

Out of Nothing—Ex Nihilo

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

The Latin word "*Ex Nihilo*" (*yesh me-ayin* in Hebrew) means out of nothing and is used to describe God's creation of the universe and His forming of life from nothingness. Let us, therefore, ask this question: Can something be created out of nothing? Rationally, our minds would tell us no. But if we believe—by faith—that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, which is both irrational and seemingly impossible to comprehend, then we can also conclude that the universe cannot continue to exist apart from the One who created it.

There is a common misconception, even for those who believe in creation, that we see ourselves as separate beings from God. Sure, we turn to God when we need Him, but otherwise, we are content living independently. Do we realize that we cannot exist without Him? Apparently not, as most people feel that God created the world, set it in motion, and has now left it in our capable hands to manage. Our entire civilization is built upon this false premise as man is continually seeking to establish his heaven on earth.

This country's Declaration of Independence even says, "Our Creator endows us with certain unalienable rights—that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Interestingly, none of these rights are in the bible. The word "unalienable" means impossible to take away or give up, and implies these things are due to us "by right," and not by any gift or privilege.

No man indeed has the right to take away your life, but I am speaking of God. Contrary to our misconception, Job said, "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord*" (Job 1:21).

Yeshua said, "*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10, NKJV).ⁱ God is the grantor of life, which is found only in Him, and this life is a gift of God and not a right.ⁱⁱ Yes, it is free to us, but it came at an immeasurable cost—the precious blood of God's only Son, Yeshua.

Nowhere in the Declaration of Independence is there any reference to our complete and total reliance on the One who created us. No, we declare that God has given us certain irrevocable

rights and that we as separate beings own these rights. Now we are free to exercise them in any way we choose. This is what some might call “free will”—another misconception—but I call it rebellion.

Do we genuinely have free will, or has God given us a choice—a decision that would either direct our lives towards receiving His eternal love or conversely receiving His eternal wrath? Because, without free choice, there can be no moral responsibility as it is written, *“Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments” (Revelation 16:7).*

Complete free, on the other hand, should give us absolute sovereignty to control our eternal destiny, even escaping death. However, we know this is impossible. All of us will die one day, and all will be judged by the Lord, some to everlasting life and others to eternal punishment. For if God’s love forever sustains the righteous, then we can assume His wrath equally sustains the wicked.ⁱⁱⁱ

As it is written, *“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:10 & 15).*

Let us begin to understand these absolute truths about God’s unity with His creation, and the reasons why we must fully surrender our existence to the One who sustains all things. Maimonides,^{iv} one of our great sages, says: “God is the Knowledge, the Knower, and the Known. God is the means of comprehension—the Knowledge, and at the same time is He Who understands—the Knower, and is also that which is understood—the Known.”^v

Maimonides continues by saying: “This is not within the power of any man to comprehend clearly; as it is written, ‘Can you find and understand God by searching?’ And it is also written, ‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts’ [says God]; and consequently ‘your’ [human] thoughts cannot possibly comprehend ‘My’ thoughts.”^{vi}

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the Alter Rebbe),^{vii} further clarifies that “God’s essence is truly infinite—even higher than the inscrutable [incomprehensible] level of knowledge that Maimonides refers to. Thus, it is written, ‘You have made them all with wisdom,’ indicating that God’s wisdom is the highest level within all the Worlds.”^{viii}

Maimonides goes on to say: “This is beyond the capacity of the mouth to express, beyond the capacity of the ear to hear, and beyond the capacity of the heart or mind of man to apprehend clearly. For the Holy One, blessed be He, His Essence and Being, and His Knowledge is all absolutely one, from every side and angle, and in every form of unity.”^{ix}

The Alter Rebbe then adds: "The Holy One, blessed be He, is a perfect unity, without any composition or element of plurality at all [although we recognize the Hebrew name of God 'Elohim,' and His Essence are a plurality of One—what we call the Trinity]. He and His knowledge are all absolutely one, and knowing Himself, He perceives and knows all the higher and lower beings. One must conclude that His Essence and Being and Knowledge are all absolutely one, without any composition. Therefore, just as it is impossible for any creature in the world to comprehend the essence of the Creator and His Being, so it is impossible to comprehend the essence of His knowledge, which is One with God Himself; [it is possible] only to believe, with a faith that transcends intellect and comprehension, that the Holy One, blessed be He, is One and Unique."^x

Before the creation, there was nothing that existed except for God. After creation—*ex nihilo*—we might erroneously assume that something now exists in addition to Him.^{xi} This addition would effectively be a change in God's absolute unity, as nothing can exist apart from Him.

So, here are the questions: How can we say that God exists alone after creation when there now exists a new entity—the universe? Or how can we say that once the world was created, that God is somehow aware of something He previously was not?

It is clearly understood that the world is entirely nullified in relation to God, and at the same time is wholly united with Him. Therefore, God is just as alone after the world was created as He was alone before its creation. In other words, relative to the Infinite One, all the worlds are as sheer nothingness and nonexistent.^{xii} As the sages declare, "You were [the same] before the world was created, [You are the same since the world has been created]. Being of absolutely no account relative to God, all the worlds affect no change in Him."^{xiii}

God does not change His nature or His will, and nothing is existing that can alter Him. The Alter Rebbe adds that God's knowledge has never changed, "For by knowing Himself, He knows all created things since all derive from Him and are nullified in relation to Him. Creation thus added nothing to God's knowledge. God's knowledge self-existed before creation, and it is with this prior knowledge that He knows all of creation."^{xiv}

Now, considering our understanding of God's absolute unity and our nothingness compared to His infiniteness, how can we continue to believe that we, as created beings are independent and somehow separate from God? No, this is implausible, except in our arrogance, which is our human pride.

Pride is the elevation or even consideration of one's own identity over God's unity. God is the Supreme King of kings—and all of creation is considered as nothing before Him and utterly nullified before His Will. He brings life to all and continually brings us into being out of nothingness—*ex nihilo*.

As it says, *“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they”* (Hebrews 1:1-4).

God upholds all things by the word of His power. Pride thus represents a denial of God’s unity, meaning a denial that *nothing* exists apart from Him. For this reason, the *Gemara* (the oral *Torah*) equates pride with idolatry; *“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry”* (1 Samuel 15:23). Idolatry implies that there is something—anything—that exists outside of God, and is separate from Him.^{xv}

The essence and root of our idolatry are that we regard ourselves as independent beings, separate from the holiness, which is the oneness and unity of God. Was this not Israel’s sin against the first commandment, *“You shall have no other gods before Me”* (Exodus 20:3), even the original sin of Adam when he ate of the forbidden tree, desiring to make him wise like God?^{xvi}

Idolatry does not imply an outright denial of God. No, it is considered idolatry only because we find ourselves similar to God as separate beings. We thereby separate ourselves from the holiness of God and refusing to efface ourselves before Him.^{xvii} Using this false analogy, we compare the work of God—the Maker of heaven and earth—to the work of man.

For example, when a metal-smith has completed a vessel, it no longer needs the hands of the metal-smith. The hands are removed, and it remains intact by itself. Some philosophers apply this model to the creation of heaven and earth, imagining that once God created them, they no longer need Him. These thinkers deny what is called *hashgachah pratit*, which is the individually-directed divine providence of the Creator’s constant and ongoing contact with His created beings.^{xviii} Yeshua said, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5). Nothing implies “nothing,” even our continual existence.

The opposite of pride is humility, which leads to submission. Humility says, “I am nothing before You—less than dust—I am completely non-existent in Your presence, and my very breath and subsistence continually depend on You.” The Prophet Isaiah said: *“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts”* (Isaiah 6:5).

Submission to God says, “I give up my [perceived] rights, even my right to exist, and fully submit to the unity of my Creator.” Humble and submitted individuals rightly view life as an undeserved

gift from God, and certainly not free, but paid for with the precious blood of Christ. He did not die for our life, liberty, and happiness. No, He died so that we might receive His life, love, joy, and eternal peace, which is found in Him alone, not in the things of this world.^{xix}

Surrender requires us to humble ourselves, or in His love and grace, be painfully humbled, remembering with fear and compassion, the severity of God which has fallen on all idolaters, “[those] who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). Surrender requires full submission to the One who holds the keys of life in His hand.^{xx}

We can rejoice in this truth, knowing that “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). When we nullify ourselves before our Creator, then we can receive the fullness of His love. And receiving the fullness of His love allows us to demonstrate Christ’s immeasurable love to an unlovable world.^{xxi}

Therefore “Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 4:17). He knew that only repentance would turn the hearts of the children of Israel back to the heart of their heavenly Father. As it is written, “Thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones’” (Isaiah 57:15).

Yeshua then prayed, “that [Israel and all who are grafted in] may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21).

And this is my prayer for us—that we remain in humble submission and continually repentant before our God. Turning from our idolatry of self and abandoning the deception that we are somehow independent beings that exist apart from God. Let us see ourselves fearfully nullified in His presence and forever remembering that we are entirely dependent upon Him, knowing that our spirit and very breath will rest in His hands for all eternity. Only then, when we are wholly crucified in our flesh^{xxii} and alive in His Spirit, will we fully become One in Him and One with one other. Dear brothers and sisters—let us all become One.

Amen!

ⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

ⁱⁱ Romans 1:32, 5:18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Revelation 21:8.

^{iv} Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (רַב־מֹשֶׁה בֶּן־מַיְמוֹן) Mōšeh bēn-Maymōn; Arabic: موسى بن ميمون Mūsā bin Maymūn), commonly known as Maimonides /maɪˈmoʊniːz/ (my-MON-i-deez; Greek: Μαϊμωνίδης Maimōnídēs), and also referred to by the acronym Rambam /ˌrɑːmˈbɑːm/ (רמב"ם, for Rabbeinu Mōšeh bēn Maimon, "Our Rabbi Moses son of Maimon"), was a medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages. Wikipedia.

^v *Lesson in the Tanya—Iggeret HaKodesh, middle of Epistle 25*. The Tanya of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, elucidated by Rabbi Yosef Wineberg. Translated from Yiddish by Rabbi Levy Wineberg and Rabbi Sholom B. Wineberg. Edited by Uri Kaploun. Published and copyrighted by Kehot Publication Society. Chabad.org.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Shneur Zalman of Liady (Hebrew: שניאור זלמן מליאדי, September 4, 1745 – December 15, 1812 O.S. / 18 Elul 5505 – 24 Tevet 5573), was an Orthodox rabbi and the founder and first Rebbe of Chabad, a branch of Hasidic Judaism, then based in Liadi in the Russian Empire. He was the author of many works, and is best known for Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Tanya and his Siddur Torah Or compiled according to the Nusach Ari. Wikipedia.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Matthew 11:27.

^{xii} Isaiah 40:17.

^{xiii} Ibid—*Kuntres Acharon, end of Essay 6*.

^{xiv} Ibid—*Iggeret HaKodesh, middle of Epistle 25*.

^{xv} Ibid—*Likutei Amarim, beginning of Chapter 25*.

^{xvi} Genesis 3:6.

^{xvii} Ibid—*Likutei Amarim, end of Chapter 22*.

^{xviii} Ibid—*Iggeret HaKodesh, middle of Epistle 25*.

^{xix} Galatians 5:22.

^{xx} John 5:39-40, Revelation 1:18.

^{xxi} John 13:35.

^{xxii} Romans 6:6, Galatians 2:20.