

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Breishit  
October 26, 2019 \*\* 27 Tishrei, 5780

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Today's Portions

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Breishit in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3137/jewish/Bereishit-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3137/jewish/Bereishit-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

God creates the world in six days. On the first day He makes darkness and light. On the second day He forms the heavens, dividing the “upper waters” from the “lower waters.” On the third day He sets the boundaries of land and sea, and calls forth trees and greenery from the earth. On the fourth day He fixes the position of the sun, moon and stars as timekeepers and illuminators of the earth. Fish, birds and reptiles are created on the fifth day; land animals, and then the human being, on the sixth. G-d ceases work on the seventh day, and sanctifies it as a day of rest.

G-d forms the human body from the dust of the earth, and blows into his nostrils a “living soul.” Originally Man is a single person, but deciding that “it is not good that man be alone,” G-d takes a “side” from the man, forms it into a woman, and marries them to each other.

Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden, and commanded not to eat from the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.” The serpent persuades Eve to violate the command, and she shares the forbidden fruit with her husband. Because of their sin, it is decreed that man will experience death, returning to the soil from which he was formed, and that all gain will come only through struggle and hardship. Man is banished from the Garden.

Eve gives birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain quarrels with Abel and murders him, and becomes a rootless wanderer. A third son, Seth, is born to Adam; Seth’s eighth-generation descendant, Noah, is the only righteous man in a corrupt world.

Haftarah in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/573554/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/573554/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The haftarah of this week’s reading opens with a statement by “the Almighty G-d, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who laid out the earth and made grow from it.” This echoes the Torah portion’s recounting of the creation of the world in six days. G-d speaks to the prophet Isaiah, reminding him of his life’s purpose and duty, namely that of arousing the Jewish people to return to being a light unto the nations, “To open blind eyes, to bring prisoners out of a dungeon; those who sit in darkness out of a prison.”

The prophecy continues with a discussion regarding the Final Redemption, and the song that all of creation will sing to G-d on that day. G-d promises to punish all the nations that

have persecuted Israel while they were exiled. The prophet also rebukes Israel for their errant ways, but assures them that they will return to the correct path and will be redeemed. (all nutshells borrowed from chabad.org)

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### The Genesis of Love (Bereishit 5780) by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

<http://rabbisacks.org/bereishit-5780/>

In The Lonely Man of Faith, Rabbi Soloveitchik drew our attention to the fact that Bereishit contains two separate accounts of creation. The first is in Genesis 1, the second in Genesis 2-3, and they are significantly different.

In the first, God is called Elokim, in the second, Hashem Elokim. In the first, man and woman are created simultaneously: “male and female He created them.” In the second, they are created sequentially: first man, then woman. In the first, humans are commanded to “fill the earth and subdue it.” In the second, the first human is placed in the garden “to serve it and preserve it.” In the first, humans are described as “in the image and likeness” of God. In the second, man is created from “the dust of the earth.” The explanation, says Rabbi Soloveitchik, is that the Torah is describing two aspects of our humanity that he calls respectively, ‘Majestic man’ and ‘Covenantal man’. We are majestic masters of creation: that is the message of Genesis 1. But we also experience existential loneliness, we seek covenant and connection: that is the message of Genesis 2.

There is, though, another strange duality – a story told in two quite different ways – that has to do not with creation but with human relationships. There are two different accounts of the way the first man gives a name to the first woman. This is the first:

“This time – bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called ‘woman’ [ishah]  
for she was taken from man [ish].”

And this, many verses later, is the second:

“And the man called his wife Eve [Chava]  
because she was the mother of all life.”

The differences between these two accounts are highly consequential. [1] In the first, the man names, not a person, but a class, a category. He uses not a name but a noun. The other person is, for him, simply “woman,” a type, not an individual. In the second, he gives his wife a proper name. She has become, for him, a person in her own right.

[2] In the first, he emphasises their similarities – she is “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.” In the second, he emphasises the difference. She can give birth, he cannot. We can hear this in the very sound of the names. Ish and Ishah sound similar because they are similar. Adam and Chavah do not sound similar at all.

[3] In the first, it is the woman who is portrayed as dependent: “she was taken from man.” In the second, it is the other way around. Adam, from Adamah, represents mortality: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground (ha-adamah) since from it you were taken.” It is Chavah who redeems man from mortality by bringing new life into the world.

[4] The consequences of the two acts of naming are completely different. After the first comes the sin of eating the forbidden fruit, and the punishment: exile from Eden. After the second, however, we read that God made for the couple, “garments of skin” (“or” is spelled here with the letter ayin), and clothed them. This is a gesture of protection and love. In the school of Rabbi Meir, they read this phrase as “garments of light” (“or” with an aleph). God robed them with radiance.

Only after the man has given his wife a proper name do we find the Torah referring

to God Himself by His proper name alone, namely Hashem (in Genesis 4). Until then He has been described as either Elokim or Hashem Elokim – Elokim being the impersonal aspect of God: God as law, God as power, God as justice. In other words, our relationship to God parallels our relationship to one another. Only when we respect and recognise the uniqueness of another person are we capable of respecting and recognising the uniqueness of God Himself.

Now let us return to the two creation accounts, this time not looking at what they tell us about humanity (as in Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith*), but simply at what they tell us about creation.

In Genesis 1, God creates things – chemical elements, stars, planets, lifeforms, biological species. In Genesis 2-3, He creates people. In the first chapter, He creates systems, in the second chapter He creates relationships. It is fundamental to the Torah's view of reality that these things belong to different worlds, distinct narratives, separate stories, alternative ways of seeing reality.

There are differences in tone as well. In the first, creation involves no effort on the part of God. He simply speaks. He says "Let there be," and there was. In the second, He is actively engaged. When it comes to the creation of the first human, He does not merely say, "Let us make Man in our image according to our likeness." He performs the creation Himself, like sculptor fashioning an image out of clay: "Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

In Genesis 1, God effortlessly summons the universe into being. In Genesis 2, He becomes a gardener: "Now the Lord God planted a garden ..." We wonder why on earth God, who has just created the entire universe, should become a gardener. The Torah gives us the answer, and it is very moving: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." God wanted to give man the dignity of work, of being a creator, not just a creation. And in case the man should view such labour as undignified, God became a gardener Himself to show that this work too is Divine, and in performing it, man becomes God's partner in the work of creation.

Then comes the extraordinarily poignant verse, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" God feels for the existential isolation of the first man. There was no such moment in the previous chapter. There, God simply creates. Here, God empathises. He enters into the human mind. He feels what we feel. There is no such moment in any other ancient religious literature. What is radical about biblical monotheism is not just that there is only one God, not just that He is the source of all that exists, but that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. God knew the loneliness of the first man before the first man knew it of himself.

That is what the second creation account is telling us. Creation of things is relatively easy, creation of relationships is hard. Look at the tender concern God shows for the first human beings in Genesis 2-3. He wants man to have the dignity of work. He wants man to know that work itself is Divine. He gives man the capacity to name the animals. He cares when He senses the onset of loneliness. He creates the first woman. He watches, in exasperation, as the first human couple commit this first sin. Finally, when the man gives his wife a proper name, recognising for the first time that she is different from him and that she can do something he will never do, He clothes them both so that they will not go naked into the world. That is the God, not of creation (Elokim) but of love (Hashem).

That is what makes the dual account of the naming of the first woman so significant a parallel to the dual account of God's creation of the universe. We have to create relationships before we encounter the God of relationship. We have to make space for the otherness of the human other to be able to make space for the otherness of the Divine other. We have to give love before we can receive love.

In Genesis 1, God creates the universe. Nothing vaster can be imagined, and we keep discovering that the universe is bigger than we thought. In 2016, a study based on three-dimensional modelling of images produced by the Hubble space telescope concluded that there were between 10 and 20 times as many galaxies as astronomers had previously thought. There are more than a hundred stars for every grain of sand on earth.

And yet, almost in the same breath as it speaks of the panoply of creation, the Torah tells us that God took time to breathe the breath of life into the first human, give him dignified work, enter his loneliness, make him a wife, and robe them both with garments of light when the time came for them to leave Eden and make their way in the world.

The Torah is telling us something very powerful. Never think of people as things. Never think of people as types: they are individuals. Never be content with creating systems: care also about relationships.

I believe that relationships are where our humanity is born and grows, flowers and flourishes. It is by loving people that we learn to love God and feel the fullness of His love for us.

### [Breishit by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt](https://mailchi.mp/b3a6d23d7772/1n6ogmq5px-2553259?e=87d85103d7)

<https://mailchi.mp/b3a6d23d7772/1n6ogmq5px-2553259?e=87d85103d7>

This portion discusses the six days of creation, the Garden of Eden, mankind's first mistake, consequences and expulsion, Cain & Abel, the ten generations to Noah, prelude to the Flood & the decree to destroy humanity.

At first glance, the Creation Story looks inherently sexist. Man was created as the pinnacle of Creation; woman was merely an afterthought; woman was created from man's rib and only as a companion for man himself, not with any inherent purpose of her own. It's not a story that's likely to excite egalitarians, that's for sure. As I said, however, that's only at first glance. A more considered look paints a different picture. When the first human is created, the Torah says that, 'male and female, He (God) created them' (Genesis 1:27). Only later (2:21) does it say that he took a tzela from this human and created Chava, the first female. The rabbis tell us, metaphorically, that the first human being was male in the front and female in the back. It was a combination of the two, a composite containing both male and female characteristics. It was only when God decided that it was better for human beings to have the two facets separately, rather than in one single entity, that God took a tzela – which can mean a rib, but can also mean a side – and split the single human being into two parts.

That's a bit more egalitarian, no? Unfortunately, the meaning seems to have been lost in translation and hence we are left with the more sexist version that everyone is familiar with. It amazes me each year to see how a supposed patriarchal society saw men and women as entirely equal from their very creation.

The rabbis tell us, further, that a complete human being is a composite of male and female, as per the original creation. Just because they were split apart does not mean that they are fully independent. Only together can they fulfil their purpose completely. Hence, a male-female relationship is the building block of Jewish society. Out of the frying pan into the fire, you might say. We've solved the sexist problem, but created an LGBT one instead! I can't solve every problem in one *davar*, so I'm afraid that one will have to wait for another time.

I do want to add, however, that the reason the rabbis give why it was, 'not good for a human being to be alone', was not because of loneliness; it was because if a human being were to be alone in this world, it would lead to he or she thinking that he was God. Our intellect and spirit are so vastly superior to anything else in the world, that if we are not careful, we might think that we humans are God to command it. We might believe the world is ours to do as we wish with, even to destroy it if we so choose. In

other words, the essential purpose of marriage is humility; to have another opinion and perspective to balance my own; to point out to me where I am going wrong. Well, I can certainly vouch for that one at least! Marriage is a great ego basher – THE great ego basher. It humbles us and makes us realise that we are human after all – and that we are merely caretakers of God’s world, not masters of our own.

### [Seeing Miracles by Rabbi Louis Sachs](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Wk0MoK7e8rXB07C0ACmqpWLOdRSCjUHBDDwmvyY2ws8/edit)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Wk0MoK7e8rXB07C0ACmqpWLOdRSCjUHBDDwmvyY2ws8/edit>

The Torah is full of miracles: food falls from the heavens, a staff splits the sea, a donkey speaks, the earth itself opens up, just to name a few. These events call attention to themselves and stand out both to those present and those who hear/read about them because they are exceptional and defy expectations about how the world works. As we begin again the cycle of Torah readings with Parashat Bereshit, these stories, and the notion of miracles in general, can be difficult for us to relate to.

Since the advent of the Enlightenment, it has become much less common to label events “miracles.” Rationalist philosophers like David Hume argued that since miracles violate the natural order when someone reports a “miracle” it is more likely a deception or error of judgment - the laws of nature are far more reliable than any human witness. If so, then what are we to think of our ancient stories and the central role “miracle” plays in Jewish religious life?

This question touches on the greatest threat religion faces today, and it is not unique to Judaism. Religion today is besieged by disbelief. The prevailing voice in society is that religion or science are diametrically opposed: one can believe in and be guided by one or the other, but not both. Many then, abandon religion in exchange for a materialistic and scientific worldview, and in so doing, cut themselves off from the ability to experience the miraculous.

In response, scientists/believers such as Harvard Paleontologist/Evolutionary Biologist Stephen Jay Gould argued that science and religion are compatible, but only because neither oversteps its jurisdiction and transgresses beyond its domain. In other words, religion asks why and science asks how. The problem with this view is that it relegates religion to a place in which it has nothing to say about some of the most important questions facing us today.

Our tradition offers us a third view, as the Jewish Sages of old were familiar with the science of their day and also faced the dilemma of how to reconcile empirical and religious truth. In the Mishnah Pirkei Avot 5:6 they taught:

Ten things were created on the eve of the Sabbath at twilight, and these are they: [1] the mouth of the earth, [2] the mouth of the well, [3] the mouth of the donkey, [4] the rainbow, [5] the manna, [6] the staff [of Moses], [7] the shamir, [8] the letters, [9] the writing, [10] and the tablets. And some say: also the demons, the grave of Moses, and the ram of Abraham, our father. And some say: and also tongs, made with tongs.

In other words, the miracles listed above, though exceptional, are part of the original creation. That this list is limited to only a few items may indicate that the Sages believed that true miracles were relegated to the Biblical past. But read more expansively, Pirkei Avot makes the more radical claim that miracles are not the natural order being overturned, they are the natural order at work. It is not that miracles stopped occurring, but that we do not recognize them as such when we don’t take the time to look at the world with a sense of awe and wonder.

Jewish practice challenges and trains us to see the sacred in the mundane and appreciate daily miracles. Each day in the Amidah we recite the words of Modim, and the blessing concludes thanking God for “...miracles that accompany us each day, and for Your wonders and Your gifts that are with us each moment- evening, morning, and noon.” For many, the idea of a daily miracle is an oxymoron, but our tradition offers us the chance to approach each day with sensitivity to the holy and sacred. It does not ask us to

suspend our belief in scientific knowledge; it asks us to suspend our belief that little moments are not really big ones.

As scientific knowledge grew, the rabbis did not establish separate spheres for religion and science. Instead, they reinterpreted the Torah in light of their new understandings. This year, as we begin a new cycle of Torah, let us approach the text with the same openness and bravery - openness to look to our ancient heritage for wisdom, and bravery to demand its relevance to our modern lives. (*Rabbi Louis Sachs is a Conservative Yeshiva Alum & Associate Rabbi at Beth Tikvah Synagogue in Toronto, Ontario*)

### [D'var Haftarah: A Universal Mission by Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein](#)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Wk0MoK7e8rXB07C0ACmqpWLOdRSCjUHBDDwmvyY2ws8/edit>

It is not hard to note the connection between this week's haftarah reading from Isaiah and the opening parashah of the Torah. The idea of God as the Creator of the world is central to the message of each. And while the description of how creation took place in each of these accounts is different, it is clear from both that God's relationship with the world is founded on the fact that He created it. In Isaiah, it is expressed in these words: "Thus said God, the Lord, Creator of the heavens, He stretches them out, lays down the earth and its offspring, gives breath to the people upon it and life-breath to those who walk on it. I the Lord have called you in righteousness and held your hand and preserved you and made you a covenant for people and a light of the nations." (verses 5-6) Professor Shalom Paul (21st century Israel) understands from this verse that God created Israel with a two-fold purpose, one as a covenanted people responsible for the maintenance of its own existence and the other universal, as an exemplar for all nations. (Isaiah 40-48, Mikra L'Yisrael, p. 146) For Rabbi David Kimche (12th century Provence), on the other hand, this verse teaches that God created the world for the sake of the children of Israel whose purpose in this world was to maintain the existence of each and every nation and as a "light of the nations" to "maintain peace among the nations" and to foster "the observance of the seven Noachide laws". Broadly understood, the Jewish role in the world, according to Kimche, was to bring about God's worldly order.

This message is different from what we are used to. Normally, we think of God's covenant being founded upon the experience of the children of Israel at Mount Sinai and to be particular in nature. Here, the covenant is based on God's role as Creator of the world. Kimche sees in this a universal mission. One possible "modern" takeaway from this message might be that there is a Jewish religious imperative to ensure that God's world remains a livable place for all. This responsibility requires not only that people try to get along but also that we work to make sure that the planet that we live on remains a livable place – a place that was created "very good" that should remain that way in perpetuity. (*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, is on Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*)

### [A Parsha Lesson from Humpty Dumpty by Rabbi Moshe Taragin](#)

[https://www.ou.org/life/inspiration/a-parsha-lesson-from-humpty-dumpty/?](https://www.ou.org/life/inspiration/a-parsha-lesson-from-humpty-dumpty/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=shsh%20Bereshit%205780%20(1)&utm_content=&spMailingID=29741996&spUserID=MTk3MTk2OTk5NjMyS0&spJobID=1564582619&spReportId=MTU2NDU4MjYxOQS2)

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Around twenty five years ago, on Shabbat Bereishit, I attended a Friday night talk of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l prior to Ma'ariv prayers. These extensive wide-ranging talks usually lasted more than an hour and challenged weary Friday-night audiences. During his speech Rav Lichtenstein spoke eloquently about original sin and the fall of Man. At one point, his Hebrew language speech was interrupted by an English quote: "And all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again."

I was startled by this quote from a popular children's rhyme. It was not uncommon for my

Rebbe to quote non-Jewish scholars who had written passionately about religion. However, a quote from the Mother Goose collection seemed incongruous. Evidently, this line about a rotund figure who fell from a high wall was more than a children's rhyme. Apparently, it was a metaphor about the stunning and irrecoverable fall of Man. By disobeying the Divine command, humanity fell so precipitously that we were shattered beyond repair- even with great effort on behalf of all the king's horses and all the king's men.

Throughout history a debate has raged surrounding the innate essence of Man. Was he created primarily good and virtuous or fundamentally evil and immoral? Many modern thinkers such as Dostoyevsky and Orwell have suggested that Man was created evil and morally damaged. This approach is deeply rooted in Christianity in the concept of original sin- every person is born into this world through an act of sin.

Additionally, some of the horrors committed by Man in the past century corroborated the sense that Man was profoundly and innately sinful. Judaism flatly denies this view and asserts that G-d fashioned Man in the Divine Image and vested him with unlimited potential as the pinnacle of creation. Man was created noble and pure and to underscore this primal nobility, the creation of Man concludes on the sixth day with effusive Divine praise at the spectacle of Man: "Va'Yar Elokim et kol asher asa v'hinei tov me'od – G-d beheld his masterpiece and it was surpassingly good." Moreover, in the very book in which Shlomo Hamelech addresses the vanity and futility of our world, he nonetheless remarks that "G-d fashioned Man as good but man sought complications and distortions." At his core Man was created kind, good and noble!

Even amongst those who affirm the essential goodness of Man, many assert that this innate virtue was squandered through Man's first disobedience of partaking of the Tree of Knowledge. After all, this rebellion triggered Divine punishments which have fundamentally altered the human condition. Unlike his ideal conditions in Eden, Man must labor and toil to feed himself and support life.

Our very birth into this world is occasioned by pain and physical discomfort. Though it may be true that original Man was created pure and perfect, by sinning, he forfeited that original status. "Original" Man may have been empowered as the pinnacle of G-d's creation however "Fallen" Man no longer possessed that great potential. We have fallen from our original stature in Eden and we now live flawed lives; we inhabit a different and bleaker world. This view of fallen and compromised humanity dominated much of Jewish outlook in general, and, in particular, of the world of Jewish mussar. Man has abdicated his original lofty position and was now mired in a state of ineptitude. Under these futile conditions, Man's only salvation is careful adherence to Divine command amidst minimal engagement in the affairs of a fallen world. Stuck in a confusing maze of a pointless world, redemption could only be achieved through withdrawal from that dark and confusing world.

About 140 years ago one of the great leaders of pre-war Eastern European Jewry asserted a radically different view of human experience. Rabbi Noson Tzvi Finkel- affectionately known as the "Alter of Slobodka"- served as the mashgiach in the great Slobodka Yeshiva. He articulated a revolutionary manner of understanding the great fall of Man. Though "Fallen" Man was punished and was banished from Eden, he still retained his original grand and elevated potential.

The expulsion didn't fundamentally alter Man's identity and we continue to live in that original state of empowerment as pinnacles of Divine creation. Indeed, sin has significantly muddled moral clarity and complicated human experience. Indeed, our vast potential isn't as easily applied or implemented as it was in Eden.

However, at our core, we still possess majestic potential to affect our world and author history. We are still princes – though fallen and marred! Striving for a morally and religiously sensitive life isn't driven by the acknowledgement of the futility or the hopelessness of human experience. Quite the contrary, Man continues to live an

empowered life, and his enormous potential entails great responsibility and uncommon duty.

Proper human behavior can redeem and advance the human condition just as our errant behavior can wreck the entire world. Precisely because of Man's lofty status he must live an "epic" lifestyle so that creation itself can advance. This mussar of "empowerment and expectation" constituted a major shift from the conventional view that we inhabit a dark and empty space amidst a world of defeat. G-d places great expectations even upon "Fallen" Man and this recognition should produce religious drive and ambition.

Many find this approach more suitable to the modern context. For several millennia Man inhabited a confused and regressive world in which the human condition was plagued by violence, socio-political inequality and widespread inertia. This backward world did indeed seem bleak and dreary, inviting the more classic view of "Fallen" Man. Modern Man has flipped the script and fashioned a world of science, progress and potential. In this context, the notion of helpless and powerless Man is detached from reality.

The Slobodka doctrine which asserts that Man still retains his original unlimited potential is far more resonant and reflective of the world we occupy. We live in a world of meaning and progress and we are mandated to express the prodigious potential which characterizes Man while advancing our world to greater levels of moral and religious achievement.

[Don't Wait Until Next Week by Burton L. Visotzky](http://www.jtsa.edu/dont-wait-until-next-week)

<http://www.jtsa.edu/dont-wait-until-next-week>

*Authored together with Karenn Gore, Director, Center for Earth Ethics, Union Theological Seminary*

The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and all its inhabitants. God founded it upon the oceans and set it on the rivers. (Psalm 24:1-2)

As the Jewish community once more begins its annual reading of the Torah, and as we recount the grandeur of God's creation, we focus on God's charge to newly created humanity: "The Lord God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to serve and protect it." (Gen. 2:15, authors' translations).

If we want God's world to be a garden, a place of beauty and abundance, we must recall God's warning that we must serve and protect the Earth we have been given. As the book of Ecclesiastes (which Jews just read over Sukkot) tells us, "One generation goes and another generation comes, but the Earth remains forever." (Eccl. 1:4)

Last month, a new young generation rose up in the streets and demanded action on the global ecological emergency. They made their point that this moment is about saving the climate, in which life on Earth can survive.

The book of Ecclesiastes (9:12) also emphasizes that human lives, like those of every other creature, are not guaranteed: "A person cannot know when their time will come any more than a fish taken in an evil net or birds caught in a trap; so people are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them."

Creation is not merely the material substance of the Earth, Creation is also the laws of nature—gravity, the carbon cycle, the physics and metaphysics of cause and effect. Our rational minds and bodily senses can align with them and we can change our actions so as to help us escape the "evil net" in which we have ensnared ourselves.

The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Philip Alston, issued a detailed report this summer stating that "Climate change threatens to undo the last 50 years of progress in development, global health, and poverty reduction . . . It could push more than 120 million more people into poverty by 2030 and will have the most severe impact in poor countries, regions, and the places poor people live and work."

Think about what is changing in God's creation before our very eyes. Did you eat apples and honey over the New Year? Our pesticides are wiping out the bees. We are already facing a crisis of less pollen, fewer apples, more expensive honey. And it's not just the bees. The birds are affected, too. The New York Times reported that there are 2.9 billion fewer birds in North America than there were a half-century ago. Almost 3 billion birds—

that's a whole lot of canaries in the coal mine that is our fossil fuel-burning world. But it goes even further than burning atmosphere-destroying coal, oil, and methane gas. In the Amazon forest they are burning trees, the very "lungs" of our world, in order to clear land for development. The same trees that exchange carbon and make the planet more breathable are literally going up in smoke.

We are all painfully aware of climate disorders: more frequent and stronger storms and hurricanes, palpably hotter summers, wildfires, droughts, melting ice-caps and glaciers, waters rising to slowly but surely inundate our coastal cities. And we all have been horrified at seeing the immense islands of plastics polluting our oceans: strangling birds and fish, and poisoning the water.

We live among a Great Extinction wave, with 1 million species threatened to disappear from the Earth due to the destruction of their habitat and the warming of the planet. We can and should make changes in our communities—to serve the Earth and protect it, by saying no to single-use plastics, switching to solar and wind sources, working for energy efficiency, conserving forests, and planting trees.

We have what we need to make this right; we need only make the choice to heed the Torah's warnings. At this time of harvest, of cycles, of new beginnings, let us stand with our children and grandchildren, and make the choice for the sacred regeneration of life. When God created the world, a cosmic clock began to tick. It ticks now toward disaster, much as it did during the first 10 generations that humanity lived upon the earth. Even as we read the Torah's glorious account of the six days of creation, before this Shabbat's Torah reading has come to an end we learn that "When God saw that humanity's evil was great upon the earth . . . God regretted creating humanity on the earth, it pained God's heart. So God said, "I will blot out the humans I created from the face of the earth" (Gen. 6:5-7).

We know how that story ended. Next week's Torah reading tells the story of the great flood that destroyed almost all of humanity. Humanity is once more at the same inflection point. Start saving the Earth today, now, before it is truly too late. Don't wait until next week! (*Burton L. Visotzky is the Nathan and Janet Appleman Professor of Midrash and Interreligious Studies.*)

### Yahrtzeits

Elaine Berkenwald remembers her father Israel Berkenwald on Wed. Oct. 30. (Cheshvan 1)

Motti Benisky remembers his mother Rachel Benisky on Thur. Oct. 31 (Cheshvan 2)