

A Weekly Message of Torah from Rabbi Rheins

It's God's Creation but it is our World

This week we begin from the beginning; a new cycle of Torah readings starts with the story of Creation and *Parashat Bereisheet*. The Torah is not a book of science though it does offer extraordinary insights about nature and our human character. The Torah is not a book of history though it records important events of human civilization that are often supported by modern historical research. Rather, the Torah reveals that all creation is united with the Divine and that all life is embraced with God's will. And though God is the creator, the Torah's message reinforces the role that we have.

Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

² *Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. - - -*

²⁶ *And God said: 'Let us make Adam/Humanity in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'* ²⁷ *And God created Adam in the Divine image, in the image of God created God created Adam; **male and female God created them.***

²⁸ *And God blessed them; and God said unto them: '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 creeps upon the earth.' ---* ³¹ *And God saw everything that was made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, **the sixth day.***

The Creation is God's, but the world was put into our care. Thus, we find in the second chapter of Genesis the explicit charge that we have been given:

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחָהוּ בְּגֶן־עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ:

¹⁵ And Adonai God took the human, and put him into the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.

The earth, with its marvelous array of life is not boundless. Nature, for all of its power and glory is, nevertheless fragile and vulnerable. That we are in a position to care for it, tend it and guard it is a sacred task. Alas, much to our shame, far from protecting nature, it is our human species that is responsible for causing so much damage. We have polluted the waters with waste and plastics. We have choked the air with gases and smog. We have poisoned the earth with complex pesticides, insecticides and industrial waste. And as a result, we are destroying the very environment in which we live. And as a result, countless life forms are threatened with extinction---including our own!

Concern for the environment transcends political and ideological affiliation. We all are vulnerable when our environment is poisoned. And most importantly, we all are capable of raising our voices and our votes so that our political and business leaders know that we will hold them account for their decisions and policies.

The Torah's story of creation is not a juvenile tale of how life came into being. Rather, the Torah teaches us that we have a moral and ethical responsibility to protect and guard our planet and the life that depends on it.

May this year be the one that future generations will point to and say: "That was truly the beginning of the renewal of the Garden of Eden."

Shabbat Shalom

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