

Medina & Halacha

Exploring the Jewish State
through the lens of Jewish Law

By Rabbi Shimshon HaKohen Nadel

The Start-Up Nation

The modern State of Israel has been called the 'Start-Up Nation'. In the 2009 New York Times bestseller by the same name, authors Dan Senor and Saul Singer attempt to explain how against all odds, the State of Israel, a young country facing tremendous challenges, has more start-ups, R&D, and a larger venture capital industry per capita than any other country in the world. At the time the book was published, 63 Israeli companies were listed on the NASDAQ - more companies than any other foreign country on the NASDAQ!

Today, Israel is at the forefront of innovation in hi-tech, energy, agriculture, engineering, and research in so many fields of science and medicine. Just last week scientists from the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot and the Technion in Haifa published a new study which may help the body's immune cells better recognize melanoma (the most dangerous type of skin cancer), and kill it.

People often joke that if the BDS movement really took themselves seriously, its supporters would have to give up much of the technology

and medicine they are currently benefiting from, as most likely some part of it was developed here in Israel.

How is little Israel is at the forefront of so much innovation, technology, and medicine?

I believe the answer is found in the story of the creation of the world.

The first commandment to humanity is: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it ; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth" (B'reishit 1:28).

What does it mean to "subdue it"? Ramban (ad Loc.) explains: "And subdue it - He gave them the power and dominion on the earth to do as they wish with animals, vermin, and all who creep on the dust of the earth; And to build, and to uproot that which is planted, and to hew copper from its mountains, and the like."

According to Ramban, man is given control and dominion over the world, and charged with the task of utilizing its resources for his benefit.

But lest he destroy the world and deplete its resources, Hashem places man in the garden "to work it and to protect it" (B'reishit 2:15). This informs our responsibility to our world, and to our fellow man.

The first Chapter of B'reishit teaches man to create (and in doing so, emulate his Creator). The second Chapter of B'reishit teaches man responsibility. In his famous monograph, "The Lonely Man of Faith", Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik draws on these two different accounts of creation and argues that 'the man of faith' must integrate both of these ideals as he seeks to serve Hashem.

Another theme in the thought of Rav Soloveitchik is that Hashem left just a little bit of His world unfinished; left for us to complete. And in doing so, we become a partner with Hashem in the act of creation. In "Halakhic Man", Rav Soloveitchik writes, "When man, the crowning glory of the cosmos, approaches the world, he finds his task at hand - the task of creation. He must stand on guard over the pure, clear existence, repair the defects in the cosmos, and replenish the 'privation' in being. Man, the creature, is commanded to become a partner with the Creator in the renewal of the cosmos; complete and ultimate creation - this is the deepest desire of the Jewish People."

Being a 'contributing member of society' is such an important value in Judaism, the Talmud explains that a professional gambler is invalid as a witness because he does not contribute to the 'welfare of the world' (Sanhedrin 24b; Rambam,

Hilchot Eidut 10:4; Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 34:16).

As Jews, contributing to humanity is part of the very fiber of our being. It's the fabric of who we are. It's encoded in our DNA. It is why the Jewish People - while making up only 0.2% of the world's total population - make up 22.5% of all Nobel Prize laureates. And in some fields more than that! (36.71% in economics, 26.21% of physics, 25.23% in medicine).

And here in the State of Israel - the 'Start-Up Nation' - it is these very same ideas and ideals which inspire us to innovate, create, and better mankind. The secret to our success is in this week's Torah portion!