

Date: 26 Tishrei 5787 (October 7, 2026)

Torah Portion: B'resheet

Topic: Worlds Built, Worlds Destroyed, Part 1

When a human inventor conceives a new invention, he begins by carefully developing his plans. He studies every detail, examines the underlying principles, and prepares a model. Yet when the invention is finally put into operation, it may fail to function as intended. The inventor must dismantle it, examine its components, test his assumptions, and identify the source of the failure. Even after correcting the defect, further adjustments may be necessary. Years of experimentation and refinement may pass before the invention reaches its intended perfection.

But can such a process be attributed to Elohim? Are we to imagine that the all-knowing Creator makes mistakes, overlooks the laws of nature, or discovers unforeseen consequences in His own creation? Such a notion is inconceivable. Elohim does not experiment because of ignorance, nor does He learn through trial and error. Every law governing the universe, whether already discovered by humanity or still beyond human understanding, originates in His infinite wisdom. Nothing escapes His knowledge, and nothing in creation unfolds beyond His awareness.

Why, then, do the Sages teach that Elohim created worlds and destroyed them before establishing the present world? Bereishit Rabbah (3:7) describes the Creator as bringing worlds into existence and then destroying them, declaring concerning the present creation, “This one pleases Me; those did not please Me.” The Zohar likewise develops the mysterious idea of earlier worlds that did not endure. Are we to understand these accounts as evidence of unsuccessful attempts at creation, or do they conceal a deeper spiritual principle?

The answer lies not in any deficiency of Divine wisdom but in the purpose for which the world was created. According to the Sages, creation exists for the sake of Torah, which reveals the Divine will and establishes the moral and spiritual order through which humanity may draw near to its Creator. Yet Torah presupposes the existence of free will. Without the capacity to choose between obedience and disobedience, the commandments would lose much of their moral significance. How could Elohim justly reward righteousness or hold humanity accountable for transgression if human conduct were entirely predetermined?

Free will, therefore, is not an imperfection in creation but an essential feature of its design. Just as the physical universe operates according to established laws, the moral universe depends upon humanity's freedom to accept or reject the Divine will. Elohim desires willing obedience rather than mechanical submission, for genuine faithfulness must arise from the heart.

The Midrash teaches that before giving the Torah to Yisrael, Elohim offered it to the other nations, each of which declined to accept its obligations. Finally, Yisrael received the Torah at Mount Sinai, declaring, “All that YHWH has spoken we shall do and obey” (Exodus 24:7). The Talmud further teaches that creation itself was bound to this moment: had Yisrael refused the Torah, the world would have returned to its primordial state of *tohu va-vohu*—formlessness and emptiness (Genesis 1:2; Shabbat 88a).

Within this framework, the earlier worlds described by the Sages may be understood as expressing the profound relationship between creation, moral freedom, and the acceptance of Divine purpose. Some traditional interpretations portray these worlds as unable to endure because they lacked the conditions necessary for the fulfillment of Torah. This is a theological interpretation rather than an explicit historical account of earlier civilizations. Its essential message, however, is unmistakable: a world that rejects its Divine purpose cannot achieve the fullness of existence for which it was created.

Thus, the destruction of earlier worlds need not signify failure on the part of Elohim. Rather, it reveals that creation is not sustained merely by its physical existence but by its relationship to the Divine will. A world may possess extraordinary beauty, complexity, and material abundance, yet without righteousness, moral responsibility, and spiritual purpose, it remains incomplete.

Shalom.