

# LBT's From Light to Liberation: *Compassion*

Week of December 27, 2020 / 12 Tevet 5781

These texts are designed to be engaged in chevruta (with a partner), with a larger group, or on your own as part of your journey from Light to Liberation. As you approach these texts, you are invited to let the discussions and thoughts they foster live with you and be part of you. If you are reading these on your own or with others, we encourage you to read aloud.

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**Framing:** The Hebrew word for *Rahamim* (רחמים), compassion, comes to us directly from the word *rehem* (רחם), or womb. Through this, our tradition teaches that compassion for another individual means treating them as if they are our own issue -- we should show compassion to the other by understanding them as we might understand a fragile life we are carrying inside our wombs. In our tradition, there are two primary names for God: *Elohim* and *Adonai* (expressed by the unspeakable four-letter tetragrammaton). We understand *Elohim* as the name of God referring to God's value of *justice*, while the name *Adonai* is directly connected to God's *compassion*. Rashi (11th Century French Rabbi) opens his commentary on the Torah contrasting the different names of God used at the start of each of the two Creation narratives to expound on the centrality of *rahamim*, compassion, in the human realm. The texts below include the opening lines of the two creation stories with the names of God preserved in the translation, plus Rashi's commentary.

בראשית א':א'

(א) בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

## Genesis 1:1

(1) When *Elohim* began to create heaven and earth—

בראשית ב':ד'

(ד) אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בְּיּוֹם עֲשׂוֹת יְיָ אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:

## Genesis 2:4

(4) Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created. When *Adonai Elohim*, made earth and heaven—

## Rashi on Genesis 1:1

(3) **ELOHIM CREATED** — The first text only includes the name *Elohim* because God initially intended to create the world based on the value of justice alone. However, God saw that the world could not be established on justice alone, so God attached the attribute of compassion to the attribute of justice. We see this from the second text that states: "When *Adonai Elohim*." By combining the two names of God, the world was created and could stand on the competing values of justice and compassion.

## Questions for Reflection:

1. Rashi contrasts the values of justice and compassion. Why are these two values in tension, in the text and in the world?
2. Why might God incline toward imbuing the world with compassion before justice? How has your meditation practice fueled your compassion for others?
3. How do you practice, or struggle with, self-compassion? What are the ways your meditation practice facilitates self-compassion?