

Shabbat Shalom With A Side of Torah – Braeshit 5768

The strangest of ideas strike us at the most interesting of moments. I was at a meeting regarding the 2010 World Equestrian Games, called by our Mayor for community leaders. The moderators were discussing the creation of a legacy project, something necessary for the Games that would remain useful for the Lexington community long after the Games were over. Even amidst the work preparing for and actually creating the venue, programming, and structures necessary for the event, there were intentional thoughts to also preparing for what came after. This may sound strange (perhaps it is even a hazard of my job), but I thought about the biblical stories of creation. Maybe not so strange, after all, we are at the point in the Torah reading cycle when we retell the creation story.

"In the beginning of God's creation of Heaven and Earth ..." These are the first words of the Torah, Genesis 1:1. At least, this is the most direct translation of the text that begins Torah. A more familiarly used translation would read, "In the beginning, God created the Heaven and the Earth." There exists an interesting discussion between Rabbis who lived over 100 years apart on these two translations. RASHI (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzkhaki --11th century) argued for the first translation, while RAMBAN (Rabbi Moshe ben Nakhman -- 13th century) accepts the second. Of course, neither of them spoke English, but their respective arguments are best represented by these translations.

Rashi's point is that we know from even the text of Torah that this is not the beginning. Rosh Hashanah, the new year, is the anniversary of creation. Rosh Hashanah is the first day of the seventh month. Creation is, therefore, not the beginning. Rashi thus argues that the bible is simply the "story" of this world (whether he believed that it is the "history" of this world is for another conversation). The first acts of creating "this" world were the acts of creating Heaven and Earth. Ramban took the text more literal in that he thinks that does speak to the beginning of everything. Of course he knows of Rosh Hashanah, but for him the statement regarding "beginnings" is more transitive and less immediate. The first words of Torah speak to the beginning of the process of creating Heaven and Earth. All the stuff that went into creating it began with those words. It just took "six months to get to a point that life was sustainable. In neither case, though, is the Earth the beginning of all there is. Both sages understand that even if the Earth were part of the original plan for creation, it was not the immediate first act.

We make a big deal over the beginnings of things. With lots of gusto, we celebrate births, weddings, inaugurations, consecrations, and opening day for businesses, sports, and institutions. We treat these events as though they are the most important event in the life of the person or institution. We celebrate New Years, as though it is a day set apart from all others. Yet, when I look at our tradition, the birth or grand opening is only the first act of the process of living. And, while it is certainly a moment of great importance, it cannot be more important than all that comes afterward. Our celebrations should begin with the first breath, but also continue and grow with each subsequent breath. There is a folktale of a man waiting on the pier for a ship to come, bringing its crew and cargo home from the latest journey. He looks to the adjacent dock and there are throngs of people sending off another ship on its maiden voyage. With great fanfare, they launched the ship, not knowing what it would have to face even on its first voyage. He was the only one waiting for the ship at his pier. He thought how odd it was that, while the crowd celebrated this new ship, there was no one there to celebrate the ship's having weathered the storms and returned safely, or the growth of its crew's experience.

We need to remember the teachings of our sages that even creation was not about "an event," it was the beginning of a process that has continued – even biblically speaking for thousands of years, and scientifically, for billions of years. If that is our macrocosm, then in our much smaller micro-cosmic worlds, we need to remember that celebration is not just for the special moments, but for every moment. Everything we do and are, may stem from "our" beginning, but are not necessarily

the result of our beginning. Where we choose to celebrate, to live ethically, to make the best of all that befalls us, then every day can be a blessing. I have learned from even patients dying in agony ... even amidst their moments of greatest pain, that they would not have missed their life's journey and the many blessings it brought them. We celebrate beginnings. May we also find the same energy to celebrate the days after ... and the days after them. On this first Sabbath of our new Torah cycle, may the lessons we learn as we engage and study bring blessings to our homes, our communities, and our world – today, and every day. Shabbat Shalom.