The Creation of the World

FROM THE TORAH: THE FIRST DAY OF CREATION

When God began to create heaven and earth, the earth was unformed and void, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God swept over the water. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day and the darkness Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. Genesis 1:1–5

CREATION: A MEDIEVAL PIYYUT

Who established the highest heights? Who who exactly measured the distances the world spanned? Who exactly measured the distance the world spanned? Who is as great as the Divine? Who propelled the sphere’s rays? Who established the highest heights? Who is the King of the universe? Who placed hair on human heads and caused it to grow? Who for all the untold creation? Who is as great as the Divine? Who is the King of the universe? Who placed hair on human heads and caused it to grow? Who can describe God’s ways; and what God has given, who can repay? Even silence is Your praise! Even silence is Your praise!

Who can describe God’s ways; and what God has given, who can repay? Even silence is Your praise!

B’REISHIT

Each year we sit expectantly, waiting to hear how it all began. We strain and stretch ourselves, not to imagine darkness, chaos—darkness and chaos are states with which we are well acquainted. No, we begin by trying to conjure first light, form and order and sense emerging from tohu va-vohu. And how can it be that on Day One there was light, night and day, but sun and moon not till Day Four? OK, we think, put aside that question for the moment as we struggle to see how it was, for light has limitless possibilities to consider—shimmering white heat of the Negev, June sunset over the Pacific, the way it sparkles on early morning maple leaves in Maine woods when everything seems new and promising.

And yes, before sun and moon, the Yangtze, the Nile, Mississippi, Danube, North Sea, Finger Lakes, Victoria Falls, Ein Gedi. And fig trees, fuchsia, redwood, rhubarb, palm, eucalyptus, birch, blueberries, mango, mustard seed, dogwood, dill, the mighty oak, oregano, arugula, climbing roses, cinnamon and cyclamens.

A fifth day brings us dolphin and win, duck and swan, seagull and whale, crocodile, crab, bat, octopus, butterfly, sockeye salmon and shark, trout, snapping turtle, blue jay, hawk and dove, ladybug, lobster, falling sparrow, heron and herring and hummingbird, whooping cranes, and bees. Now our hearts are pounding wildly, our eyes fill with tears at the glory of this world—

(continued)

Who can describe God’s ways; and what God has given, who can repay? Even silence is Your praise!

(continued)
The Creation of Humanity

FROM THE TORAH: THE SIXTH DAY OF CREATION
And God made human beings in God’s image—thus were they created: God created them male and female. And God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and conquer it; rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, and all living things that crawl on earth.” . . . And God saw all that had been done and thought it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Genesis 1:27–28, 31

One or more of the following selections may be included.

The Rose of Sharon

My being, my heart, my soul set out toward the fragrance of the rose. The smell of happiness, the joy of the sand dunes, rises toward me through the damp, through the emptiness of endless space, flies on its white wings, and the world again becomes a discernible reality, a heavenly charm, an instrument of holiness, surely.

The Torah: The Sixth Day of Creation

And God made human beings in God’s image—thus were they created: God created them male and female. And God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and conquer it; rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, and all living things that crawl on earth.” . . . And God saw all that had been done and thought it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Genesis 1:27–28, 31

One or more of the following selections may be included.

A poem by the modern Israeli poet Zelda Schneerson Mishkovsky (1914–1984), known simply as “Zelda.”

The Rose of Sharon

My being, my heart, my soul set out toward the fragrance of the rose. The smell of happiness, the joy of the sand dunes, rises toward me through the damp, through the emptiness of endless space, flies on its white wings, and the world again becomes a discernible reality, a heavenly charm, an instrument of holiness, surely.
IN YOUR IMAGE
In Your Image You fashioned us;
You owe us Your Presence.

We need to bow to You, ask Your forgiveness,
hold You responsible for the unfair, the ugly.

We need to return to You,
hold You accountable for what defies comprehension,
that we may turn to You more fervently, with gratitude for
the seasons and the stars and the day and the night.

We are humbled by the wonder of the world,
grateful for the gift of thought,
grateful for our dreams, our hopes,
grateful for our never-ending illusions,
grateful for these beautiful souls that transcend death.

God of the faithless,
God of the faithful,
God in all forms and formless,
who was and who is and who will be:
You are the Eternal One.

Let every breath of life praise ADONAI. Halleluyah!
Kol ha-n’shamah t’hallel yah, hal’luyah.

May this year’s troubles end, and a year of blessing begin.
Tikhlleh shanah v’kil’oteha,
tahel shanah u-virkhoteha.

This poem, composed in French by Myriam Kubovy and published in 1956, draws upon recognizable phrases of the liturgy. It asserts that the “image of God” in human beings includes not only the ability to appreciate the wonder of creation and the Creator’s wisdom, but also the ability to struggle with God. The English translation of this excerpt is by Amy Gottlieb; the Hebrew translation, by Alan Letzofsky.
May it be Your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, that the year ______ be one of balanced and mindful growth for us as individuals, for our families, and our communities. May we return next year in good health and in appreciation of a year of greater peace, a year in which we deepened our lives through learning and the performance of mitzvot, a year in which we were conscious of the Divine Presence, a year in which we strengthened our shared commitment to tikkun olam, the betterment of the world.

MEDITATION
In Your great kindness, aid us, Adonai our God, to embrace this Rosh Hashanah with love and overwhelming joy, as a gift from You. Through the celebration of this sacred Rosh Hashanah may we attain a full and true faith. Help us to gather together the sparks of holiness within ourselves, as we join with all the people Israel congregating from their individual homes and joining together on these holy days of Rosh Hashanah to bless Your sacred name.

May it be Your will (הַמִּתְקַשֵּׁט אֶלָּמִיס) that we set out this year to stand in front of the Divine Presence with open hands, with the sparks of holiness within us, with the desire in our hearts to become a light and an instrument, a pure vessel to bring a newness of life.

In Your great kindness, aid us, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, that next year, when the sparks of holiness within us are intertwined with the Divine Presence, we may all be filled with light and purity.

This meditation is adapted from the writings of the 20th-century rabbi and liturgist, Chaim Stern.