

Hayom Harat Olam- Today We were Created

Creation

According to Jewish tradition, Rosh HaShanah celebrates the creation of the world. But what does it mean to be created?

Many people would say that God created you from nothing, called creation *ex nihilo*. Just like every rock, blade of grass, or animal we were created utterly unique and distinct from one from another. Each of us is the product of the Master Craftsman, as the liturgy of Rosh HaShanah tells us; each of us is a work of art.

This concept has been a crucial foundation upon which we understand human rights and how we order society. A human being is an end in itself, and not some means to a greater end. In our western civilization, we celebrate the autonomy of each individual as a unique creature of God.

And yet, this concept is not the complete picture. For consider, are we really independent beings and autonomous? Have we ever felt overwhelmed and utterly dependent? Have we ever felt lonely or alienated from others and felt incomplete? Have we ever seen a person who has been physically, emotionally, or mentally compromised, and can we really say they are autonomous? If we wanted to examine this issue further, we might even say that the notion that we are autonomous beings is a myth, and one that does not accurately describe the human condition.

The Other Creation Story

In fact, the Torah allows for this tension. There are two chapters in Genesis with two different descriptions of creation. The first chapter tells us we were created in the image of God, but the second chapter tells us that we were molded from dust of the earth, and God blew into our nostrils the breath of life. If the former concept focuses upon each of us a creator, the latter concept most certainly focuses upon each of us as a creature, utterly dependent upon the Other.

In fact, let us go deeper into understanding the story of creation. *If the first narrative assumes we were created from nothing, the latter narrative affirms that in fact we were created from everything. We are not distinct creatures, but derive our identity from something much greater than ourselves. Therefore, in the process of self-discovery, we need to 'find ourselves' not only through looking inward, but also through relationship with something greater than ourselves.*

Rosh Ha-Shanah- The Source of Differentiation

The first Rebbe of Gur, Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter (1847 - 1905) teaches that Creation was the process through which we were differentiated from the Divine source of all. The Divine vitality of the universe took the guise of time and space, and therefore created *the illusion* of differentiated and unique beings. However, ultimately we are just part of something larger than ourselves. On Rosh Ha-Shanah we recognize that interconnectivity that binds the entire universe together. He explains that Rosh HaShanah comes from the word *shinui*, or change; Rosh HaShanah therefore is the day we remember the beginning, before the Divine energy of this world changed to take the form in which we see it.

This understanding of reality is reflected in the blowing of the shofar. Think about it- the sound of the shofar is a prayer, but not a prayer of words but of undifferentiated sounds. When we are born, the first thing we do to express our vitality is make a cry, a shriek. In fact, an infant has no sense that there is anything distinct outside itself; mother and child are one. Only as the baby begins to grow, does the baby organize information and data in a comprehensible fashion; now the mother is a distinct creature, with her own identity. Language is used to mediate this exchange between distinct creatures, and what is language? *Language is differentiated sound.*

On Rosh HaShanah we blow the sound of the cry. We in a sense return to our source and recognize how we are part of something greater than ourselves. The entire world is reborn once again. The Shofar is again the first cry of birth!

New Possibilities of Self-Understanding

What does this mean practically for us? The shofar tells us that our existence and identity is rooted in relationship- with others and the Divine Other. The Rebbe of Gur tells us that the shofar is meant to help us link to this higher source in the world, this higher unity.

This concept is liberating, for we can gain a proper perspective on life. We are indeed unique, and each of us is placed here with a unique role. Life indeed is a stage, like Shakespeare said. However, all of us are on the same stage. In good drama, each actor is highly attuned to the movements and reactions of another. Similarly, life can become art when we live our lives with that same sensitivity.

Now let's consider that you and I- both great actors- decide to both perform our monologues at the same time, disregarding what is going on around us. The result? A chaotic stage of confusion and cacophony. Life is the same way, and if we walk through life without really being in relationship with other human beings, the physical world around us, our inner spiritual lives and ultimately the higher source of Being which defines this beautiful universe in which we live, we reduce ourselves and our own humanity.

Rosh HaShanah- back to the Source. This Rosh HaShanah, let's try to experience this in our prayers, and may we continue to experience the sound of the shofar throughout the year.

Shanah Tova Tikatev V'Techatem. May you have a sweet year and be inscribed in the book of life.