will teach you exactly the lessons you had already deceased to learn ie. nature does not teach.

(Isn't this an overstatement given the verses in Proverbs?)

Psalm 19

הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֱלֹהִים וְיַמְעֵשָׂה יָדָיו מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ:
The heavens declare the glory of God,
the sky proclaims His handiwork.,,,,,,,,,,

גַּם מִזֵּדִים אֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ אֱלֹהִים מִשְׁלוֹ-בִּי אַז אֵיתָם אֲנִי מִפְּשָׁע רָב

: and from *arrogant men or willful sins* keep Your servant;

let them not dominate me;

then shall I be blameless

and clear of grave offense.

Nature can't forgive

Can't love

It can't support, "My rock"

It can't redeem "my redeemer"

We have to redeem nature

Especially in the sexual realm but also we can redeem

Desire with desire for Torah

Anger can be directed to shechita or the punishment of the wicked

Jealousy can be directed to those who learn more torah or do more mitzvot

Rav Amital z'l

Why the battle with Peor?

Not everything natural is good.

Rabbi Akiva told the Roman that the body with the bris is greater than without, the wheat inferior to the bread.

We need to go beyond nature....