

## Ends and Beginnings – Some Reflections

Coming off a full month of Yomtov is an adjustment. Along with the joy of the *hagim*, there is also disruption and a lot of effort. Many of us, while enjoying the festive season, feel “*yomtoved out*”. But Shabbat Bereshit offers us hope and guidance as we begin the year and our routines anew.

1. This Shabbat marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my Bar Mitzvah. It is hard to believe that it has been this long. I remember the practice for it as well as tearing up the speech my Day School principal wrote for me in favor of one I wanted to compose and deliver myself. Our family was not *Shomer Shabbat* at the time. But the Orthodox shul we attended (and more frequently did not attend!) was delighted to let me daven *Musaf*, as well as continue to lead *Musaf* after my Bar Mitzvah. This had a profound influence on me. I do not think I would have taken the path I took were the shul not welcoming, gracious, accepting and warm.
2. It is no accident that Genesis begins with universal human concerns. Putting aside the famous first Rashi about how it is all an introduction to our right to the Land of Israel, one can derive guidance for how to act in a larger and general society. One of those issues is our interaction with the environment. Even if one doubts the science of global warming (and for the record, I am hard pressed to do so) we can still do what we can to maintain our environment. Consider the following Midrash:

### קהלת רבה (וילנא) פרשה ז ד"ה א [י"ג] ראה

בשעה שברא הקב"ה את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי, תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי, שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך.

### Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:1

At the time that the Holy One created the first human being, God took Adam around all the trees of the Garden. God said: Look at my Creations, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are. And all I created, I created for your sake. Put your mind to it so you do not destroy My world, for if you destroy My world, there will be no one to fix it after you.

Recycling is one easy way to fulfill this dictum. St. Louis Park, along with many other communities (including many in Israel) has a strong recycling program. It does take a while to adjust to it, (“Which is the compost container? Which numbers go into which container?”) but ultimately, this benefits all of us. As your rabbi, I urge you to recycle as a Jewish imperative.

3. Back to that first Rashi – I cannot begin this year without grieving the loss of those of our brothers and sisters who were murdered in terror attacks in Israel over the Yomtov season. All the losses are heartbreaking. But I especially must note the murder of Rav Eitam and Naama Henkin. I know his parents. His father is Rav Hertzal Henkin, a noted *talmid chacham* with whom I have occasionally consulted. His mother is Rabbanit Chana Henkin, founder and Dean of

Nishmat, and Rebbe to my daughter in law in the Yoetzet Halacha program. The young couple left behind six young children, who (according to the reports) will now be raised by their grandparents. Rav Eitam was reported to be one of the up-and-coming *talmidei chachamin* in the Religious Zionist/Israeli Modern Orthodox community. Naama was a talented artist and designer. May Hashem comfort the family from Above on this horrible loss.

4. We can derive some comfort that in spite of many who wish to destroy us, we still go on. Mazal tov to our community on the plethora of babies being born to Darchei Noam families and those soon to come! This is certainly a wonderful Bereshit for all of us!

May your beginnings be pleasant, and may this year be one of joy and salvation for you, for all of Clal Yisrael, and for the world!

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Joe Ozarowski