

## **Shabbat Shalom With a Side of Torah - Braeshit**

We learn the darnedest things from our children. Some things we learn directly from them, such as the day they decided that it was time to learn how to use the washing machine myself. Other things we learn as a result of an encounter with them that leaves us thinking. Not too long ago, I was giving instructions to one of my "darlings" and was met with a "Why do I have to do it?" I shot back, "Because I helped bring you into this world." What came back should have been expected, but made me stop and think. The response was sassy yet so true, "Well, I didn't ask to be born." I know it sounds silly to dwell on this, but this is, after all, what Rabbis do -- dwell on the stuff no one else dwells on. It was with some delight, then, when I was reading a Chassidic text regarding this week's portion when I came across the most profound of thoughts. The Rabbi was stuck on the use of the plural "Us" in the creation story. "Let us make man in our own image." From an early Midrash (Braeshit Rabbah), the Rabbi argued that the "we" implied that God had help in creating us, and he postulated that we are the "we" of the text. God consulted with each one of us before deciding to make us corporeal (give us bodies). Thus, according to the Midrash, there is existence before there was "existence." The profundity of this statement is that I now have a response to my children, "In fact, yes, you did have a say in coming here!" More importantly, it provides us a great lesson as we enter the new year's reading cycle.

We really do have free will, even to the extent of helping to decide about our own creation. We read near the end of Deuteronomy and on Yom Kippur that the understanding of "what is" is not so far across the sea or up in the heavens that it has to be brought back to us by some other fore. It is here, in our hearts and our hands. Every decision made in this world has our input. The biggest question is not why does this happen to me, but why do we let all this happen? So, what is it that this first portion of the Torah cycle tells us? Well, there are two creation stories. In one, we are really super important. In the other, we are God's gardeners. In both, we are given dominion over the earth and all that grows on, in, or above it. And if the Midrash is taken as fact, we asked to be put here and in this position. Over the last several thousand years, we have accepted this role in a host of ways, and as of late, most of them abusive and destructive. Having dominion over this world means that we have ultimate decision making authority in how it should serve us and how we demonstrate our control over it.

The questions we ultimately have to ask ourselves make us come to terms with not only this controlling interest, but also with our responsibility in making sure that there is something over which we will continue to have dominion. It will come as no shock to anyone that environmentalism is at the forefront of today's news (okay, second to the mudslinging election process). We have made it a political – even partisan – issue of debate. There are scientists who can both "prove" there is global warming as there are those who can "prove" there is not. It seems to me that winning the debate is a rather pointless victory, since whether we are causing the world to deteriorate or just accelerating it is a pretty silly thing to spend the money we should be spending on research to save the world on the fight to determine who is right. And even for those who have decided that there is nothing wrong with the environment, they cannot ignore the horrible socio-economic impact occasioned by the "abuse of nature" choices we have made in how we deplete the world's resources. It is nothing but arrogance to argue that we have a right to use up the oil of the earth. Clean coal may not pollute, but it still destroys the mountains and habitats from which it is drawn. If we were serious about clean energy, every home would have a

windmill to supply or at least supplement its energy consumption. At the same time that we are shocked at the proliferation of stories about animals of the wild being found in our urban neighborhoods, we clear cut their natural habitats, forcing them into either extinction or relocation. The only places left for them to go are our back yards. We have called people who argued for the maintenance of animal habitats "Tree hugging liberals," yet time has proven that where we do not care about the spotted owl and destroy its home, it has no choice but to relocate in our own homes, destroying them. We chose to be created, knowing full well that we were to be put in control, yet we refuse to accept the results that our lack of control has caused. No differently than the CEO of a large company who takes a huge bonus right before the company and its employee pension plan fails, we have taken from the earth all that we want, giving little regard for the rest of the world around us. I heard one pastor argue that the oil was created by God for us to consume. The day it no longer is available, are we then going to claim that God abandoned us? As we retell the story of creation, take stalk of the responses we bring to these conversations, and how they heal or proliferate the damage being done to our world. Make this Sabbath one where we recommit to paying attention to the responsibilities of the job we asked for in becoming part of this world. Shabbat Shalom.