

## **Bereishit: From Darkness to Divine Light** **Yali Szulanski, Class of 2025**

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Imagine waking up one morning and knowing exactly, without a doubt, what the purpose of your existence is. As you open your eyes, you are flooded with the knowledge that everything you are, and everything you do is exactly right, even righteous. Imagine living in that certainty, that alignment, that feeling of abundance every day of your life. Imagine a world in which you no longer doubt yourself, no longer feel shame for your mistakes, and most importantly, no longer have imposter syndrome. Imagine a world that is created perfectly for you, where everything works out in your favor. When we dream of the perfect world, we are connecting to the first divine spark, the moment that God turned on the ethereal light of the universe, and separated it from the darkness.

God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.

(Bereishit, 1:3-4)

In this verse, God separates light from darkness, setting a fundamental division in the created world. Rashi's commentary on this verse sheds light on the deeper significance of this act of separation. He writes,

[God] saw that the wicked were unworthy of using it (the light); He, therefore, set it apart (*vayavdeh*), reserving it for the righteous in the world to come.

(Rashi on Bereishit 1:4)

Rashi's commentary focuses on the phrase “And God saw the light, that it was good.” Rashi explains that the goodness of the light, as described in this verse, does not refer to the physical quality of the light. Instead, he interprets it as God foreseeing the future goodness that the light would bring to the world. Rashi suggests that the light's goodness is a reference to the righteous individuals who would benefit from it. In other words, God saw that the light was “good” because it would ultimately benefit those who walk in the path of righteousness.

Defining the path of righteousness in our modern era is undeniably a complex and nuanced endeavor. However, in times of growing darkness, conflict, and confusion there is no doubt that coming together to work towards peace, and the fixing of a broken world is more necessary than ever. The unifying power of bringing people together towards creating a safer, more harmonious world helps us bring back some of this much needed light. Whether through direct action, donation, gathering of supplies and items necessary for survival—we all have the ability to come together and create a forceful, all encompassing light—as was in the beginning.

In a world that feels more and more like chaos and disorder, pursuing ways to bring light into the world underscores the importance of empathy, open dialogue, and a commitment to continuous self-reflection. It reminds us that while the road to righteousness may be fraught with uncertainty, our dedication to seeking the light amidst the darkness and engaging in the ongoing struggle for personal and collective growth remains paramount in our quest for a more just and compassionate world.

Rambam, whose commentary follows Rashi's in both time and tone, addresses various aspects of ethical behavior, social justice, and the role of individuals in creating a more harmonious society throughout his writing. In his commentary on Bereishit 1:4, he provides a profound connection between the separation of light and darkness and *tikkun olam*. He emphasizes the significance of moral distinctions and ethical clarity in the divine act of separating light from darkness. He writes, "And it teaches you that at the outset there was darkness and God illuminated it, and when it saw that it [the world] was evil, He set it apart for the righteous in the World to Come." Rambam implores us to fill the world with light, and to remove any traces of the evil that may be there.

The creation of light in *parshat Bereishit* carries profound significance in relation to the concept of *tikkun olam* within Jewish tradition. *Tikkun olam*, which translates to "repairing the world" or "healing the world," is a fundamental concept that underscores humanity's role in actively working to restore a harmonious world in partnership with God. In Bereishit 1:3, God says, "Let there be light," and there was light. This divine



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act of bringing light into the world not only serves as the literal foundation for bringing the world to fruition, but also as a charge to humanity: Create light.

Engaging in committed, genuine work towards the betterment of our world requires individual journeys toward self-improvement and spiritual growth. We need to mend the broken parts within ourselves before we can mend the broken world. So as we strive to repair the world, let us fight the many internal forces of darkness that work to bring us down. Let us illuminate the hidden corners of our hearts and souls, fostering empathy, love, and a deeper connection to the divine light that resides within us all, so that we might declare: “Let there be light!”

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