

היום הרת עולם
Hayom Harat Olam
Kol Haneshamah page 652

היום הרת עולם, היום יעמיד במשפט,

Hayom harat olam, hayom ya'amid bamishpat
Today the world is born; today shall stand before You

כל יצורי עולמים, אם בנים אם בעבדים.

Kol y'tzurey olamim, im k'vanim im ka'avadim.
All the beings of the cosmos, whether as Your children or as Your servants.

אם בנים, רחמנו כרחמת אם על בנים :

Im k'vanim, rachameynu k'rachemet eym al banim.
If as Your children, show them mercy, like a mother toward her children.

ואם בעבדים עינינו לך תלויות,

V'im ka'avadim eyneynu l'cha t'luyot,
If as Your servants, then our eyes are turned toward You in great anticipation,

עד שתחננו ותוציא כאור משפטנו, איום קדוש.

Ad shet'choneynu v'totzi cha'or mishpateynu ayom kadosh.
That You may be gracious, rendering judgment for good, on our behalf, as clear as light of day.

HaYom harat olam – Today the world was born.

Why celebrate the birthday of the world? And, honey cake notwithstanding, why not with a bit more frivolity?

In our myth cycle, which mainly seems to be about violence and betrayals and more violence, here is an extraordinary origin story:

One world, created by One god, populated with one human.

Or possibly two humans – according to an early midrash echoing a similar story in Plato and seeking to make sense of

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם
הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצַלְמֵם -
אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ:
זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם.

1:27 And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

, a two sided, bisexual creature, male and female, later separated into two halves doomed to search for their missing part. Or maybe a four-sided creature, to account for various less binary genders and relationships.

The Athenians taught that they had sprung from the earth of Athens and all others were foreigners, inferiors, barbarians. Our origin myth agrees that we come from the earth, but proclaims that we, all humans, are all children of one *adam* of *adama*. One human, that is, from one earth, not the land of Athens, but the Earth itself.

No aristocrats or natives and foreigners or elites-by-birth at all – And especially, no King but the one King

אֶחָד וְאֵין יַחֲדוֹ , – one and only one, alone in his oneness, as we sing in the Yigdal.

The Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, uses this story of the single Adam to teach about capital punishment. In its view, every judge should explain to each witness the responsibility involved:

“know that when you kill one person, it is as if you destroyed an entire world”

just as the death of Adam would have destroyed us all, so too, an entire world will be destroyed if you destroy this one person. Each person is a world, irreplaceable and infinite,

אֶחָד וְאֵין יַחֲדוֹ

one and unique in his or her uniqueness.

And even more, Sanhedrin continues – no one may say my blood is better than yours, because we are all descended from one Adam and one Eve. No one may say my genes are better than yours, because we all wear the same genes, we are all descended from the same parents, we are all dust of the same earth.

This is perhaps the most radical attack on aristocracy that we have before the modern era.

The fundamental message of Genesis is that all the divisions that separate us are family affairs.

- The refugees fleeing man-made drought and war in Syria;
- The US citizens and residents that too many of our politicians are, sotto voce or leaning in the microphone, denigrating and seeking to condemn to second-class status;
- The prisoners we are obligated by Jewish law to redeem, not sacrifice to the private profit of privatized prison investors;
- The Americans who will not allowed to vote in this election because of voter-suppression laws surgically designed – as one of our appellate courts held a few days ago -- to racially discriminate, or lawless thugs masquerading as election monitors
- The poor in our midst here and abroad;

These are our family; these are the brothers whose keepers we are, whose bloods cry out from the earth. (Gen. 4:9-10)

קול דְּמֵי אֲחֵיךָ, צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן
הָאֲדָמָה.

So, on Rosh HaShana, we remind ourselves

- to hear the shout of the shofar and the still small voice that follows it,
- to hear the call to abandon the idolatries of power and nationalist prejudice,
- to remember that whether your skin is light or dark or even orange, you are just another *adam*, made of dust and earth, *adama*, doomed to return to the earth far too soon.

And we repeat and recapitulate the lesson in our national origin story -- one people all of whom were slaves, and all of whom are converts and immigrants, all of whom should know the soul of the stranger *ki garim hayitem b'erezt nokhria*, for you were strangers in a strange land.

In Egypt, Joseph legislated rules of the market apparently designed to force the entire population to sell itself into slavery to Pharaoh instead of starving – and he, or we, were punished by having his own descendants be slaves themselves for 400 years. This is why, Exodus and Leviticus explain, we are barred from placing stumbling blocks in the way of the blind or weak, forbidden to bow down except to the invisible king in heaven, forbidden to raise the price of food in famines, required to leave the corners of the field for the poor, required to forgive loans in the 7th year and to undo all economic inequalities – to impose an estate tax of 100% -- to return to an equal starting point after seven 7s of years.

Our obligation, this story teaches, is to hear the bloods of our brothers crying out from the earth, to protect the widows and the poor and the ordinary people – to free the literal and metaphorical slaves still suffering our world.

To follow Joseph in using the power of the state to protect our fellows from the vagaries of weather and markets, but **without** following him in his terrible violation of the principles of equality and freedom.

Our origin story, though, extends beyond demands that we guard and keep our fellow humans.

Our myth contends that the equality of the origin was so equal that in the eyes of the Creator, any of the animals was a potential spouse to the man. Gen 2:18-20 “And he brought them to the man ... but he did not find a suitable mate”.

And in making us human, gives us the knowledge of good and evil and the need to work, and blesses us with vegetables to eat and a world to tend and make better.

One god who gives us one world, and as the midrash points out, in putting us in charge, says – there is only one.

“Take care of it for there is no other.”

Science tells us that we are destroying our world, putting our fellow *b’nai adam* at risk of floods and typhoons and hurricanes in coastal areas across the globe, cooking the habitat that our potential spouses in the animal – and vegetable, and fungal, and protist – kingdoms depend on.

On the birthday of the world, our foundational myth says that our King,

the only king we recognize, the one who would later declare idolatry – that is, recognizing the claims of those who would proclaim themselves our masters – the worst sin of all,

our King sent us out into the world, endowed with the knowledge of good and evil, to care for and tend the world.

All Israel are guarantors for one another, and all people as well, and indeed for the entire world.

Is this not a task we too could take on?

HaYom Harat Olam. The translation, “today the world was born,” isn’t quite right. *Heriyon* is pregnancy, not birth. And Harah has the same roots as Torah, teaching. And it doesn’t say *ha-*

olam, “the world”, but *olam*, “eternal” or “God” or “infinite”. Someone a better linguist than I can correct me, but to my ears, it’s more like “Today is the eternal pregnancy.” Pregnant with what? With teaching, and

Perhaps with the justice that we must demand and give. For today is the day of judgment, the day that stands because of judgment; *ha-yom yaamid b’mishpat*, as we say after the shofar blows.

Shimon ben Gamliel taught, "On three things the world stands, (or in some versions, *kayam*, depends for its existence): on judgment, on truth and on peace”

רָבִן שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר, עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַדִּין וְעַל הָאֱמֶת וְעַל הַשְּׁלוֹם,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (זְכוּרִיָּה ח) אֱמֶת
וּמִשְׁפָּט שְׁלוֹם בְּשַׁעֲרֵיכֶם:

Justice, truth and peace are processes not endpoints.

We must work today – and vote on Nov 8 – to make this world, and our corner of it, part of the eternal struggles to become better, to pay our share of the taxes and the *avoda*, the service, we need to maintain and care for it, and us, all of us. *Ha yom harat olam*, “Today is the eternal pregnancy.” *ha-yom te’atzmeinu*. “Today you shall strengthen yourselves.”

Today the world is pregnant with all that is; today we must take courage, strengthen ourselves, prepare to make this a better world and not a barren one of hatred and heat.

-- Daniel JH Greenwood, Oct 2, 2016, Rosh HaShana 5777