

# Bereishit

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The first chapter of the Torah is a description of the creative process that brought our world into existence. The whole of the Torah was written in a language that an average person would have understood. "The Torah spoke in human language", says the Talmud in Brachot 31b. We should not be surprised if our modern mind finds difficulties in understanding words that seem modern but might have meant something different once. A "day" can have several meanings. What was a day before the cycle around the sun was established on the fourth day? And would they have understood the notion of the earth revolving around the sun thousands of years before Galileo?

But there is another important paradox in the opening chapters. In the first chapter God creates the plants and the trees, but in the second it says that there was nothing on earth because it hadn't yet rained and man was not there to till the ground. In the first chapter man and woman are created together, while in the second man is made first, is presented with animals as potential partners, and only then is Eve fashioned from the rib.

There are six creative days of chapter one, but only one in, "This is the story of the heavens and the earth on the day they were created." I understand the first chapter to be talking about the ingredients of creation and the second to be talking about relationships—humanity to nature and the animal world, relations between man and woman.

You often find an idea or a narrative in the Torah is too complex to be described fully in one version or that it requires two different viewpoints to fully describe the process. You have two versions of the Tabernacle; the first contains the basic elements, the second talks about how they function. There are two versions of the Ten Commandments, two different justifications for keeping Shabbat, the Song of the Sea is repeated in condensed form, the narrative of the Golden Calf is given twice, and Eliezer's journey to find a wife for Isaac is reported and repeated. Here the first chapter of Creation describes the contents of the world. The second describes the interactions and relationships.

Sometimes the many facets of an idea are conveyed sequentially, each new description adding an extra and important dimension. It is not that there is a contradiction, simply an expansion.