

# Parsha Ponders

Rosh Hashanah | September 15, 2022 | 20 Elul 5782

## Creating disputes<sup>1</sup>

זה היום תחלת מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון

Today is the beginning of Your creation, a commemoration of the first day<sup>2</sup>

There's a well-known dispute between our Sages regarding when the world was created. Rabbi Eliezer says that the world was created in the month of Tishrei, whereas Rabbi Yehoshua says that the world was created in Nissan<sup>3</sup>. Tosafos are bothered<sup>4</sup> that we rule like Rabbi Yehoshua<sup>5</sup>, and yet on Rosh Hashanah, the first of Tishrei, we say the phrase, "Today is the beginning of Your creation"<sup>6</sup>. According to Rabbi Yehoshua, Tishrei wasn't the beginning of Hashem's creation. Nissan was. How can this be reconciled?

Tosafos suggest that both opinions have some validity<sup>7</sup>. In truth, the world was created in Nissan. However, the thought to create the world came before G-d's mind, so-to-speak, in the month of Tishrei. This doesn't fully resolve the problem though. If what Tosafos says is true, why do we only say the phrase, "Today is the beginning of Your creation", on Rosh Hashanah? Shouldn't we also say it in Nissan, when the world was *actually* created?

There's a surprising dispute in the *gemarra*<sup>8</sup> between the Academy of Shammai and the Academy of Hillel. We are told that for two and a half years, the Academy of Shammai said that it would have been better<sup>9</sup> had we never been created, whereas the Academy of Hillel said it's better that we were created. In the end, both schools cast a vote, and decided that it would have been better had we never been created. However, now that we've been created, we have no choice but to investigate our ways and improve.

There are many questions though on this teaching. Why does it matter that they argued for two and a half years, specifically? What difference did this dispute make? What was the purpose of concluding the dispute with a vote? Another question is how could the conclusion of the dispute be that they voted it would have been better not to have been created? We know that the Academy of Hillel was more numerous than that of Shammai<sup>10</sup>. If the Academy of Hillel held that it's better that we were created, they had the majority vote. It appears then that they changed their minds, but why?

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Derashos Chasam Sofer p. 355 col. 3

<sup>2</sup> Zichronos prayer in the Mussaf of Rosh Hashanah

<sup>3</sup> Rosh Hashanah 8a, 10b

<sup>4</sup> Tosafos to Rosh Hashanah 27a s.v. כמאן

<sup>5</sup> Rosh Hashanah 12a

<sup>6</sup> Zichronos prayer in the Mussaf of Rosh Hashanah

<sup>7</sup> אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים (Eruvin 13b). Rav Herczeg in Patterns in Rashi points out a dispute how to understand this principle. Tosafos Rabbeinu Peretz ad. loc. says that there are multiple objective truths, and each opinion is valid on its own. Rashi to Kesubos 57a s.v. קמ"ל holds that there is one objective truth, but each opinion is revealing one facet or expression for how this truth can manifest. Rav Herczeg suggests that our Tosafos seems to be going with the latter approach, that each opinion has some merit in some instances. See his Appendix there, where he tries to reconcile Tosafos Rabbeinu Peretz with our Tosafos

<sup>8</sup> Eruvin loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup> נח לו לאדם שלא נברא משנברא. I've heard it pointed out that נח לו doesn't mean better, but *easier*, making their dispute easier to digest. The Chasam Sofer seems to go with the translation of "better"

<sup>10</sup> Yevamos 14a

One interpretation<sup>11</sup> of this dispute might reveal an answer to these questions. In truth, it's better for the righteous that they were created. They benefit from their good deeds, and so does the world. It's regarding the wicked that we say it's better that they hadn't been created<sup>12</sup>. According to this then, the world's creation came to fruition in the month of Nissan, when the Jews were born as a nation. Before we received the Torah, it would have been better had we not been created. Once we received the Torah, our creation is worthwhile and praiseworthy. It's no wonder then why Rabbi Yehoshua, a disciple of Hillel and member of his school of thought, would say that the world was created in Nissan.

However, the Academy of Shammai disagree. It's better had we not been created, as a person who is created is susceptible to sin. Especially the Jewish people, whose inclination to sin is always growing. Our nation's birth in Nissan is not worthy of praise. Nevertheless, now that we've been created, we must investigate our ways. Through proper, sincere repentance, we can again say that it's better that we were created. If so, then one could say that the world was created in Tishrei, which is the time for atonement and repentance. It makes sense then that Rabbi Eliezer, a student of Shammai<sup>13</sup> and member of his school of thought, would say that the world was created in Tishrei.

Now it makes sense why we don't mention the creation of the world during the month of Nissan. This is because the Academy of Hillel eventually retracted their opinion to be like that of the Academy of Shammai. Initially they held their ground, but after the first year, when Tishrei came around, the students of Hillel noticed that many of them needed to repent and seek atonement. Still, they didn't retract<sup>14</sup>. However, after another year when Tishrei came, they noticed the same pattern. They had no choice then but to reconsider their position, two and a half years later. They voted that it's better had we not been created, but now that we were created, we should investigate our ways. It turns out then that it's not a praise to Hashem to mention the "creation" in Nissan. The real praise is the month of Tishrei, the month of repentance.

Kesiva VeChasima Tovah! Have a happy, sweet, new year

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<sup>11</sup> Tosafos to Avodah Zarah 5a s.v. אלמלא

<sup>12</sup> This is why the *gemarra* specifies נח לו לאדם, meaning the Jewish people, who are referred to as אדם (Yevamos 61a)

<sup>13</sup> See Yerushalmi Terumos 5:2, brought by Tosafos to Niddah 7a and to Shabbos 130b, and Yerushalmi Sheviis end of Chapter 9, brought by Rashi to Shabbos 130b. See also Rashi to Niddah

<sup>14</sup> See Chasam Sofer to Shabbos 13a s.v. תני, Chasam Sofer Al HaTorah Chayei Sarah p. 98b s.v. ולא, and *ibid* Behar p. 78a s.v. ויש (in the name of Chovos HaLevavos Sha'ar HaTeshuva Chapter 8)