

# THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT BEREISHIT

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## Fire and Water



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Ever wanted advice on how to argue? Comes along Pirkei Avot (5:17) to give us a key principle:

“A debate for the sake of heaven will have lasting value.”

On a surface level, be sure that your intention is holy, anchored in the will to defend what is just. Yet, with this baseline understanding, what makes such an argument “for the sake of heaven”? Is there something extra about “heaven” that relates to this type of debate?

Rashi, the most important rabbinic commentary on the Torah, in this week’s parasha, gives three possible explanations for the word ‘heaven’,

used to describe what was made on the second day of Creation. His third suggestion is that ‘heaven’ is a hybrid of fire and water - mingled together. Making this comment at the conclusion of the second day of Creation, Rashi’s remark is within the context of a glaring omission.

On each day of Creation, we are told that God saw what He created and declared it ‘good’. On the second day, however, we have no such declaration! We are merely told:

*“And God called the firmament, ‘heaven’. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day” (Bereishit 1:8).*

So the question on our lips is: why is this creation of God not good? The answer is found in day three - where, not only are we told that God saw His work as ‘good’, we find that He declares this twice! Once relating to

the formation of the waters and the other regarding the completion of the third day of Creation.

The 17th Century Prague-based rabbinic commentator known as the ‘Kli Yakar’ points out that these two ‘good’ declarations come to emphasise the lack of any ‘good’ declaration the day before. The formation of the waters on the third day represents unity, whereas the division of the waters to form the firmament the previous day brought separation and the potential for disagreement into the world.

Returning to our opening words of advice, we can now understand what a “debate for the sake of heaven” is. Perhaps it is one focused on creating unity – fusing opposing elements, like fire and water – rather than one which promotes separation and strife. This is a debate that will have lasting value.

## Creation Chronology

Can you place the following events from Parashat Bereishit in the right order, as they appear in the Torah?

- a. God created the sun, moon and stars
- b. God created light and darkness
- c. Cain kills Abel when he feels a surge of jealousy
- d. Adam and Eve are thrown out of the Garden of Eden
- e. God forbids Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge
- f. God creates the first man
- g. God creates the first woman
- h. God rests on Shabbat
- i. God sees the world and says “it is good” twice