

**THE
CONSERVATIVE
SYNAGOGUE
OF THE HAMPTONS**

Rabbi Jan Uhrbach

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Please let us add your name here.

Candle Lighting Friday, October 16th 5:50 pm

Saturday, October 17th Parshat Bereshit / Birchat HaChodesh Cheshvan
Old Whalers Church 9:30
44 Union Street Sag Harbor
Kiddush following services

Torah Reading for Bereshit

Genesis 1:1 - 6:8 (annual)
Genesis 5:1 - 6:8 (triennial)
Haftarah: I Samuel 20:18 - 42

Bereshit Musings

Genesis 3:9 “And the Lord God called to Adam, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ (**Ayekah**) ”

Ayekah causes the reader to stumble slightly. The unusual word begs the question: could God truly not have known where Adam was? Of course God knew where Adam was – God is The Omniscient. Why then did God call out, “looking” for Adam? Rashi suggests that this was a way of starting a conversation without frightening Adam and without punishing him outright. Think about the scene that follows Cain’s murder of Abel. God asks Cain, “Where (**Ay**) is Abel your brother?” using the same language and the same underlying message. God is playing the role of nurturing parent. When a child misbehaves, and the parent learns of this, the conversation often begins with “who did such-and-such” or “did you do such-and-such,” even though the parent already knows the answer. As Rashi teaches us, God wanted to enter with Adam, (just as we read later with Cain) with words of gentleness, seeking admission of guilt and repentance. <http://www.dovraytorah.org/Bereshit%20-%205766.pdf>

Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezritch, and a follower of the Baal Shem Tov, explains in Or Torah the secret of the verse **Bereshit Bara Eloheim Et - IN A BEGINNING GOD CREATED “ET”**. These are the first words of Torah, Genesis 1:1, in a beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ET is a word that is not translatable into English. It is like a marker that says: a definite direct object is next. Thus there needs to be an ET before THE heavens and THE earth. If there was no the, there would not need to be an ET. But Dov Baer points out a deeper meaning. ET is spelled Aleph Tav. Aleph Tav is an abbreviation for the ALPHA-BET. Aleph is the first letter of the ALPHABET and Tav the last. So in a beginning God created the ALPHA-BET. And God did this before creating the heavens and the earth. God used the letters, the building blocks, to create the world.

R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe of Chabad explains that if the letters were to depart even for an instant, all of creation would become absolute nothingness (Zalman, Shneur. 1981.

"Igeret Hateshuvah." . Likkutei Amarim - Tanya. Brooklyn: Kihot. 289)
www.hebrewletters.com/item.cfm?itemid=1209

Buying the present at the cost of the future

BBC Radio 4 – Thought for the Day 15 February 2002

A report published yesterday urges the government to adopt a more environmentally friendly energy policy, by way of more heat efficient homes, and a greater use of renewable energy sources like the sun, the wind and the waves.

I must say that at this time of the morning and the week I could do with some renewable energy, but the point is serious and urgent.

We're using up our coal, oil and gas, at a prodigious rate; and in the process we're not just polluting the environment and damaging the earth's atmosphere. We're also buying the present at the cost of the future. Unlike wind, solar and tidal energy, the fossil fuels we burn now won't be there for our grandchildren not yet born.

And it's here, I think, that a biblical perspective is helpful. In Genesis 1 we read of how humanity was told to fill the earth and subdue it, our mandate for science and technology. But in Genesis 2 we're told that man was placed in the garden to serve and protect it, meaning that nature has its own integrity that we must respect and preserve.

The line that always resonates with me is that remarkable verse in which G-d says, The land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the earth is Mine; you are only temporary residents. What this means is that we don't own nature; at most we hold it in trust on behalf of G-d who made it, and the future generations who will inhabit it. Hence all those laws in the Bible - don't work the land on the seventh day and the seventh year; don't mix different species; don't destroy fruit trees in the course of war - possibly the world's first environmental legislation.

It took the modern prophets of ecology, the green activists, to make us go back to the Bible and realise what it was whispering to us all those centuries ago. We're the guests of nature, the guardians of creation; not the owners who can do with it what we like.

There's a lovely rabbinic comment, dating back at least fifteen hundred years, that might have been made for yesterday's report. When, at the end of creation, G-d made man, he showed him all the glories of nature. See the beauty of the world, he said, and I have handed it over to you. But be careful that you do not damage it, for if you do, there will be no one left to mend what you destroyed. Don't use up what you can't renew.

covenantandconversation@communications.chiefrabbi.org

The question is Ayekah – Where are you? Where are you in your life's path? Where are you on your Jewish journey?

Let me tell you why I think Ayekah? is a great question. First of all, because asking where you are is much broader and more inclusive than asking what you believe. It is a question that goes out to everyone, no matter what your belief in God, your religious background, or even whether or not you are Jewish. Everyone is somewhere – I'm simply asking – where? Where do you locate yourself on your life's path? How far along the way are you in achieving your goals? In particular I am interested in your asking yourself: "Where am I in terms of my Jewish life, or the life of my Jewish family?"

Second, I believe it is important to ask ourselves Ayekah because it is one of those ultimate questions. If you squirmed a little when I mentioned "life goals," it's probably a good indication of just how important a question Ayekah is. You see, I believe that it is human nature to care about what we are doing in this world. It is human nature to live life with consciousness and intentionality. It is human to seek meaning in our existence. It is uniquely human to strive to transcend our limits and to move toward holiness. (If you don't agree that all this is part of human nature, than suffice it to say that it is the nature of Judaism.)

Ayekah is a great question because it doesn't invite quick or easy answers. What it does is to provoke from us a response. It is a question that has the power to help us get unstuck and move ourselves forward in our lives. <http://sites.google.com/site/baderechbethelsudbury/ayekah>

In his book, *The Way of Man*, Buber exploits this apparent contradiction, which threatens the validity and authority of Torah, and elevates it to a teaching that penetrates deeply into the heart of anyone who understands it. And of course, he accomplishes this through the power of a Chasidic story. Let's read it together:

I. Heart-Searching

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the Rav of northern White Russia (died 1813) was put in jail in Petersburg, because the mitnagdim had denounced his principles and his way of living to the government. He was awaiting trial when the chief of the gendarmes entered his cell. The majestic and quiet face of the rav, who was so deep in meditation that he did not at first notice his visitor, suggested to the chief, a thoughtful person, what manner of man he had before him. He began to converse with his prisoner and brought up a number of questions which had occurred to him in reading the Scriptures. Finally he asked: "How are we to understand that God, the all-knowing said to Adam: 'Where art thou?'"

Scene: Shneur Zalman finds himself in a government prison, the victim of internal Jewish strife. While he's there, the non-Jewish warden takes advantage of the opportunity to ask some questions about the Bible. After a time, the warden raises a classic contradiction, one which threatens a basic theological assumption of the Torah; How is it that an all-knowing God would have to ask Adam, 'Where are you?' Watch how the rabbi responds...

"Do you believe," answered the rav, "that the Scriptures are eternal and that every era, every generation and every man is included in them?"

A classic Jewish response! The rabbi answers the question with a question. He wants to be sure that there is enough agreement on principles for the two men to have a meaningful conversation. In a sense he's asking the warden if he takes Torah seriously. But more, he is also making his big move here. The Torah is happening all the time! The question – all Torah's questions – leap out of the text and into the reader in every generation and at all times. Torah is no ordinary book. It's not about something that happened long, long ago. Torah is eternal, not because it has endured for millennia, but because it is always happening in the present!

"I believe this," said the other.

"Well then," said the zaddik, "in every era, God calls to every man: 'Where are you in your world? So many years and days of those allotted to you have passed, and how far have you gotten in your world?' God says something like this: 'You have lived forty-six years. How far along are you?'"

What the rabbi is saying to the warden is this: 'You yourself are Adam, you are the man whom God asks, 'Where are you?'

The question *Ayekah?* Is not only Adam's question (adam means earthling – adam is all people) it is the chief's question, and of course it is our question.

When the chief of the gendarmes heard his age mentioned, he pulled himself together, laid his hand on the rav's shoulder, and cried: "Bravo!" But his heart trembled.

Buber teaches that *Ayekah* is not a question that has an answer which is a matter of fact. It is a question designed to provoke a response. Adam is hiding from God, physically and emotionally. The question is designed to penetrate Adam's hiding places and reach his heart. God is not interested in the facts, God wants Adam to search his own heart, to recognize that he is hiding and to understand that his hiding is preventing him from finding his way in the world.

Buber teaches that Adam is hiding in order to avoid taking responsibility for the way he is living. Furthermore, every person hides for this purpose. It is part of human nature to construct hiding places – we are all Adam. To escape responsibility for our lives, we turn our existence into a system of hideouts. Buber writes; "Man cannot escape the eye of God, but in trying to hide from him, he is hiding from himself... This question (*Ayekah?*) is designed to awaken man and destroy his system of hideouts; it is to show man to what pass he has come and to awake in him the great will to get out of it."

To hear the question *Ayekah*, is to respond – Where am I? What is keeping me from becoming the man or woman that I could be – or that God created me to become?

http://www.bethelsudbury.org/jewish_basics/text005.php3?id=12721&page=12721

<http://vimeo.com/2029852> by g-dcast

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner asks some mystical questions about the creation of the world in the year's first Torah portion! Take a trippy voyage through Kabbalah and Torah with a Star Wars-tinged style.

Donations

The next time you are looking for a meaningful way to celebrate a simcha, a birthday, a promotion, remember a loved one, or comfort a mourner, please consider making a donation to The Conservative Synagogue of the Hamptons.

Quotes of the Week

The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.

Thomas Merton

A human being is part of the whole,
called by us "Universe,"
a part limited in time and space.
He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings
as something separated from the rest
- a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.
This delusion is a kind of prison for us,
restricting us to our personal desires and
to affection for a few persons nearest to us.
Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison
by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures
and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Albert Einstein

Shabbat shalom.

Stacy

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