

ALL BEGINNINGS ARE HARD

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The rabbis of the Talmud characterized all beginnings as being difficult. Well, for the Lord nothing can be said as being difficult. Nevertheless we can all certainly agree that the universe created by God is exceedingly wondrous and complex and difficult for us ordinary humans to grasp in its entirety. So this beginning is a difficult one as well, at least for us, to consider and deal with.

Science has advanced many theories and only limited certainties as to the origin of our species - humankind - and of our planet, Earth, and certainly in regard to our galaxy and the immense universe of which we are barely a tiny speck. What are we to make of all of this?

The Torah has purposely hidden the secrets of creation from us in the narrative that it portrays of the six days of creation and of the arrival of Shabat. It is as though the Torah is telling us that "how" is not important as to this universe but rather the issue is simply "what." What are we supposed to do with our lives, our planet, our galaxy, our universe now that we are temporary residents here?

Human curiosity and further scientific and technological advances will continue to pursue the elusive "how" of creation. That is purely basic human nature - to attempt to know the unknown and to understand the infinite. But that will have only limited effect, if any at all, on human behavior. That certainly remains at best a work in progress. And it constantly demands more work from us.

Human beings were placed on our earth, according to the Torah, "to work and exploit its riches and yet to guard and protect that world." That is the clear instruction given by the Almighty to Adam in the Garden of Eden. If humans are able to harmoniously blend the two - the work and the guarding - then this planet is and will remain a veritable paradise.

However, if humans lose their sense of proportion and balance regarding these two goals and veer towards working and exploiting too much or guarding overzealously then neither of these goals will be achieved. Harmony and a balanced relationship one to the other is the only way to ensure success. Human society seems to veer from plundering its habitat to overprotecting it at tremendous cost to human comfort and society's economic wherewithal.

The watchword of our day is "green" - green energy, green housing, a green economy. This is a worthwhile goal but it cannot be the only goal on the human agenda. After the rapacious treatment of the earth's resources over the past centuries, the reaction of "green" has set in with a vengeance. Eventually we humans will have to find the balance between working and guarding that the Lord bade us to do at the beginning of the story of humankind.

Common sense, political wisdom and a balanced view of life and its problems can all help fulfill God's blessings to Adam and Chava and their descendants to truly inherit this earth and live in harmony with it.

Shabat shalom.

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com