How did things get this way?” is probably one of the first things that ancient human beings asked. Not most of them, for sure. Like today, most people have enough to do trying to figure out and deal with what is happening right now. There has always been some subset of people, however, that asked “how?” and “why?” and “what for?” How did the universe get here? Why was the universe created? For what purpose? These questions ultimately come down to: why am I here? And what is my purpose?

I imagine some ancient person sat very quietly one day, looking at the sky and the ground and sea, and all the denizens thereof, and asked a fundamental question: Has it always been this way? If not, how did this come about?

This mythical ancient human being that I have conjured up had already heard other theories: “Primordial gods at war with each other” or some other complex story. That was all hearsay. No one saw it.

My original ancient philosopher had Occam’s instinct, probably before anything like a razor had been crafted. William of Occam (or Ockham, 1287-1347), you will recall, was an English philosopher and theologian. As a philosopher, he, like many others before him and after him, liked the rule of parsimony: the fewer questions, the better. Only one tiny angel dances eternally on the head of a pin.

John Punch, a later philosopher, probably said it best: “Entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity.” Some philosophers, like William of Occam and John Punch, enjoyed giving philosophical arguments a nice, close shave (hence, “Occam’s Razor”).

My ancient philosopher contemplated reality, considered the mythical stories, and rejected them. This philosopher concluded: It all comes from one source. Why suppose many gods when one can suppose one God as the origin of existence?

This ancient, prehistoric philosopher that I am imagining had the great fortune of having a friend, less philosophic, more mystical. The philosopher inferred a singular origin. The mystic intuited the nature of this Singular Origin of All Reality. “The Oneness permeates all,” the mystic said, “and this Oneness is alive in depths of the human being.”
The philosopher and mystic then went over to a sympathetic poet and shared their findings. This poet, fortunately, was not mesmerized by ancient myths of origins. Maybe this poet was a proto–Leonard Cohen, a composer of sparse and simple lines, lines somehow packed with a stunning, sinewy strength.

The philosopher, the mystic and the poet conferred for many years.

The philosopher: It all comes from One Source.

The mystic: This Source pervades all reality, and rumbles in the human soul.

The poet:

In the beginning of the Nameless One’s creating

Reality was an astonishing, wondrous, formless emptiness.

A Divine wind appeared over the liquid expanse –

And the Nameless One spoke.

I think the philosopher and the mystic were impressed with the poet and even very moved. They said, “Let’s talk some more, and then memorize it.”

They memorized the poem and recited it to other philosophers, mystics and poets. They formed a group and finally decided on a name: the Knowers of the Nameless One. The group loved the irony: knowing that which cannot be known but must be found. They let other philosophers, mystics and poets in the group. The expanding group found the poem so beautiful.

The philosopher, the mystic and the poet each found a suitable replacement as they faced the end of their days. The group, the Knowers (for short), expanded. The poem, in its depth, beauty and precision, grew over generations. The poem was hidden for centuries. They feared that dullards would hear it and talk about it in dull-witted ways and thus ruin the exquisite experience of the Presence that was evoked when the ever-growing poem was recited.

This secret school of philosophers, mystics and poets (long before these foundational archetypes of human thought stopped working together) never claimed that this living word, with roots and branches and a wind moving through the murmuring leaves, was the spoken, very “word o’God.” God did not dictate it. The divine channeled through their ideas, their words, their fellowship.

The truth of the poem was not a result of God speaking to them, but was found in the Presence that brought the philosopher, the mystic and the poet together. That Nameless One, a Presence that pervades reality and rumbles in the soul, is the origin of art, poetry and all manner of beauty. It speaks of love, justice and truth, the good and the holy.

I think the early listeners were able to infer the hidden reality in the poem: The human being itself is a self-writing poem, seeking to understand itself, with the Divine as a prodding witness.

The truth of the poem lay, at least partly, in its power to enrapture those whose souls had something of the philosopher, the mystic and the poet knotted within.

(Later people said, “It is the revealed Word o’God!” without bothering to notice that the poem actually never says that.)
The first Haftarah of the reading cycle immediately links the God of creation to the God that insists on justice and fidelity, as can be seen in the following selection:

5. Thus said God the Lord, he who created the heavens, and stretched them out; he who spread forth the earth, and that which comes out of it; he who gives breath to the people upon it, and spirit to those who walk in it; 6. I the Lord have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand, and will keep you, and give you for a covenant of the people, for a light to the nations; 7. To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and those who sit in darkness, out of the prison house. 8. I am the Lord; that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to carved idols.
Welcome New Members

Jake Surrey
Kelsey & Eric Ledgin

Mazal Tov...

Eleni Merari and David Gable on their upcoming wedding this Monday, October 24.

This Week We Remember...

Joe Diamond, uncle of Laura Phillips, on October 24.

Condolences To...

Diana Fields and family on the passing of her husband and their father, Brian Fields, on October 12. Brian is survived by his loving family, Diana, his children Daniella, Jake and Kyra, his step-mother Cindy Fields, his mother, siblings, extended family and friends.

Please Note:
If you have something for the weekly update, material, as well as flyers, must be in the office by 4PM the preceding Monday!