

Dear Chavraya,

Here we are, standing at the dawn of creation, ready to take the first steps toward a world of possibility. It is the first week in a new Torah reading cycle. I feel a certain giddiness in actually being in *Parashat B'reishit / Genesis*, the name of the first portion and the first book in the Torah. It is all about beginnings and newness, and so too, therefore, of trepidation. A paradigm for our own journeys in the world, for the opportunities in our own lives to begin again, the Torah opens with optimism and hope. Whatever else happens, the negative emerging quickly in the new world of human reality, there is an affirmation of possibility that remains as God's hope and encouragement for each of us.

In a fascinating midrash, the rabbis imagine God vacillating as to whether to create people or not as part of Creation. Unencumbered, with a beautiful world to enjoy, will the heartache and *tzoris* of children be worth it? Fortunately for us, God, through the imaginings of the rabbis, sees the potential for good in human reality and decides to have children, as it were:

*At the hour when the Holy Blessed One came to create the first human, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and fellowships, some of them saying, "let the human be created," while others were saying, "let the human not be created." 'Chesed'/Kindness said, "let the human be created, for the human will do acts of loving kindness;" And 'Emet'/Truth said, "let the human not be created, for the human is made entirely of lies;" 'Tzedek'/Justice said, "let the human be created, for the human will do just and righteous deeds;" 'Shalom'/Peace said, "let the human not be created, for the human will be all strife." What did the Holy Blessed One do? God took Truth – 'v'hishlichah la'aretz' - and cast it to the earth....*

It is a powerful teaching that acknowledges human frailty, declaring our worthiness to be created in spite of the shortcomings that God knows will be part of our nature. God is wary of the impossible demands of absolute truth, wary of harsh judgment. The midrash affirms our humanity in spite of our frailty. When the angels protest God's action, God responds that "truth will rise up from the earth," drawing then for proof from *T'hilim / Psalms*, "Truth will spring from the earth," *Emet me'eretz titzmach*. It is a profound expression of optimism; it will be for people, for us, to raise truth back up to God, imperfect, coated with the dust of this earth.

There is one more strand to this intricate midrash. It is but one sentence, what appears to be an entirely separate thought that is woven into the midst of the teaching about truth, breaking its continuity, in fact. Offered through the names of a string of rabbis, a word play is made: *m'od hu adam* -- "the word *m'od* / very, is *adam* / human." The rabbis see an intrinsic connection between the two words, 'very' and 'human,' formed of the same letters in Hebrew. By flipping the first letter, *mem* of *m'od*, the word *adam* / human is formed. The rabbis draw then on

God's expression of delight upon the creation of people at the very end of Creation, "And God saw all that God had made, and behold, it was very good -- *v'hinei tov m'od.*" Just in case the midrash about truth was too cryptic in its affirmation of people, the rabbis now boldly change God's own words as expressed in the Torah, *v'hinei tov adam* -- "and behold, the human is good!" How very human we are, and in God's eyes, for all of our frailty, how good.

A celebration of creation, Shabbos is a weekly affirmation and renewal of the hope and possibility that was at the beginning, a hope even more palpable on this Shabbos of *B'reishit*. The words of God's delight in the world and in people, *v'hinei tov m'od/ behold, it was very good*, open the way into Shabbos, for us as they did for God. The very next words in the Torah are the first words in the Shabbos evening Kiddush, *And it was evening and it was morning: the sixth day*. In this Shabbos of beginnings, may we find a renewal of possibility and hope for ourselves and for the world.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor