

From the Rabbi's Desk

October 2019

Friends,

Rosh Hashanah has past and Yom Kippur is around the corner. *T'shuvah* is a turning. What are we turning away from? What are we turning toward? As I write this article, I am still polishing my Rosh Hashanah sermons. The topic is our environment. It is hard to ignore our environment. We breathe air, drink water, and eat what the environment provides. Throughout history, we have treated the environment as a resource from which to constantly draw. People and groups have been sounding alarm bells for years, for my entire lifetime and maybe yours too. Up until now, we have had the luxury of listening to, or ignoring those alarm bells. Now we have no choice but to return to our primary purpose.

You all know our creation stories. *Bereshit bara Elohim eit hashamayim v'eit ha'aretz* - When God began to create the heavens and earth. This seminal text does not begin with a human story, but rather the beginning of everything. God creates, steps back as an artist, and looks at it taking shape. God sees light and perceives it as good. God shaped the land, gathered the seas, and steps back. Good. God spoke and caused vegetation and seeds to come forth, good. God created the great lights, set them in motion, and established day and night. Good. God spoke and brought forth living creatures, those of the seas and those flying through the air. Good. God continues the conversation of creation and beasts roaming the land come forth. Good.

The Artist shaped the unformed void by speaking things into being, making them into something. Then, God speaks to an audience our tradition imagines as a host of angels. God says to them that they should create a new type of creature, *Adam*, humanity. Now returns the word at the very beginning, *va'yivrah* Elohim, and God *created* humanity in God's image. Humanity shall dominate what has already been formed. God instructs humanity, be fertile and increase, subdue the things created and master them. God does not remark that the creation of humanity is good. Only by stepping back and looking at the whole does God remark that it was *tov m'od*, very good. Humanity only shares good as one inseparable aspect of creation with a unique place and purpose.

That place and purpose is clarified in the second creation story within our sacred text. In this story, God – *yitzer*– formed the human being from dust. God literally breathed life into the human being. God plants a garden. Both acts are much more profound than creating. God lovingly and purposefully places each living thing in the garden. Then the human, who was brought to life by an ultimate intimate act with God, is placed within the garden. The garden was not created for the human, rather humanity created for the garden. The purpose of humanity is made clear in Genesis 2:15. Humanity is to *l'avdah v'shamrah* – to work, serve, till; and to keep, watch over, preserve.

Our shared tradition that we must share with all humanity teaches that we must conduct ourselves as responsible for the world in which we have been placed. Our world was not put here for our enjoyment; we were put in this world to care for it, to sustain it, to protect it.

The Psalmist who was immersed in the human-God relationship, spoke from soulful depths regarding human purpose saying, *saneiti hashamrim hav'lei shav, v'ani el Adonai batachti*, I detest those who rely on empty folly, rather I trust in Adonai. Turn away from empty pursuits, return to being the stewards of God's glorious creation.

L'shana Tova,

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