

**Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time
Friday Erev Shabbat 6:32 pm

Services Shabbat Morning October 18 9:30 am Kiddush hosted by Howard Rosenhouse in honor of his birthday.

My 2025 High Holiday Sermons

The living hostages are home, although Hamas is still holding bodies of deceased hostages. I am totally convinced that Hamas has not changed its goal, the destruction of Israel. Israel must remain vigilant.

**PARSHAT BEREISHIT
CREATION: ONE TIME EVENT OR ONGOING PROCESS?**

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

This week we begin our reading of the Torah once again. We read about the creation of the universe. Jewish philosophers believed in *creatio ex nihilo*, creation from nothing. That seems to be the obvious meaning of the opening verse of the Torah. There was nothing, then a big bang, then a universe. The ancient Greeks rejected this idea. They taught *ex nihilo nihil fit*, nothing can come from nothing. There must have been some kind of primordial matter that God used to shape a universe. This was the view of Plato in his dialog *The Timaeus*. But to Plato it was not God but a lesser being called a demiurge who formed the universe. (To Plato, we are literally *Children of a Lesser God* to quote the award winning play and movie.)

But let us suppose the philosophers are right. Let us suppose that the universe was created at a single instant in time, perhaps by a big bang. God set up the universe, and it continues to run, following the laws of physics and biology. This approach creates other problems. There was an extremely popular approach to religion during the Enlightenment called deism. Deists believed that God created a universe but since then God does not intervene. Such thinkers as Voltaire, John Locke, and Thomas Jefferson were

deists. In fact, Jefferson put together a Bible which included the creation story but removed everywhere else where God intervened - miracles, revelation, even answering prayers.

There is an advantage to deism, particularly as modern science developed. It allows us to study scientific laws without worrying about God intervening. The universe simply works by its own natural law without God being involved. And yet, I find a serious problem with deism. As a rabbi, I do not find it an authentic Jewish approach.

I remember when I was working on my PhD and discussed creation with the philosophy professor who was head of my committee. She had a great description of deism. She called it "God as deadbeat dad." Just as some fathers create children and proceed to ignore them, to the deists, God created a universe and proceeds to ignore it. God may have created the universe sometime in the past, but today God is not involved.

I prefer the approach described in our daily morning service. *Betuvo M'chadest B'Kol Yom Tamid Maaseh Bereishit*, "with his goodness he renews every day the works of creation." I love the idea that creation was not a one-time event but rather an ongoing process. I see a world where cells come together and form life, where plants grow, animals are born, and babies are created. In my mind, these are not random scientific events but miracles that point to the greatness of God. I also see miracles happening in history, events that cannot simply be explained by scientific laws. Perhaps the biggest miracle in my mind is the establishment and flourishing of the state of Israel. How did a language like Hebrew which no one spoke for two thousand years become a language used by an entire nation? We could call it mere happenstance. But I see it as the providence of God intervening in history.

Of course, there is a difficult scientific question. How does a spiritual being like God intervene in a physical world like the universe? The great philosopher Rene Descartes taught that the universe is made of two different substances, spiritual substances and material substances. He was challenged by a young woman who carried on correspondence with him, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. How could a purely spiritual substance move a purely physical substance? (It is wonderful to see a woman philosopher in the early Enlightenment.) Descartes never came up with a good answer.

It is difficult to explain from a scientific view how God intervenes in the universe. But I believe God does intervene. On the Holidays we identify God with life, and whenever I see life flourishing, I see the hand of God. In my mind, creation was not a one-time event long ago, but an ongoing everyday process.