



Torah Reflections on *Bereishit* Genesis 1:1 – 6:8

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The Torah, which records the earliest history of the Jewish people, does not begin (as one might expect) with Abraham, the first Jew. Rather, the Torah begins at the Beginning, with creation itself. Why might that be?

One answer is that Torah wants to talk about the creation of *all* human beings, before it narrows the focus to the early Hebrews. The Torah is universal in scope, teaching us about the basic nature of being human.

However the story of the creation of humans is not as straightforward as many people think. There are, in fact, two separate descriptions. In the initial account we are told, "God created human in God's image...male and female God created them." That is, the first two humans are created at the same moment, as the culmination of the six days of creation.

The second account, in Chapter 2 of Genesis, describes God creating a human from the dust of the earth, then blowing the breath of life into his nostrils. Only later does God realize "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting mate for him." God then makes a female companion from one of Adam's ribs.

Perhaps these two accounts represent different ancient traditions, but they teach us the same thing: human beings are not meant to be alone. We are created to be in relationship with one another. One account shows us that humans are all equal, the other adds to that by showing us that we are here to be helpers and supporters to one another.

All too often when things are going smoothly for us, we think of ourselves as independent and self-sufficient. But when we are ill or grieving, we may realize how much we need and are comforted by the presence of another. Often words are unnecessary; a hug or a hand to hold assures us, even through our pain, that we are not alone.

The creation story ends with Adam and Eve expelled from the Garden, assigned to a life that includes challenges and difficulties. This, too, is a part of the human condition. But the two leave together, because God knows that we can face the trials of life more easily when we allow others to accompany us on the journey.

Sometimes the people we are closest to may not be able to give the comforting presence we desire. But relationship also comes in unexpected forms, when we are open to receive it. A kind word from a neighbor or a reassuring touch from a nurse, for example, is a human connection that can lift our spirits and help us feel less alone.

Relationship goes both ways. We can also be the one who reaches out to connect with another, putting our own needs aside for a moment and responding with sympathy to the pain of another.

The Torah's story of creation shows us that relationship is essential for each of us. May we be open to receive and to give the caring connection that reassures us that we are not alone.

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This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Helen Cohn of Congregation Chaverim in Tuscon, Arizona. The Torah Reflections series is published by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center (a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties), an affiliate of the Institute on Aging. More information and healing-oriented resources can be found at www.JewishHealingCenter.org.



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