

Today we celebrate the birth of the world  
six days of creation  
culminating in the making of humanity,  
of us!  
There is a discussion in the Talmud  
as to whether Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of day one,  
– the day of light–  
or of day *six*, the day *we* were created.  
Most agree that when we say  
*Hayom harat olam*  
“today the ‘world’ was conceived”  
we mean ‘our world’  
so that earth and flowers and sun and stars  
are all just a prelude to the really important moment  
when we come on the scene.

There has been a lot of talk recently  
about the account of *Breishit* –of Genesis –  
being the true account of the creation.  
Was the world really created in six days?  
Did life and formation arise instantaneously from G-d’s word?  
Was the human being made out of earth?

In celebration of this day of Rosh Hashana  
celebrating creation  
Let us take a look at the creation story  
as it was meant to be understood:  
Yes, it’s *all about us.*

The real agenda of *Sefer Breishit*–of Genesis–  
is evolution.  
Yes, evolution.  
Not the evolution of species,  
but the evolution of humanity.  
The evolution of families and societies,  
the evolution of the human heart.

The Torah’s creation story describes the formation  
of patterns of dominance  
who gets to be preferred and who gets to be rejected,  
and what happens to the preferred and to the rejected.  
The Book of *Breishit* is an examination of sin–  
how human beings are fulfilled or disappointed;  
How it is  
that we continue time and time again to choose those things  
that are not beneficial to ourselves,  
that set us into exile, into a disconnected state.

The Torah is a guide book, not a science book,  
and whether or not  
we can find hints to the big bang  
in these words  
is interesting  
but it's not the primary concern.  
But the details of temptation, of desire  
of self-deception, of disappointment--  
how these propel us toward and away from God and goodness--  
these are the hints we are mining for in our Torah.

It all begins in the Creation story:  
Sin is part of the original design.  
That's because *tshuva*--return--is part of the original design.  
How was sin created?  
It comes with the territory.  
Sin is just part of human existence.  
As the world is more and more differentiated,  
as boundaries are set in place  
each element of creation is more and more separate.

(There is a midrash that describes an eternal longing  
of the waters below which were separated from the waters above on day number two of creation.  
This midrash is a fanciful way of describing  
the longing and desire which is simply part of separateness.  
Some longing brings us to fulfilment and good things  
some longings, when we follow them,  
bring us to more separateness and ultimately to exile.)

Mussar is another word for Torah, or instruction  
But in Jewish tradition, "mussar" has come to mean  
that aspect of the Torah  
which addresses human behavior, character.  
So when you study mussar--  
you study those texts that shed light upon  
the workings of the human heart.  
If you were studying humility--  
you would carefully examine the figures of Moses and Saul  
two men known for their humility  
and you would see what they did well and where they failed,  
how, in the case of Saul, one can be too modest,  
how, in the case of Moses, one can be modest and bold.  
Then you learn where and how to watch *yourself*--  
where and how to challenge yourself,  
and where to guard yourself.  
(Seeing your weak spots and your pitfalls)

So too

if we want to understand the nature of sin—  
we look to these early chapters of *Breishit*  
and read them as if we were reading a map of the human soul.  
Here I am in a garden of Eden of grace and beauty.  
I am satisfied.

I have everything I need.

what is this pull that I feel toward that One tree  
which I am told is off limits?

How does the serpent convince me  
that I should breach the boundary  
and reach for the fruit?

It is an interesting process to observe when we are ourselves are both the observers and the  
observed.

This is the careful and painstaking work of Mussar.

It is similar to the Buddhist practice  
of watching the rising and falling of desire  
noticing the appearance of pleasure and pain  
-- the pull toward pleasure and aversion to pain.

watching each shift, each upset, each ache  
where is it coming from  
and where is it leading me?

Some of you here have participated in the meditative silent lunches that we used to have.

The focus of that meditation was watching,  
beholding, the process of satisfaction and desire.

How beautiful

the colors of the foods were when we were hungry

How delicious was the taste—

and then, as satiation began to set in--

we would notice that the colors were less enticing  
that even the flavors had lost their sharpness.

Through silent attention

we were able to find that moment of “enough”  
savor it

and appreciate it

When we watch ourselves carefully

we can discern whether the urge to eat more  
is coming from an emptiness in our bellies  
or whether

it is coming from longing for a memory  
of something that was once satisfying

when we watch ourselves reaching  
for something [or for someone]

—we can discern

whether we are reaching in love and tenderness  
or reaching to grab.

The eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil  
was an act of disobedience.  
There was first delight  
then a hiding  
and ultimately exile  
which is the kind of suffering that is our inheritance as human beings.  
The desire of Adam and Chava for more  
is a very familiar desire  
and their story seems like a description of life.

Interestingly, though, the word 'sin'  
is not introduced in this story at all.  
The word 'sin', *chataat*, comes to us in the next story  
a much darker chapter of human history  
the story of Cain.

Just as there are two kinds of Mitzvot,  
the ones to do and the ones to not do  
there are also two kinds of Sin:  
the reaching for what we desire  
(even if it's not good for us)  
and the destroying of what we don't want.  
(even though it does us no harm)  
The first type of sin, of reaching, is exemplified in the story of Adam and Chava  
reaching for the tree which G-d commanded them not to eat..

the second sin, which is the sin of destroying,  
is exemplified in the story of Cain and Hevel,  
the story of the evolution of hatred and murder  
when brother kills brother.

This sin, too, was brought about by a feeling of 'not enough'  
this sin, too, was paid for with exile.  
Just as Adam and Chava are exiled from the garden  
Cain is exiled from all of earth, from all farming,  
and from human society as well—branded with the mark  
that both protects him from being hunted and distinguishes as a sinner.  
Cain bring about the word "sin" in the Torah.  
Cain is the one who introduces competition  
into our story of creation.

Until the birth of these two brothers,  
all creation was made of distinctions *between* contrasting forces.  
*this is not that.*  
all pairs were complements:  
day and night  
male and female  
holy and worldly kodesh v'hol

But Cain and Hevel are two of the same:

two men

two sons

How, in this next phase of evolution, will they be distinct from one another?

The sad answer is:

One is preferred, the other is rejected.

Here in our creation story we encounter the pain of insult.

The Bitterness of recognizing that someone else has more  
more love

more talent

more happiness

more good nature. . . .

More something.

It is at this point of bitterness—at his fallen face

where God “steps in”

“Right here”—says G-d to Cain’s disappointment—“right here is your crossroads.”

“Your face is fallen

you are rejected

and you have two choices:

one is “*tetiv*”

if you can bestow good

you can bear it.

If you cannot bestow good,

you make yourself susceptible to sin

(even though you still may conquer it).

We can peer into this *passuk*

and learn what it has to teach us

about the step by step process of sin.

“If you can bestow good’.

Im *tetiv*.

There are two ways of understanding this:

the first is if you can bestow good upon your brother.

If you could possibly delight in his success,

then you can bear your own rejection.

It won’t look the same to you.

If you can’t, you will be susceptible to sin.

When Moshe gets the call

Aaron his brother comes to meet him in joy.

like Cain, Aaron is older than his chosen brother

but he is fully appreciative of his brother’s position.

So that’s one interpretation of “*im tetiv*”

Or ‘Im *tetiv*’

if you can bestow good

not on Hevel, but on yourself—

Here is the ultimate human challenge:

to bestow good upon ourselves when we are hurting.  
When we watch closely we can notice that  
what often happens when we are insulted or rejected  
is that we add insult to injury in that we berate ourselves  
for being rejected or ignored or insulted.  
We punish ourselves for failing  
or for being caught at failing.  
So when, say, a date doesn't call you back  
not only do you feel bad that he or she didn't call you  
but you start telling yourself,  
"well, I'm not really attractive enough."  
Or, when someone corrects you in a caustic tone,  
not only do you feel the sting of their criticism  
but inside yourself you add to it and punish yourself  
for being so careless to have invited the criticism  
or for misjudging such a person who you thought  
would be kind,  
whom you thought you could trust.  
These are some of the ways  
that we add to the pain inflicted upon us  
even as we are trying to defend ourselves against it.

G-d says to Cain:  
if you can be benevolent  
if you can bestow good upon yourself as you are being rejected  
if you can be compassionate towards yourself  
even when you are failing,  
you can bear anything.

But, if you cannot be benevolent to yourself  
"V'im lo tetiv"  
then sin will be lying right outside the door  
longing for you. . . ,

here is an image of sin as a devoted, waiting animal,  
The verb *rovetz* describes the lying around of an animal.  
Lying at the opening  
at the door  
longing for you.

G-d tells Cain that it is within his power to overcome sin.  
Sin is not particularly powerful.  
like a dog, slavishly hovering around  
waiting for its master to emerge,  
it can even be pathetic!  
Sin is not domineering  
it is just waiting.  
It's just persistent,  
and you are in charge, says God,

We all know that moment  
when we become aware that we have a choice  
to either allow ourselves to continue to be driven by our hurts  
the pathetic pest that they are hanging around us, annoying us,  
or to choose something else.

And yet.

Cain does not dominate sin.

He lets sin dominate him.

he stays in bitterness

he stays in his resentment

in his hurt

he holds onto his dissatisfaction

and he kills his brother.

And saddest of all

is that his crime, his sin,

does *not* alleviate his pain,

as perhaps he thought it might.

Instead, it plunges him into deeper pain:

*Gadol avoni min'so*

My sin is too much for me to bear!

He is ashamed.

He is sad.

He is changed forever.

He can't undo what he has done

Just as Adam and Chava cannot un-know

what they acquired from the tree of knowledge.

This is the story of every human being.

Reaching, and paying.

Pushing things away, and paying.

The shofar which we are about to hear is a wake up call.

Wake up sleepers–

see who you are

see what you are doing

watch!!!!

The answers are laid out before us

hidden in some of these stories.

We need to wake up to the wisdom of these maps

and we need to wake up and watch ourselves.

The Mussar master Rav Moshe Chayim Luzatto

teaches in his book the Path of the Just

that the first step on the path of righteousness

is watchfulness.

If we realized that we live in the dark

we would walk very carefully.

We would be awake with every step.

Today is the birthday of the world.

Today we celebrate creation.

Our creation.

Let us be in awe of the path

let us walk the path in awe.