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The Creation of Adam: How the Entire Universe Can Change in a Day

One thing I cherish about being a rabbi and a mother is that our Temple Beth El Community helps me appreciate the many changes in my daughter. Being around her every day, sometimes it's hard for me to notice the many ways that she has changed. When Galit and I are at the Temple together, I love when you greet me with "My, how she has grown!" or "She's already a little girl, not a baby!"

Over the summer, while my mom was in town visiting, I enjoyed taking a step back from parenting for a few moments to appreciate some of the many changes in Galit for myself. My mom gently demanded that I sit down with a glass of wine and a magazine so she could enjoy some special "Bubbe" time with her granddaughter. My mom had brought supplies from Seattle to make chocolate lollipops and I watched Galit and my mom do this simple cooking project together.

Galit stood on a chair to reach the counter. They took chocolate chips and poured them into a glass bowl. Galit loved the sound of the hard chocolate chips hitting the bowl so much, that she wanted to pour them into the bowl again and again. Last year Galit was talking, now the talking has changed to bartering and negotiating. Finally, the bowl made its way into the microwave and after about a minute, the chocolate had changed completely. Galit thought the thick liquid was amazing! She was in awe of how the chocolate had changed. She tasted it on her finger. Then on pretzels. Then strawberries. They eventually poured the melted chocolate into the plastic molds for the lollipops. After no time at all, the chocolate had changed again, back to a hard state. But this time the chocolate had taken on the fun shapes in the lollipop mold.

What is a rabbi's kid to do with a dozen chocolate lollipops? We brought them to the temple for Shabbat and Galit gave them out to unassuming congregants. "Shabbat Shalom!" she sang, as she ran and held out a lollipop, giving away a sweet Shabbos treat.

I remember a friend telling me that when he had his first child, someone asked him before they had left the hospital with the baby, "What does it feel like to be a parent?" They were dumbfounded by the question. "I have no idea! I'm trying to figure that out!" It has taken me a while to appreciate the changes that come with being a parent, to truly transition into the role of being a parent. Now that I've settled into this role, I don't ask new parents "What is it like?" but I do catch myself sharing cliché phrases with the utmost sincerity 'Your whole world changes when you become a parent.' 'Savor every moment, children change so fast.'

Our tradition teaches that today, Rosh Hashanah, is the birthday of the world. Our Sages are more specific: today is Adam's birthday. And on the day that Adam was born, the entire universe changed.

A Midrash captures every hour of the day that God created Adam. In the first hour, the idea of creating a person entered God's mind. In the second hour, God took counsel with the ministering angels. In the third, God assembled the dust to create a person. In the fourth, God kneaded the dust and water into clay. In the fifth hour, God shaped it. In the sixth God formed a person with a lifeless body. In the seventh God breathed a soul into the body [Adam!] In the eighth hour, God brought Adam into the Garden of Eden. In the ninth hour, God commanded him [against eating the fruit of the tree of

knowledge], but in the tenth hour, Adam transgressed and ate from the tree. In the eleventh hour, Adam was judged. In the twelfth hour, Adam was pardoned.¹

The entire Universe changed the day that Adam was born. Some changes that occurred on the first day of Adam's life were intentional. God had the idea of creating a person and put this plan into action. When Adam chose to eat from the tree of knowledge, everything changed again. Certainly Adam's perception of himself and his role in the world changed and perhaps God's perception changed too. We have wrestled with these changes that came from Adam eating from the tree of knowledge for centuries. Was banishment from the Garden of Eden always a part of God's plan or, was this an unexpected change?

Change is an essential part of our Universe. And like Adam, change is an essential part of our lives. Think about the changes that have taken place in your life between this New Year and last. Like God choosing to create Adam, some changes in our lives were intentional, they were changes we chose to take on for ourselves. Other changes in our lives were beyond our control. Some changes that have occurred in our lives whether planned or unplanned, we have embraced. Other changes, planned or unplanned, we struggle to integrate into our lives

On Rosh Hashanah, on this day that Adam was born, we as a Jewish community celebrate change and renewal. We often take for granted that before change can lead to renewal, we must first take time to transition.

William Bridges is an expert in organizational change, but his philosophy of managing transition can be applied to the changes that occur in our individual lives. William Bridges teaches that change and transition are not the same thing. *Change* is situational: a new job, a new family member, a new rabbinic team, a divorce or a death. Change is what happens. Transition, on the other hand, is psychological; transition is the process that we go through as we internalize and come to terms with the details of a new situation that change brings about.²

Let's turn to Adam's story again to help us better understand change and transition in our own lives. After a day of many changes for Adam, the sun descended in the Garden of Eden. Shabbat. A day of rest and appreciation for the Universe and all that had changed in the past six days. But as the sun began to descend, another Midrash from our tradition, imagines Adam's emotions. As the sun set, Adam was scared. It was dark and Adam did not have the wisdom that it would become light again. I imagine that in the darkness, Adam began to think about all the change that had occurred over the past day, he started to think about leaving the Garden of Eden and what that transition would mean for him.

Adam threw himself on the ground, his hands spread out touching two stones. Upon one stone was written the Hebrew word "*afeilah*" which means "darkness" and on the other stone was inscribed the Hebrew word "*mavet*" which means "death." He rubbed the two stones together, and out of its friction a spark was emitted, with which Adam lit a torch that lit up the night sky. Out of darkness and loss, Adam somehow managed to light a fire and view his world in a new light. Adam learned to use the fire, not just to light up the sky, but Adam learned to use fire as a tool to cook, to keep warm, and as a torch that would light his path out of the Garden of Eden.³

¹ Leviticus Rabbah 29:1

² William Bridges. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. 2009

³ Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 54a; Bereshit Rabbah 11:2

William Bridges describes that the first phase of a transition is an ending. In that first dark night in the world, holding onto those two stones, Adam came to understand that darkness and loss were a part of the world and a part of his transition away from Eden. So is true in our lives. Even when we deem a change as positive, there is always loss that comes with change. When taking on change, we must create a new identity and in order to transition, we must learn to let go of the old and become anew.

Year after year, Rosh Hashanah celebrates change and renewal but these themes should never feel redundant, for, we human beings, are in a perpetual state of transition with all the change that occurs in our world and in our lives. The philosopher Ernst Bloch famously taught: we are not actually human beings; we are human *becomings*. Rabbi Brad Artson, a prominent leader in the Conservative Movement who was a rabbi at Congregation Eilat for many years, explains that God too is in the process of becoming. When Moses asks God what name he should use when introducing God to the Israelite slaves, the answer was not a name that captures one static image of God like *Adonai* meaning Master, or *Avinu Malkeinu*, which conjures a complimentary image of God as Almighty and Merciful. No, God chose a more dynamic name: "Tell them my name is *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*. I will be what I will be."⁴ In Hebrew, this name is in the imperfect tense, further emphasizing that God is incomplete and changing.⁵

William Bridges describes a second phase of transition: learning to manage the new, developing new tools, and learning new skills to navigate the new landscape. For Adam, out of darkness and loss came fire, and Adam learned to use this fire to literally navigate his new path forward in life. Developing new skills, replacing old behavior with new typically does not occur over night as it did for Adam.

Some of our Sages teach that as Adam experienced the sun setting for the second time, as Shabbat went out, Adam made use of the fire that he had learned to make for a new purpose. Before he left the Garden of Eden, Adam made Havdalah. Adam prayed, "*Barukh Atah Adonai borei m'orei ha'aish*, thank you God for the creation of fire." Adam, holding in his heart all the changes that had taken place in his brief time in the world thanked God for all the distinctions in the world and prayed: "*Barukh Atah Adonai, Hamavdil Bein Kodesh l'chol*."

During this time of year in our Jewish calendar when we celebrate change and renewal, we cannot forget that transition, our learning how to manage change, is ultimately what leads to renewal. While we typically make Havdalah at the end of Shabbat, in ten days, we will come together to make Havdalah on a Wednesday evening to end Yom Kippur. What a perfect conclusion to the High Holy Days.

Change is a part of our Universe and our lives. During these Days of Awe, we have an opportunity to note the changes that have occurred in our lives and spend time working on our transition. We pray for strength and courage as we know transition requires our emotions, our energy, our learning, and our growth. On this day that Adam was born, we take time to recognize how everything has changed in each of our worlds, and on this day, let us commit ourselves to learning how to integrate this change into our lives.

⁴ Rabbi Brad Artson. *God of Becoming and Relationship*. 2016.

⁵ Yoram Hazony. "An Imperfect God," *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 2012.