

A Shabbat message from Rabbi Rheins
Shabbat Bereisheet 5781

A Little Less Than Divine

This week is Shabbat *Bereisheet*, so named after the very first of the *parashiot* (portions) of the Torah. The beginning of the Torah is perhaps its most famous in that it addresses the phenomenon of creation. Of course as humans, our interest is naturally turned to the focus of the creation of humanity. The story of humanity quickly turns rather sour, first with the consumption of the forbidden fruit (sweet or sour, it nevertheless was a bitter bite), and then in quick descending order, the first spousal squabble between Adam and Eve and the even more tragic fratricide of Cain killing Abel. Far from painting a pretty picture of humans in Eden or the serenity of pre-modern life, all our vanity, disloyalty, depravity, jealousy, and violent tendencies were exposed and written large in the first two chapters of Genesis.

So, reeling as we are from nearly 8 months of COVID-19 isolation and the rather unpleasant political climate, I think we've suffered enough and need not focus on our preternatural human flaws. Rather, let's focus on a single verse in the second chapter of Genesis (*Bereisheet*):

ז וַיִּיצֶר יי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נֶשְׁמַת

חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

Adonai God formed (va'yiyi-tzer) one human from the dust of the earth. God blew into the human's nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living soul (Genesis 2:7).

Most significantly, the Torah emphasizes that humans are brought to life by means of God's direct act of blessing; literally, breathing into us a living soul. This establishes the understanding that every human life is sacred.

As the Psalmist wrote:

מִה־אָנוּשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֵנוּ וּבֶן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקֹדֵנוּ: וַתַּחְסְרֵהוּ מֵעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים

וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תַּעֲטֶרְהוּ:

⁵ *What are humans that You have been mindful of us, mortals that You have taken note of us?* ⁶ *You made humanity **little less than Divine**, and adorned us with glory and majesty (Psalms 8:5-6).*

Our Torah is not a book of science or history. It does not come to reveal to us the academic description of creation and evolution. Its intent is not to review for us the unfolding of human development, the rise and fall of kingdoms and nations. Rather, the Torah reveals that all life is in relationship to God, that all life is sacred, and thereby extols us to embrace the magnitude of our existence. A little less than Divine. . . What a concept!

Now, it is up to us explore the meaning of that gift and strive to live up to its inherent potential.

Shabbat Shalom!

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