

Creation to Creativity

“And God saw all that God had made and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” Genesis 2:31

Marcia Falk writes,

Giving Birth¹

Hayom harat olam: Today is the birthday of the world, the day which the world was conceived—so we say each Rosh Hashanah. And today it is being born again—as it is every day, at every hour. With each moment, the old world disappears and a new world comes into being. Everything is always happening for the first time.

Why, then, is *this* birthday special? On Rosh Hashanah, we set out on a path of deliberate change, change that is in our own powers to effect—*t’shuvah*, the return of one’s truest self.

As we celebrate the birthday of the world, the great creation out of which we are born, we bring attention to the ongoing creation of our lives, by which we make ourselves new each day.

During this past year it has been challenging for so many of us to be consistently happy, as we may have been, or as we wish to be. Mental health professionals tell me they have been flooded with people needing help and many depressed and anxious people have had an extra measure of suffering

¹ Marcia Falk

as a result. Confined to our homes, social lives and community engagement restricted, it has been difficult to ignite our passions for anything new or different. A crisis like this can lead us to crave sameness to be grounded, to appreciate the comfort of familiarity. After all, who has energy for imagination to remake themselves in the midst of a time of immense crisis?

We have had quite a year. It might seem as though we have little to celebrate, and sometimes, the problems of our world can feel overwhelming; unsolvable. Eat chocolate and pull a blanket up for comfort – this world is a mess!

But Rosh Hashanah, the birthday of the world, is about new beginnings. This night we begin the celebration of the birthday of the world; and the gift of creation looms large. The New Year offers us a reset, to scrape away the darkness, to once again perceive the light.

Israeli singer-songwriter Shimon Smith turned to Isaiah for the awakening to Divine light, words that are captured in the Lecha Dodi poem we sing to welcome Shabbat:

Kumi Ori Isaiah 60 (Shimon Smith)

<i>Ku-mi oh-ri ki vah oh- rech</i>	<i>Arise, my light, for your light has come</i>
<i>U'kh'vod Adonai ala- yich zarach</i>	<i>And the glory of G-d upon you will shine</i>

The prophet Isaiah knew terrible darkness – he prophesied during the time of the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of our

people to Babylonia. Violence, loss and exile caused devastating suffering among our people. Yet, Isaiah, in words of comfort for his people, proclaimed, *“Arise, my light, for your light has come.”*

The image of light fills Jewish text and imagination. It emerges right away in the opening words of Torah, within the mythic, spiritual telling of the creation of the world:

*God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years;
and they serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so.*

God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars.

And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. Genesis 1:14-18

Each week we separate light from darkness on Shabbat. In contemporary Israeli culture Friday, Yom Shishi, the sixth day, is called Shishi Shabbat. It is a special day; when many people have the day off, or a short workday. There is a happy, creative buzz of energy.

“And God saw all that God had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” Genesis 2:31

When creation was completed, Yom Shishi was *very good*. Except for one thing -- that very completion was *incomplete*. The paradox of creation is that it was **very good**, yet so **rife with problems**. There is so much pain in our world. *How is that “very good?”*

The Kabbalist, medieval mystics, proposed an understanding to this conundrum. Lurianic Kabbalah explains:²

God contracted the Divine self to make room for creation. In that contraction, Divine light became contained in special vessels, kelim, too much for them to hold, so some of them shattered and the shards scattered. While most of the light returned to its divine source, some light attached itself to the broken shards. These trapped sparks of light convey brokenness -- suffering and evil.

*Our world needs “repair” – **tikkun** – by gathering the scattered shards and divine light through mindful sacred acts, mitzvot. This is Tikkun Olam, separating what is holy from what is ordinary and elevating the holy.*

We all yearn to repair the world; to do our part to fulfill creation’s promise. We are Gd’s partners in the ongoing work of completing creation. Then, Torah’s vision of a world that is “very good” will be realized.

Birthday of the World {Marcia Falk}

Today is the birthday of the world.

² “Tikkun Olam: Repairing the World” by MyJewishLearning.com-MJL”

*But the world knows nothing
of this invention.*

*The world just keeps moving about itself,
buzzing and humming, exulting and keening,
birthing and being born,*

*while the mind keeps on its own way—
form-craving, metaphor-making,
over and over, giving birth and being born.*

Right now, this moment is like ***shishi shabbat***. 5781, this past year, must now fade into memory, as we retain what is essential and begin again. The hustle and bustle of preparing for this holy day portends an opening, metaphorically “*giving birth and being born*” as the poet imagines.

The broken shards of pain and suffering and loss are the entry to creation. In the close of 5781 we have felt enveloped by crisis, but it won't last forever. Crisis is an opportunity, creation renewed.

During this past year, in the midst of so much difficulty, we have been held back in many ways. But along the way, we have learned new lessons about ourselves and our world. In life, if everything goes as you had planned, then you probably didn't learn anything. In actions big and small, glimmers of creativity have shone through the darkness of this time of suffering. Seeds

of renewal, partnership with the Divine in completing creation, have begun to be planted with our creative actions.

From the sublime to the ridiculous, we are finding our way out of this darkness with tremendous creativity; this is how we move toward the light. Crisis can, and ought to ignite our creative juices. In my household, the ridiculous was the weekly creation of a new kind of casserole; what my husband Bob would call my “concoctions” of comfort foods to be enjoyed during an uncomfortable time. Until the diet had to follow.

For the sublime – we, like many communities, learned how to pivot to online services in a hurry and we created rituals and experiences in a virtual world with new-found perspectives. Many of us did the same by keeping in touch with close friends and family virtually. Shabbat dinner and family board games on Zoom. In the meantime, we cleaned out our closets and rearranged our homes, planted new and expanded gardens, and more. In my neighborhood and others, an influx of new neighbors signaled much change. It was a harbinger of new beginnings. This signals creation to creativity.

Along the way we had stumbled and fallen, trying innovations that some disliked, or that fell flat in the process. Still, some new melodies, songs, prayers and learning experiences worked out very well. We learned a lot in the process of adapting to our changing world. We know that failure can lead to growth and learning. This creative process has been enlivening and energizing.

One small example of this makes me smile. When the pandemic forced us to adapt our services for a virtual experience, I introduced a practice I had learned in Tel Aviv at the wondrously creative community of Beit Tefila Yisraeli. We sing their melody with words that mean, “for this I am grateful” – “*v’al zeh ani modah/modeh*,” and pause for each of us to share small and large things for which we are grateful. This practice stuck over the many weeks of our virtual services. Then, the first day back in our sanctuary, disoriented as I was after 18 months at home, I forgot to include “*v’al zeh ani modah/modeh*.” Fortunately, our stalwarts quickly reminded me, sharing how much it meant to them. A small measure of creativity that has come to mean so much, and we are only just beginning to build on this creative energy.

Today is the birthday of the world. Let us embrace the creativity that gives us energy, connection and a sense of possibility. In this new year, creation and creativity nourish our sense of possibility and fills us with gratitude and hope.

I leave us with this kavannah, spiritual intention, another poem by Marcia Falk:

Like Buds {Marcia Falk}

Such Gratitude as might be held
by the wide-spreading topmost branches

of the most noble trees—
Where can it go, if not up

to the heavens, or to the depths

of earth, which yields

to every step, commanding
nothing? Or perhaps

it has no destination, no reason
beyond itself for being—

like buds that cannot help but open,
never stop opening—Oh

what's the difference, what's
this need to know? Let it go

wherever, to burst the seams of meanness
puncture the blistering regrets,

letting loose the grieving
to nowhere

or somewhere
whether or not you know its name.