

## Pregnant with Possibilities

Our Torah reading for today begins with the birth of Isaac. We see Avraham, the proud father preparing a party to celebrate the weaning of his son. This is the very first time we read of a baby celebration in the Torah. Our Rabbis paired this story with another birth story for Rosh Hashanah. The haftarah for today tells the story of Chanah and her deep desire to have a child. Like Sarah she is barren for many years. She prays silently and intensely from the heart, for G-d's help and she too becomes pregnant. She gives birth to Samuel who becomes a great prophet. Incidentally, the Rabbis of the Talmud see her method of prayer as a model for our recitation of the Amidah- a silent prayer from the heart. Our readings today begin and end with birth stories. Wrapped between these 2 texts are the stories of Abraham's family, its complex relationships, jealousies and trials. Why did the Rabbis choose these particular stories for us to read on this profoundly important day?

One answer can be found in another text that we recite every Rosh Hashanah (when it does not fall on shabbat) after the shofar is blown. Tomorrow after each section of shofar sounds, we will recite the words: *Hayom Harat Olam*- often translated as "today is the birthday of the world."

Actually, this is not the true meaning of these words. *Harat* does not mean to be born. It means to become pregnant or to conceive. A better translation of these words is: Today the world is conceived. Expressed in another way, Today, the world is pregnant with possibilities. Rosh Hashanah is given to us as gift, a spiritual tool to awaken us up to the transformative power of choice. We have choice! This is the moment when we are called to look in the mirror and to be honest with ourselves as individuals, and also as the creators of our society. Later today we will sing the refrain: Hayom Hayom Hayom! Today- Today -Today! This is the moment- today- and every present moment, every moment that we are present is pregnant with possibilities.

Today- living through this pandemic, our world is indeed, pregnant with possibilities. Many new ideas and practices are being born. Our ability to welcome and include friends and family from all over the country to our ritual life, to our shiva minyanim, to our seders and other sacred

gatherings is truly a blessing . We have no real idea of what the world will be like once this is over. And yet, this experience has also brought much suffering under the weight of limitations. As our lives have expanded on the internet, they have also contracted in many of the ways that in normal times, we have found meaningful and life-affirming. Our entire world is surely experiencing severe trials. But in taking the birth metaphor a little further, we should remember that birth does not occur without a period of contractions. Without diminishing the suffering that people are going through, we should remember that in order for something to be born, there must first be contractions. This is the way of nature. The tides come in and the tides recede. All of life flows to the rhythms of contraction and expansion. And when our lives contract, as in these days of Covid, naturally there is pain. And so the important question becomes, how do we cope with the pain? As in childbirth, we get through it by having helpers present, by giving and receiving emotional support. This is what we can do for one another and this is what a holy community can do most effectively. We can all reach out to friends and neighbors and let them know they are seen, that we care and ask them what they need. Most often just feeling seen and heard provides a healing balm that allows us to endure. And so, I'd like to especially acknowledge our lay leaders and Board members who have taken up this practice of checking in with our community members. When you do so, you shine a light that uplifts and supports. This is a great mitzvah and one which we can all emulate. Yasher Koach- may you be strengthened in your sacred work.

Part of the challenge of our times is to not lose perspective or disengage from the beauty of the infinite possibilities that lay before us. Like Hagar in our Torah reading, who discovered life-saving water once she opened her eyes to the well right beside her, let us too, keep our eyes open to the myriad possibilities and resources that lie within reach. And let us remember that this experience, like all moments is a temporary state.

More than anything I long to pray, sing, daven with you in person in this beautiful space as one community in one place. I remind myself daily, that Covid will one day become a distant

memory and we will once again sing together and greet one another with open-faced smiles and hugs.

This RH... we, our society, our communities are standing at a crossroad. Will we stretch and expand into a sea of opportunities for the repair and healing of our relationships with one another and with the earth herself? Or will we retreat in fear?

After the words: *Hayom harat olam* - today the world is pregnant with possibilities, our liturgy continues with the words: *Hayom ya'amid bamishpat*- today all creation is called to judgment. Rabbi David Seidenberg points out that these words can also be translated as Hayom-Today, Ya'amid- is sustained, Bamishpat- through justice! Today is sustained through justice.

Our prophet Isaiah ( 8:17) states: "*Samti mishpat l'kav utz'dakah l'mishkelet*. I set justice with a plumb line and righteousness with a balance." The prophet Isaiah portrays G-d as the architect who establishes justice and righteousness in perfect measure within our world. On RH we place the crown upon G-d as the King who sets justice into the earth. And today, on YomHaZikaron- our day of remembrance, we remember our true parentage, our covenant in which we obligate ourselves to be G-d's agents of justice in the world.

Today- Hayom! We stand before G-d and this community, accepting that these are hard days, and that we must go through painful contractions on the path of birthing a new world. As we move through these Days of Awe we are reminded of the awesome fact that we have a choice in creating the kind of world we want to live in. Every birthday comes with a gift. This is the gift of RH!

To paraphrase Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, z'tzl, *teshuvah*/repentance is the highest expression of a person's capacity to choose freely — it is the manifestation of the divine in humankind. We can extricate ourselves from the binding web of life, from the chain of causality that otherwise compels us to follow paths of no return. RH brings our attention to the profound gift of free choice. Let us use it with clear intention and guided by compassion for the highest good for all.

There is a story told in our Talmud in which the Rabbis were debating the circumstances that would cause the Messiah to arrive. At the end of the discussion R. Yehoshua seeks out Elijah the Prophet to ask him directly, when will the Messiah come? When he finds Elijah he asks the question, to which Elijah replies, why don't you go ask him yourself? "But where shall I find him," asks R. Yehoshua? "He sits at the entrance to Rome among the poor and ill, tending to the feet of the suffering, tying and retying their bandages." (

And so R. Yehoshua goes to Rome, finds the Messiah there, and asks him, "when will you come?" And the Messiah answers him, "today!" R. Yehoshua returns to Elijah perplexed and says to him, "the Messiah lied to me. He said he was coming today but he did not."

Elijah responds, "This is what he said to you. He said that he will come **"today/hayom, if you will listen to His voice"**([Psalms 95:7](#)).

Today! Hayom Harat ha-olam! Today births new intentions, conceives new possibilities.

Today! Hayom T'amtzeinu! Today let us be strengthened!

Today! Hayom Tivarcheinu! Let us be blessed- let us create a world of blessings!