HAYOM HARAT OLAM

ONE SMALL LITURGICAL TEXT, ONE GIANT TROVE OF INTERPRETATION

BY GORDON TUCKER

SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE
מכון שלום הרטמן

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

— William Blake

Our beautiful world has been buffeted by storms and disease more this year than any other in a century. During these Days of Awe, we have a chance to think of ourselves in the context of human history, of natural history, and of our own codes of behavior. It's a moment in which we look inside and, despite feeling humility about our insignificance, try to elevate ourselves by relating, through awe, to the majesty of Creation.

In honor of that sense of the huge by way of the tiny, I've chosen to look at a very short *piyyut* (liturgical poem). It contains a mere 32 words, and it is known by its opening three words: *Hayom Harat Olam.*

I will, for the moment, leave the phrase untranslated, except to note that two of the three words are probably quite familiar to us. *Hayom* generally means "today" or "this day," and we recognize *olam* as meaning "world." Knowing these words gives us an entry into the meaning of the phrase, but we shall see later that the meaning of the phrase is somewhat more complicated than these common words might suggest.

In addition to understanding the words in English, it's also important to note this *piyyut*'s location in the unique liturgy of Rosh Hashana. The core of every *tefillah* — indeed, the Sages called it simply "*tefillah*" — is what we call the Amidah. Throughout the year, it consists either of 19 *berakhot* (the template for weekday liturgy) or of seven *berakhot* (the template for all services on Shabbat and holy days, including Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur). The first three and the last three are shared at all times.

One *tefillah* on Rosh Hashana — the Musaf Amidah — breaks that otherwise exceptionless pattern and comprises nine *berakhot*. The three central ones, the ones between the opening and closing three, form the liturgical signature for Rosh

Hashana. They're the verbal settings for the non-verbal blowing of the shofar. They are called, respectively, *Malkhuyot* (Sovereignty of God), *Zikhronot* (God's Remembrances), and *Shofarot* (the historical appearances, past and future, of the shofar).

This is what the culmination of the *Malkhuyot* section looks like:

Malkhuyot

— Ten Scriptural verses on the theme of Malkhuyot, i.e. God's sovereignty. Then:

Our God and God of our ancestors, reign over the entire world with Your glory, and be uplifted over all the earth with Your honor. Appear in the splendor of Your majestic might over all who dwell in the inhabited world of Your earth; so everything that has been created will know that You have created it, and it will be understood by everything that was formed that You have formed it, and all who have breath will say, "Adonai, God of Israel is the Sovereign whose sovereignty rules over all." Our God and God of our ancestors, sanctify us with Your commandments and grant our share in Your Torah; satisfy us from Your goodness and gladden us with Your deliverance. Purify our hearts to serve You in truth, for You are the true God, and Your word is true and enduring forever. Blessed are You Adonai, Sovereign over all the earth, Sanctifier of Israel and the Day of Remembrance.

Teki'ah Shevarim Teru'ah Teki'ah — Teki'ah Shevarim Teki'ah — Teki'ah Teru'ah Teki'ah

הַיּוֹם הָרַת עוֹלָם. הַיּוֹם יַעֲמִיד בַּמִּשְׁפָּט כָּל יְצוּרֵי עוֹלָמִים. אִם כְּבָנִים. אִם כַּעֲבָדִים.
אִם כְּבָנִים רַחֲמֵנוּ כְּרַחֵם אָב עַל בָּנִים. וְאִם כַּעֲבָדִים עֵינֵינוּ לְךָ תְלוּיוֹת. עַד שֶׁתְּחָנְנֵנוּ
וְתוֹצִיא כָּאוֹר מִשְׁפָּטֵנוּ אָיוֹם קָדוֹשׁ:

Hayom Harat Olam — Today all creation is called to judgment, whether as Your children or as Your servants. If as Your children, be compassionate with us as a parent is compassionate with children. If as Your servants, we look to You expectantly, waiting for You to be gracious to us, and to bring forth a favorable judgment on our behalf, awesome and holy One.

אֲרֻשַׁת שְׂפָתֵינוּ יֵעָרֵב לְפָנֶיךָ אֵל רָם וְנִשָּׂא. מֵבִין וּמַאֲזִין מַבִּיט וּמַקְשִׁיב לְקוֹל תְּקִיעָתֵנוּ
וּתְקַבֵּל בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרָצוֹן סִדּוּר מַלְכֻיּוֹתֵינוּ:

May the utterance of our lips be pleasing unto You, Almighty, Most High and Uplifted. You Who understands, gives ear, perceives and attends to the sounds of our shofar. May You accept with compassion and beneficence our acknowledgments of Your sovereignty.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- Do you normally think of Rosh Hashana as the day on which all of creation is called to judgment? What does this idea mean for you?
- What is distinctive about how a parent judges her child? What does it evoke to imagine God judging us as a child?
- What is distinctive about how a master judges his servant? What does it evoke to imagine God judging us as a servant?

As I mentioned, the same template is then followed twice more before the Amidah turns to its regular closing of the three daily final *berakhot*. Each time, *Hayom Harat Olam* appears just after the shofar blasts.

We know that this short *piyyut* is a very old feature of Rosh Hashana prayers. It appears, just as we recite it today, in the ninth century Seder — or Siddur — of Rav Amram of the Geonic Academy of Sura in Iraq (about 120 miles south of Baghdad). That Seder is the earliest comprehensive "script" that we have for the *tefillot* of the year. The origin and the authorship of *Hayom Harat Olam*, however, are both unknown.

If my own experience over many decades in many different settings (both Conservative and Orthodox) is any indication, *Hayom* — as I shall call it for brevity — is generally rushed through silently in between the dramatic blast of the shofar and a closing paragraph (*Areshet Sefatenu*), which is usually a joyous congregational song.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Is silently rushing through this *piyyut* the custom in your community? Or do you have any special traditions or music that you associate with this part of the liturgy?

But if I can convince you of anything in this essay, it is that these 32 words are extraordinarily rich. I hope that when you reach them on Rosh Hashana, you will be affected by their poetry and philosophy. I have shamelessly structured my title using the famous phraseology of Neil Armstrong, of blessed memory. I hope calling it "One Small Liturgical Text: One Giant Trove of Interpretation" convinces you that it is well worth attention.

Translations

Let's get to the translation of the those first three words, *Hayom Harat Olam*. Remember, it's only the middle one — *Harat* — that was not immediately recognizable.

Here are seven different translations from different Mahzorim, spanning many different movements in America. All of them take that word, *Harat*, to refer to birth — and with good reason, for the Hebrew root from which it apparently comes denotes conception and pregnancy. But there are a few variations to notice, and those variations all bespeak an uneasiness with the imagery of pregnancy and birth when speaking of creation. Again, that's with good reason, since the Torah and the subsequent tradition did as much as it could to put distance between God and the pagan mythological motifs of divine sexuality, cohabitation, conception, and birth.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why might translators be uncomfortable with the metaphors of pregnancy and birth for creation? Do you find these metaphors meaningful? Why or why not?

Metzudah Mahzor

On this day, the world came into being; On this day, He makes stand in judgment — all the creatures of the worlds.

Art Scroll Mahzor

Today is the birth[day] of the world. Today all creatures of the world stand in judgment.

Max Arzt, in *Justice and Mercy*

This day the world was called into being; this day all the creatures of the universe stand in judgment before Thee.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Which of these translations, on first read, do you find most moving?

Rabbinical Assembly (Harlow) Mahzor

Today the world is born. Today all creatures everywhere stand in judgment.

Reconstructionist Mahzor

Today, the world is born! Today shall stand before you all the beings of the cosmos.

New Union Prayer Book (Gates of Repentance)

This is the day of the world's birth. This day all creatures stand before You.

Mahzor Lev Shalem

Today the world stands as at birth. Today all creation is called to judgment.

Only the first three (Metzudah, Art Scroll, and Arzt) make Rosh Hashana into an historical commemoration of creation (as in, "the world came into being," "Today is the birthday...," and "was called into being"), and even so, both Metzudah and Arzt avoid diction that directly speaks of birth (opting instead for the more nebulous "came into being" or "called into being"). Though Gates of Repentance is admittedly a bit ambiguous on this point, the other four examples speak of birth, but purely as a way of thinking of today as a day on which the world "is born" or "stands as at birth." In other words, it's about the ways in which we might think of this day as a way to remake ourselves and our world, not about Creation in the past.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Do you normally think of Rosh Hashana as connected to the creation of the world? What does this idea mean for you?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Do you normally think of Rosh Hashana as a day when the world is reborn? What does this idea mean for you?

We will be returning to this uneasiness about Creation as a birthing in contemporary

translations, but it's interesting to note that in medieval times, the uneasiness about *Harat* as denoting conception, pregnancy, and giving birth was already being given expression.

Here, for example, is what the book Ha-Pardes — often ascribed to Rashi, and certainly stemming from Rashi's school — had to say:

Sefer Ha-Pardes (from the School of Rashi — 11th-12th Century), §172

למה אנו אומרים בר"ה "היום הרת עולם"; וכי בר"ה נברא? והלא בכ"ה באלול נברא העולם! פירש רבנו "הרת — לשון דין", ומצינו ראיה מן משלי כי במשלי בכל מקום שכתב ריב או מדון או מצה מפרש המתרגם "הרת". לכך אנו אומרים בר"ה "היום הרת" ואין "הרת" אלא דין; ולכך אנו אומרים היום דין.

Why do we say on Rosh Hashanah "Today the world was born"? Was it born on Rosh Hashanah (1 Tishri)? Was the creation not begun on the 25 Elul [so that Rosh Hashanah was the sixth day, i.e. when humans first appeared]?
Our master (Rashi) explained that "Harat" connotes "Judgment".
And we find support for this from the fact that whenever the Book of Proverbs uses the Hebrew words for "disputes" and "controversies", the Aramaic Targum renders it with the word "Harat" [actually "Harata"]. This is why we say these words on Rosh Hashanah: what we mean when we say "Hayom Harat Olam" is "Today is Judgment Day".

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How would it change our understanding of Rosh Hashana if we thought of it as the anniversary of the creation of the world or as the anniversary of the creation of humanity? Which idea appeals to you more?

This brings us to the first of the four main ways that the *piyyut* as a whole has been interpreted.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What does it mean to you to be judged on Rosh Hashana?

I. Judgment

As well as avoiding the idea of "birth," Ha-Pardes provides our first interpretation of the entire *piyyut*, which in fact follows the contextual meaning of the prayer. According to the author of Ha-Pardes, this *piyyut* is about judgment.

In *Justice and Mercy*, Max Arzt's classic commentary on the Days of Awe liturgy, he quotes the great liturgist and ethnomusicologist Eric Werner, who compares a much more famous *piyyut* — Unetanneh Tokef — to a medieval Christian liturgical piece, "Dies Irae" (Day of Wrath). Some familiarity with Unetanneh Tokef will immediately reveal the striking commonalities, including trembling, the Book being opened, and an awesome horn sounding. Even the angels are not safe. The Master counts us like sheep. It's all here. And yet there is one big difference, and Arzt points it out in the last paragraph of this excerpt:

Max Arzt, Justice and Mercy (1963), 168

Dr. [Eric] Werner shows [in *The Sacred Bridge*] that there is a remarkable similarity in style and form between Unetanneh Tokef and its Byzantine and Middle-Latin parallels. Yet the Jewish differential can be clearly discerned by a comparison with this part of the Middle-Latin Dies Irae:

What a tremble will be there!
The book will be opened
All hidden things will appear
The awesome trumpet will sound
Over all the graves.
Whom shall I ask for protection even
When the just ones are not safe?
Counting the sheep, grant me space
Among the lambs, segregate me from the goats
My prayers are not worthy, but Thou,
Good one, be gracious unto me.

Here, as in the Unetanneh Tokef, judgment takes place in heaven, but emphasis is placed upon the "Last Judgment," after the dead are revived and the redeemed are segregated from those condemned. In the Jewish version, however, the Judgment Day occurs on Rosh Hashana, and the sealing of the Judgment is on Yom Kippur. The decision relates to this life, and the decree can be remedied and even repealed by the decision of repentance.

Judgment occurs annually, and it is not necessarily a Day of Wrath. Leaving the problematic birth imagery aside (we'll get back to it soon), if Rosh Hashana is, in fact, an anniversary of the creation, and the creation of humans in particular, then it makes sense that it should be like a contract anniversary. Thus, we get what every contract employee should get on that anniversary: namely, a performance review.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How does it change your experience of Rosh Hashana to imagine it through the metaphor of a performance review?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How can we judge ourselves more lovingly this Rosh Hashana?

We don't know whether God will judge us the way a parent judges a child, from a basis of love, or whether God will judge us as an employer judges an employee — entirely on the latter's performance and usefulness to the employer. We hope to be considered God's child (and perhaps that's hinted at in the use of *Harat* for the creation) and to be judged as a loving parent judges his or her child. We hope to be considered for our own sake and own integrity, not just for our usefulness to Creation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- If we judge ourselves on our usefulness, what is helpful and what is harmful about that perspective?

So that's a first, strong interpretation of *Hayom Harat Olam*. Rosh Hashana constitutes our annual judgment, in which we aspire, even in our failings, to be faithful children of the compassionate God. That also supports having the *piyyut* punctuate the three unique, signature moments in the day's liturgy.

II. Bearing a child

A second reading will take for granted that *Harat* indeed refers to birth and not judgment. Significantly, though, it goes deeper into the prayer's message by going back to the liturgical poet's source. Even medieval scholars who wrote about this passage — for example, the Tanya Rabbati of the 13th century — were already pointing out that the phrase was not invented by the poet. Rather, he radically transformed it from its source in the prophetic books of the Bible.

The prophet Jeremiah did not have an easy time being God's prophet. God made it clear at his commission, when he was just a teenager, that he would be scorned, targeted, and abused, while the aim of his mission — to save the people through repentance — would seem impossible. As a result, Jeremiah lived a life of deep depression, reaching a kind of apogee in chapter 20 of his book.

Here's **Jeremiah 20, verses 7-18**, with the use of the phrase *Harat Olam* in verse 17 highlighted:

פִּתִּיתַנִי ה' וָאֶפָּֽת חֲזַקְתַּנִי וַתּוּכָל הָיִיתִי לִשְׂחוֹק כָּל־הַיּוֹם כֻּלֹּה לִעֵג לִי׃

You enticed me, O LORD, and I was enticed; You overpowered me and You prevailed. I have become a constant laughingstock, Everyone jeers at me.

כִּי־מִדֵּי אֲדַבֵּר אֶזְעָק חָמָס וְשֹׁד אֶקְרָא כִּי־הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה לִי לְחֶרְפָּה וּלְקֶלֶס כָּל־הַיּוֹם׃

For every time I speak, I must cry out, Must shout, "Lawlessness and rapine!" For the word of the LORD causes me Constant disgrace and contempt.

וְאָמַרְתִּי לֹא־אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ וְלֹא־אֲדַבֵּר עוֹד בִּשְׁמוֹ וְהָיָה בְלִבִּי כְּאֵשׁ בֹּעֶרֶת עָצֻר בְּעַצְמֹתָי וְנִלְאֵיתִי כַּלְכֵּל וְלֹא אוּכָל׃

I thought, "I will not mention Him, no more will I speak in His name"— but [His word] was like a raging fire in my heart, shut up in my bones; I could not hold it in, I was helpless.

כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי דִּבַּת רַבִּים מָגוֹר מִסָּבִיב הַגִּידוּ וְנַגִּידֶנּוּ כָּל אֱנוֹשׁ שְׁלוֹמִי שֹׁמְרֵי צַלְעִי אוּלַי יְפֻתֶּה וְנוּכְלָה לּוֹ וְנִקְחָה נְקָמָתֵנוּ מִמֶּנּוּ׃

I heard the whispers of the crowd— terror all around: "Inform! Let us inform against him!" All my [supposed] friends are waiting for me to stumble: "Perhaps he can be entrapped, and we can prevail against him and take our vengeance on him."

וַה׳ אוֹתִי כְּגִבּוֹר עָרִיץ עַל־כֵּן רֹדְפַי יִכָּשְׁלוּ וְלֹא יֻכָלוּ בֹּשׁוּ מְאֹד כִּי־לֹא הִשְׂכִּילוּ כְּלִמַּת עוֹלָם לֹא תִשָּׁכֵחַ׃

But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; therefore my persecutors shall stumble; they shall not prevail and shall not succeed. they shall be utterly shamed with a humiliation for all time, which shall not be forgotten.

וַה׳ צְבָאוֹת בֹּחֵן צַדִּיק רֹאֵה כְלָיוֹת וָלֵב אֶרְאֶה נִקְמָתְךָ מֵהֶם כִּי אֵלֶיךָ גִּלֵּיתִי אֶת־רִיבִי׃ (ס)

O LORD of Hosts, you who test the righteous, who examine the heart and the mind, let me see Your retribution upon them, for I lay my case before You.

שִׁירוּ לַה׳ הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה כִּי הִצִּיל אֶת־נֶפֶשׁ אֶבְיוֹן מִיַּד מְרֵעִים׃ (ס)

Sing unto the LORD, Praise the LORD, for He has rescued the needy from the hands of evildoers!

אָרוּר הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יֻלַּדְתִּי בּוֹ יוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יְלָדַתְנִי אִמִּי אַל־יְהִי בָרוּךְ׃

Accursed be the day That I was born! Let not the day be blessed when my mother bore me!

אָרוּר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בִּשַּׂר אֶת־אָבִי לֵאמֹר יֻלַּד־לְךָ בֵּן זָכָר שַׂמֵּחַ שִׂמֲּחֵהוּ׃

Accursed be the man who brought my father the news And said, "A boy is born to you," And gave him such joy!

וְהָיָה֙ הָאִ֣ישׁ הַה֔וּא כֶּֽעָרִ֕ים אֲשֶׁר־הָפַ֥ךְ ה' וְלֹ֣א נִחָ֑ם וְיִשְׁמַ֤ע זְעָקָה֙ בַּבֹּ֔קֶר וּתְרוּעָ֖ה בְּעֵ֥ת צָהֳרָֽיִם׃

Let that man become like the cities which the LORD overthrew without relenting! Let him hear shrieks in the morning and battle shouts at noontide—

אֲשֶׁ֤ר לֹא־מוֹתַתֵ֙נִי֙ מֵרָ֔חֶם וַתְּהִי־לִ֥י אִמִּ֖י קִבְרִ֑י וְרַחְמָ֖הּ הֵרַ֥ת עוֹלָֽם׃

Because he did not kill me before birth so that my mother might be my grave, and her womb big [with me] for all time.

לָמָּ֣ה זֶּ֔ה מֵרֶ֖חֶם יְצָאתִ֑י לִרְא֥וֹת עָמָ֛ל וְיָג֖וֹן וַיִּכְל֥וּ בַבּ֖שֶׁת יָמָֽי׃ (פ)

Why did I ever issue from the womb, to see misery and woe, to spend all my days in shame!

Looking at the original use of the phrase, we see how the anonymous author of *Hayom* lifted it, only to completely reverse its context and meaning. As in Hebrew, in English we use the phrase "she bore a child," synonymously with "she gave birth to a child." Here though, the meanings diverge. Jeremiah's imagined eternity applies to the actual bearing — carrying — of the child in the womb not, as for the *Hayom* poet, to the eternal birth manifest on Rosh Hashana.

In Jeremiah 20, the prophet fantasizes about somehow escaping his imposed mission, even to the point of escaping life itself. This chapter contains one of his most poignant — and grotesque — fantasies: that someone might have killed him by preventing his birth altogether — "so that my mother might be my grave, and her womb pregnant to all eternity (ורחמה הרת עולם)."

I noted earlier that the word *olam* is familiar in its commonplace spatial meaning of "world." But the more primary meaning of *olam*, from which this spatial sense derives, is "without end" — with the translation in this temporal sense being "eternity." The hymn at the end of the Shabbat morning service named "Adon Olam" is talking about our "Eternal Lord" rather than about the "Lord of the World."

So in Jeremiah, *Harat Olam* meant just what the two words classically meant — pregnant for all eternity. It is — as one might expect from the ever- persecuted prophet — a sickly, depressed fantasy about a never-ending pregnancy that cannot come to fruition.

And now we see the genius of our anonymous *piyyut* poet. He appropriated *Harat* from Jeremiah and endowed it not with the meaning of the ongoing state of

pregnancy, but rather with the *outcome* of pregnancy, which is birth. And he endowed the word *Olam* — eternity for Jeremiah — with the post-biblical meaning of "world." Thus, "today is the birthday of the world."

Why is this noteworthy and important? Well, when we looked at the first interpretation, I quoted Rabbi Max Arzt z"l, but I didn't mention that he was a mentor to me from the time I first met him, when I was a teenager. He urged me to consider rabbinical school, and I always cherish the opportunities to quote him. That's because our tradition tells us that when students quote their teachers' words, it's as if their lips have once again come to life. So it's fitting that I quote another rabbi who had an important influence on me, a man who died just a few short months ago: Rabbi Norman Lamm z"l. Indulge me in another brief reminiscence to introduce this idea.

ARZT, MAX (1897–1975), Arzt was born in Stanislav, Poland, and was brought to the U.S. at the age of four. He was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1921. After serving in Stamford, Connecticut. (1921–24), Arzt accepted the pulpit of Temple Israel in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where he remained for 15 years. The congregation became known as a laboratory for synagogue education. In 1939 he became director of Field Service and Activities of the Jewish Theological Seminary and was a pioneer in educating laymen to support institutions of higher Jewish learning. He was named vice chancellor of the Seminary in 1951 and professor of practical theology in 1962. He wrote Justice and Mercy, a Commentary on the New Year and the Day of Atonement (1963) and various talmudic studies. Arzt was a member of the editorial committee of the Jewish Publication Society of America as well as of its translation committee preparing a new translation of the Bible. Other posts he held included president of the Rabbinical Assembly, and vice president of the Synagogue Council of America.

— Adapted from Alvin Kass' entry in *Encyclopedia of Judaism*

When I was a freshman in a public high school, I continued my Jewish education at an afternoon and Sunday school that met at Rabbi Lamm's shul on 86th Street (The Jewish Center). Remarkably — I only came to realize later how remarkable that

LAMM, NORMAN (1927- 2020), Yeshiva University president, educator, and scholar. Born in Brooklyn, Lamm attended Mesivta Torah VoDaat yeshivah, and then Yeshiva College. He received rabbinical ordination at RIETS in 1951. In 1966 he received his Ph.D. from Yeshiva University and was on its faculty for 17 years. He also served as communal leader, first as assistant rabbi of New York City's Kehillath Jeshurun Synagogue, then as spiritual leader of Congregation Kadima in Springfield, Massachusetts, and still later as spiritual leader of Manhattan's Jewish Center.

He was the founding editor of Tradition, the major journal of Orthodox thought, and also served as editor of "The Library of Jewish Law and Ethics."

When Yeshiva University president Samuel Belkin passed away in 1976 Lamm was elected to that position, which he held for 25 years. It was as head of Yeshiva University that he made a major impact on Jewish education in America. Lamm has been a strong proponent of the Torah u-Madda approach, of combining traditional Jewish learning with modern secular studies. He has been one of the foremost leaders of Modern or Centrist orthodoxy, between Conservative and Reform Judaism on the left, and haredi Judaism on the right. He worked for unity among all streams of Judaism and though he strongly opposed the Reform decision to make patrilineal descent a criterion for defining Jewishness.

Lamm is one of the most important of modern Jewish thinkers and he published ten books and many articles. Among the subjects Lamm has written about are the nature of Jewish and rabbinic leadership, man's position in the universe, the religious implications of extraterrestrial life, ecology in Jewish law and theology, and privacy in law and theology. After retiring as president of Yeshiva in 2001 he was appointed chancellor of the University.

— Adapted from Shalom Freedman's entry in *Encyclopedia of Judaism*

was — Rabbi Lamm took it upon himself to take our class of 12-and 13-year-olds) on Sunday mornings and teach us Rambam's Hilkhot De'ot. It was not only my first real introduction to Maimonides; it was also my first introduction to Aristotle! Though my choice of rabbinical school may not have met with Rabbi Lamm's approval, I can trace my eventual path from that class to the rabbinate and to graduate school in philosophy thanks to the model he presented to us of תורה ומדע Torah u-Madda.

Hilkhot Deot is a section of the Mishneh Torah. It deals with laws pertaining to character development and proper interpersonal behavior

More than a half-century ago, Rabbi Lamm preached about *Hayom Harat Olam* at The Jewish Center, and he noted this stark contrast between the poet's source and the poet's steadfast beliefs.

Norman Lamm, from a sermon on the 2nd Day of Rosh Hashana 5724, September 20, 1963:

Each of us possesses wonderful native abilities and marvelous inner resources. Either we can opt for Jeremiah's harat olam, remaining forever with our greatest human treasures locked up within our hearts and never brought to fruition, like a child prodigy for whom a brilliant future is foretold but who never manages to translate his genius into real achievement; or we can joyously proclaim "hayom harat olam", that today we shall express those capacities into reality, for today we shall fulfill ourselves by giving birth to a new and fascinating world.

And it is this in truth which is the response to the challenge of the Shofar. For the Shofar was once also a call for the liberation of the slaves. The Rabbis considered the words shofar teru'ah to be related to the word "t'ro'em," and thus meaning "the shofar's call to break the chains and release the slaves." The shofar summons us to break the bonds of habit and indifference that keep our vast treasures locked up and our repositories of goodness and faith impounded within us, to transform the eternal waiting of Jeremiah's harat olam into the living immediacy of the Mahzor's hayom harat olam. It is the call to release and emancipate our talents, our abilities, our greatness.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Which of your capabilities and talents do you want to make better use of this year?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How do negative habits or patterns "enslave" your potential for spiritual greatness? What could you do this Rosh Hashana to release those treasures?

Jeremiah's image of eternal pregnancy was about hopes forever unrealized and aspirations never to be fulfilled — doubly so, for Jeremiah had come to believe that he would not fulfill his task because the people he was supposed to serve would never succeed in their obligations. But the poet boldly redefines the words. He states that on this day the world can be born again — in fact it is always being born again. And we will be judged on our actions

precisely because we have the ability to realize dreams and fulfill aspirations.

The Great March on Washington was part of the great civil rights protest movements of the 1960s. 250,000 marched to Washington D.C. to advocate for the civil and economic rights of African Americans. At the march, Martin Luther King Jr., standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial, delivered his historic "I Have a Dream" speech in which he called for an end to racism.

This sermon was given on the second day of Rosh Hashana, 1963, barely three weeks after the famous March on Washington. And Rabbi Lamm did not — on the day that tradition thinks of as having universal significance — miss the opportunity to apply the lesson of this second reading of our *piyyut* to what was happening in the wider world. In this moment of coming to terms with the terrible and enduring effects of our nation's past sins, it is both inspiring and sobering to read the words he addressed to his congregation — a rather formal one in his day.

> This year has been a historic one for the Negroes of our country. They have heard and responded to their Shofar-call. They have taken the decisive step from unrealized potential to a new and exhilarating reality. For the past 100 years, since the Emancipation Proclamation, all the vast talents of this great community have gone to waste. Who knows how many potential Einsteins and Oppenheimers, or George Washington Carvers or Ralph Bunches may have been born, lived and died unexpressed and undeveloped during this long and dark period of harat olam, of frustrated gestation of genius, of immense human riches always in the state of possibility and yet always coming to naught. This year the Negroes of America have decided to transform their possibility into actuality. They have announced to America: hayom harat olam, today we create a new society of dignity and honor, and even if we must lose lives of our innocent children, we shall break out of our stupor and enable our people to make their contributions to this land as freemen and the equals of all others.

Rabbi Lamm takes *Hayom Harat Olam* as a decidedly non-Jeremiah-like affirmation of life. Systemic racism in America — or any other major source of social inequity against which we can once again rise — is a good reason for the three-fold reminder during the Rosh Hashana Musaf that God's Sovereignty, Cosmic Memory, and the Call of the Shofar are, in the end, all about the belief in the possibilities of rebirth in our own lives.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What were the historical, systemic causes that blocked some African American's potential from coming to fruition? Where have we made progress on these issues, and where are we as a nation still stuck? How can you contribute to this work this year?

For me, the theme of rebirth includes reviving with honor the words of my own teachers. For the next interpretation, I will have the privilege of conveying the Torah

of my most important teacher. And for that purpose, I will begin with a verse from Kohelet (5:11).

III. Eternity

"A worker's sleep is sweet, whether he has much or little to eat; but the rich man's abundance doesn't let him sleep."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How does abundance sometimes serve as a negative or disruptive force in your life?

The Tanhuma (in Ki Tissa 3) turns the hard-nosed cynicism of the second phrase into a description of a beautiful blessing enjoyed by very special people. Here are its words:

> "Imagine a person who was fabulously wealthy in Torah. He taught many students. He lectured on the Torah publicly. He was completely suffused with Torah. Even though he may now be dead, the students whom he nurtured will not let him sleep. Rather, his students sit and busy themselves with the Torah, Talmud, Halakhah, and Aggadah that he taught; moreover, the disciples cite his teachings and mention his name all the time, and thus give him no slumber in his grave. In other words: 'the rich man's abundance doesn't let him sleep.'"

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Who are your teachers and mentors whose wisdom you feel responsible to share with the world?

Among the richest persons — according to the Tanhuma's definition of wealth — I've ever known was Rabbi Gerson Cohen z"l. And it is fitting that the Tanhuma describes a way of conquering death by being quoted, because, in his intellectual and spiritual work, Rabbi Cohen delved deeply into the concept of immortality. And that is in fact the subject of the third interpretation of *Hayom Harat Olam*.

GERSON DAVID COHEN (1924–1991) was a Jewish historian, a Conservative rabbi, and the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America from 1972–86. Graduating from City College of New York in 1944 he received his rabbinic ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. in Semitic Languages at Columbia University in 1958.

Cohen served as Gustav Gottheil Lecturer at Columbia University and in a number of posts at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He was named Chancellor of the Seminary in 1972.

Cohen is especially noted for ordaining the first female rabbi in Conservative Judaism in 1985.

— ADAPTED FROM WIKIPEDIA

Please travel with me along a brief tangent, which will become relevant soon enough.

Part of what we are investigating hinges on the difference between two words whose distinction is subtle but significant: "eternal" and "sempiternal." As it turns out, we quite often, though incorrectly, use the word "eternal" when we mean existing in the flow of time, yet on into the infinite future. That is the definition of "sempiternal" — the concept Woody Allen was

using as he famously quipped that he didn't want to achieve immortality through his work; he wanted to achieve it by not dying.

On the other hand, "eternal" connotes being outside of time. Eternity, that is, is timelessness — beyond the changing, and thus degenerating, flow of time. The following passage tells us that what physics taught Einstein about eternity, timelessness, being in some sense here and now and touchable — all laid out — brought him comfort as he was facing death. Rabbi Cohen loved to use the word *consolatio* with its connotations of ritual and ceremony. If a concept of eternity could console Einstein, it could presumably do that for others (and not only those who are mystically inclined).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What does it mean to you that "the distinction between past, present, and future is only an illusion"? Do you find this idea comforting?

Rebecca Goldstein, *Incompleteness* (2005), 254-255

Is there anything we know more intimately than the fleetingness of time, the transience of each and every moment? Yet, strangely enough, it isn't so..... not if we take Einstein's physics seriously.....

In Einstein's physics, there is no passage of time, no unidirectional flow away from the fixed past and toward the uncertain future. The temporal component of space-time is as static as the spatial components; physical time is as still as physical space. It is all laid out, the whole spread of events, in the tenseless four-dimensional space-time manifold....

Einstein, living "under the sword of Damocles" [he had already been diagnosed with a growing and fatal abdominal aneurysm], seemed to take comfort in his vision of tenseless physical objectivity. In a condolence letter to the widow of Michele Besso, his longtime friend and fellow physicist, Einstein [who would die less than 5 weeks later] wrote: "In quitting this strange world he has once again preceded me by just a little. That doesn't mean anything. For us convinced physicists the distinction between past, present, and future is only an illusion, albeit a persistent one."

YEHUDA HALEVI (c.1075 – 1141) was a Spanish Jewish physician, poet and philosopher. He was born in Spain where he lived and worked, but made a pilgrimage to live in the Holy Land as an older man and died shortly after arriving in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Halevi is considered one of the greatest Hebrew poets, celebrated for both his religious and secular poems, many of which appear in present-day Jewish liturgy. His greatest philosophical work was The Kuzari.

Exit one of the Jews and great thinkers of the 20th century, and enter one of the great Jewish thinkers and poets of medieval Spain. I've taken you on this brief tangent because among all of Rabbi Cohen's riches, he had a special love and attachment to those exceptional Jews of the Iberian Peninsula. And so next we look at one of those poets, Yehudah Halevi, and one of his

poems. In it, you will hear the contrast between, on the one hand, existence in time, and on the other hand, timelessness — eternity.

Yehudah Halevi, Prelude to *"Nishmat,"*
in *The Gazelle* (1991), Raymond Scheindlin, *editor*, 155–159

יְחִידָה, שַׁחֲרִי הָאֵל וְסִפְּיו
וְכִקְטֹרֶת תְּנִי שִׁירֵךְ בְּאַפָּיו
הֲלוֹא אִם תִּרְדְּפִי הַבְלֵי זְמַנֵּךְ
וְתֹאמְרִי כִּי אֱמֶת הֵם כָּל כְּשָׁפָיו
וְתַזְלִי אַחֲרָיו לֵילֵךְ וְיוֹמֵךְ.
וְתֶעְרַב לָךְ תְּנוּמָה מִנְּשָׁפָיו
דְּעִי כִּי אֵין בְּיָדַיִךְ מְאוּמָה
אֲבָל עֵץ יִבְשׁוּ מָחָר עֲנָפָיו
הֲיִי לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהַיִךְ וּמַלְכֵּךְ
אֲשֶׁר בָּאת לַחֲסוֹת תַּחַת כְּנָפָיו
שְׁמוֹ יִגְדַּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ בְּפִי כֹל
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמַת אֱלוֹהַּ חַי בְּאַפָּיו.

My soul, seek God at dawn, attend His house,
And set your song like incense before Him.
For if you run to try to trap Time's vapors,
Mistaking his illusions for the truth,
And wander wayward, night and day behind him,
Loving lazy mornings after nights of pleasure —
Know that nothing really is your own
Except a tree whose boughs will one day wither.

Then be before your Lord, your God and King,
From whom you seek protection underneath His wing.
His name be ever magnified and sanctified:
Let every mouth that breathes His greatness sing.

Translated by Raymond Scheindlin

Notice how Time is said to offer us *keshafim* – translated here as "illusions" — the same word that Einstein used. And what is offered as the positive contrast to the frantic and incessant use of time to pursue that which time itself ultimately destroys? It is the verb without action and motion: הֲיִי — "Be." Halevi offers a vision of coming to rest by achieving that which we might call the "God's eye view" — the view from eternity. It's the achievement of something of timelessness even in this world.

Now, let's turn to Rabbi Cohen, bearing in mind what we said earlier about time — namely that the primary meaning of the word *olam* was not "world," the ultimate fullness of space, but rather "eternity" (as in *l'olam va'ed*), the ultimate fullness of time.

Gerson D. Cohen, The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni (1967), reprinted in Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures, 223-4

In the view of Maimonides, the ultimate reward of the righteous was not the messianic redemption and the resurrection connected with it, but the incorporeal state of the soul in the world to come. In attempting to understand Maimonides' reading of classical texts, Nahmanides noted that Maimonides' view of the sequence of eschatological rewards derived from the latter's understanding of the term olam ha-ba. According to Nahmanides, Maimonides could say that ha-olam ha-ba was not a world to be created in the future but one that is already in existence, one into which the souls of the righteous enter immediately after death, because Maimonides understood the Hebrew expression as it was used by Andalusians. Only among the latter, Nahmanides claimed, would one find the usage of the expression ha-olam ha-ba as the state of immortality enjoyed by the soul at the present time immediately after the death of the body. Not only was Nahmanides right that Andalusians used the words ha-olam ha-ba in that sense, but evidence can also be adduced that they even used the single word olam and its inflections in that sense. Abraham Maimuni (Maimonides' son), brought up under an Andalusian curriculum, absorbed such usage as a matter of course.... Thus, in his Milhamot ha-Shem, composed in defense of his father's eschatology, he cited in proof that the state of incorporeal bliss is one reached by the great sages even in the present world the Talmudic blessing:

עולמך תראה בחייך ואחריתך לחיי עולם

May you experience the eternity that is yours while you live, and may your future thus be of life eternal.

Years ago, there was an NBC religious programming series — aptly named, given our present exploration — "The Eternal Light." One of the most ambitious and memorable of those programs over the years was the one in which Rabbi Cohen taught for an hour — on site in such places as Granada, Cordova, and Toledo — about the flourishing Jewish culture in Muslim Spain. It was entitled "Sunlight and Shadow." Standing on the ground in Toledo, he recited the words of another of those beloved poets, Solomon ibn Gabirol. It was a short excerpt from his long poem *"Keter Malkhut,"* which to this day forms a part of the Yom Kippur liturgy in many Sephardic synagogues.

SOLOMON IBN GABIROL was an 11th-century Andalusian poet and Jewish neo-platonic philosopher. He published over a hundred poems, as well as works of biblical exegesis, philosophy, ethics and even satire.

— ADAPTED FROM WIKIPEDIA

Solomon ibn Gabirol, *Keter Malkhut*, from §30

מִי יַגִּיעַ לְחָכְמָתֶךָ
בְּתִתְךָ לַנֶּפֶשׁ כֹּחַ הַדַּעַת אֲשֶׁר בָּהּ תִּקּוּעָה.
וַיְהִי הַמַּדָּע יְסוֹדָהּ.
וְעַל כֵּן לֹא יִשְׁלוֹט עָלֶיהָ כְּלָיוֹן
וְתִתְקַיֵּם כְּפִי קְיוּם יְסוֹדָהּ.
וְזֶה עִנְיָנָהּ וְסוֹדָהּ:
וְהַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחֲכָמָה לֹא תִרְאֶה מָוֶת.

O Lord, who can reach Thy wisdom?
For Thou gavest the soul the faculty of knowledge that is fixed therein,
And knowledge is the fount of her glory.
Therefore hath destruction no power over her,
But she maintaineth herself by the stability of her foundation,
For such is her nature and secret;
The soul with her wisdom shall not see death.

In reading those words from Toledo, he explained that Ibn Gabirol was teaching us how to gain immortality, as it were, in this life, just as Abraham Maimuni and others had insisted we should strive to do. And I suspect that in a very deep place inside his mortal self, Rabbi Cohen might have felt that this is, after all, all the immortality that we truly need.

Additional excerpt from
'Keter Malkhut' ('The Royal Crown') **Solomon ibn Gabirol**

My God, I know that those who plead
To you for grace and mercy need
All their good works should go before,
And wait for them at heaven's high door.
But I have no good deeds to bring,
No righteousness for offering,
No service for my Lord and King.

Yet do not hide your face from me,
Nor cast me out far from you;
But when you command my life to cease,
O, may you lead me forth in peace
To the world to come, to dwell
Among your pious ones, who tell
Your inexhaustible glories.

There let my portion be with those
Who arose in eternal life;
There to purify my heart right,
In your light to see the light.
Raise me from the deepest depths to share
Heaven's endless joys of praise and prayer,
That I may evermore declare:
Though you were angered, Lord, I will give thanks to you,
For now your wrath is past, and you do comfort me.

In speaking about the Sabbath, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel used the phrase, "Eternity utters a day." And here the favor is returned, as a particular day — the day at the beginning of Tishri — utters eternity and presents it to us, if only we would pay attention. This idea was a very precious one to my teacher, who taught us that the rabbis of Andalusia understood the talmudic blessing "may you see your *olam* in your lifetime" to mean that a state of spiritual bliss and blessedness can be reached even in the present world.

So back to the words *Harat Olam*. The great Hebrew linguist Abba Ben David noted that *Harat* came to be used in modern Hebrew in such phrases as הרת גורל and הרת סכנות. The meanings are "fraught with destiny" and "fraught with dangers," because, he said, that's what הרת had always really meant. And so, for Rabbi Cohen, היום הרת עולם meant what those poets and philosophers were pointing to: "Today is fraught with Eternity." Except that Rabbi Cohen characteristically preferred to give it a somewhat more earthy sound: "Today is pregnant with Eternity."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What would it mean for you to say that Rosh Hashana is a day pregnant with Eternity?

And that is our third meaning. Rosh Hashana is pregnant with eternity — for if we take what is offered to us on that holy day, we perhaps can bring forth into our lives a long view, a broad view, a view from eternity that can put our time-bound travails into perspective. And then, of course, the rest of the *piyyut* follows. Will we be like children — seeing ourselves as part of an unending, timeless chain of which we are eternally a part — or will we be and live like mere servants, just playing out a utilitarian quid pro quo that will in the end die with us? That is the choice that is הרת גורל — fraught with destiny.

IV. Parenthood

Finally, a most personal reading by Sara Friedland Ben Arza, a contemporary teacher of Torah, midrash, and Hasidut and an affiliate of the spiritual leadership organization Beit Hillel.

> **Sara Friedland Ben Arza,**
> ***"Harat Olam — On the Birth of the World on Rosh Hashana"***
>
> The use of birth imagery for creation is not common in Jewish sources, and this is understandable, given the transcendence of the God of Israel. Birth images assume a continuum of species identity between the begetter and the begotten. And in the Jewish world, even though the Shekhinah may place itself in this world, and even though humans are created in the image of the deity, there is yet an unbridgeable gap between an exalted and eternal God and a limited creature. For that reason, the use of other images for the creation of humans was preferred.

She is nevertheless going to take on the monotheistic challenge by bringing us back to the understanding of the opening phrase of the prayer as indeed referring to the birth of the universe and to God as the birther.

> Thus, our liturgical poem contains a two-fold deviation from the norm: It is exceptional in relating to the event of birth; but in addition, the image it conveys is

The Torah reading for first day of Rosh Hashana is Genesis 21:1-34, which deals with the conception and birth of Isaac and the banishing of Ishmael and Hadar. The Haftarah (from 1st Samuel 1:1-2:10) concerns Hannah's prayer to conceive and the dedication of her child to the temple. The Torah reading for the second day of Rosh Hashana is Genesis 22:1-24, the binding of Isaac. The Haftarah (from Jeremiah 31:1-19) contains the image of Rachel crying for her children as they go out into exile.

> not that of a male "seeder" of the world, but rather of a pregnant mother. We are focused on the emergence from the womb, i.e. on birth itself, as the metaphor for creation. In this way, a continuity, and an immanent connection, between the Creator and the creature receive an emphasis and a particular force.

Why, Ben Arza will ask, is the imagery of conception and birth inserted into a liturgy that is primarily about God's sovereignty and about judgment? And why just after the shofar is blown?

But first she makes another very perceptive observation. If the imagery of conception and birth stands out as unusual in the liturgy, which is mostly about other themes, that imagery — and the destiny of children — is at the very heart of every one of the scriptural readings that were chosen for this holiday.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How has the strong focus of the Torah and Haftarah readings of Rosh Hashana on conception and parenthood impacted your experience of the day?

We read about the vicissitudes of parenthood. The difficulties of conception; Sarah conceiving and then giving birth to Isaac; Ishmael being exiled from his home; Isaac nearly being lost through sacrifice, and — at least in the text — disappearing from his parents' lives in the sequel; Hannah conceiving and giving birth to Samuel and then having to give him away to the Sanctuary to fulfil her vow; and finally, Rachel, whose barrenness finally ended, left to cry over the children she bore out of pain, who have also gone into exile.

> It is true that the image of conception and birth for the world is quite out of the ordinary, and it appears explicitly in Rosh Hashana prayers only in this poem. However, it appears implicitly throughout the tapestry of Scriptural (Torah and Haftarah) readings for the two days of Rosh Hashana.
>
> ....
>
> This is a minimalist midrashic move. Without adding a single word of their own, the Sages presented us with a narrative about the day by placing these four readings at center stage. These chapters succeed in creating a correspondence between the relationship of the Holy One to the world and the relationship of parent to offspring. And it thus presents Rosh Hashana as a day of birth. The foundational story of the world born on this day, as it is laid out for us by means of these parental narratives, is the story of a world that halts its journey each year on its day of birth, and looks back with yearning, towards the womb from which it emerged. It is the story of a world in exile (like that of Ishmael and Ephraim), that senses the distance between it and its progenitor whenever it reaches the day of its conception and birth.
>
> Moreover, since the Scriptural readings do not make philosophical statements, but are rather stories, they invite us to read them in such a way that we can identify with

> more than one character in the tale. Indeed, this kind of deep reading can bring the worshiper and the reader to share in the pain of the Holy One — the parent — who must face the distancing of the children. On Rosh Hashana, say the Sages, God created the human being, and each year, on the day of the birth of humanity, God measures once again the gap that ever widens in proportion to humanity's maturity, and to the complexities of its life paths. By means of empathy with Abraham's need to part with his two sons, with Hannah who must relinquish her child to God's service, and with Rachel crying for her exiled children, it becomes possible to relate to the day of the creation not only from the point of view of judgment, but also from the perspective of compassion [compassion is a translation of *rahamim*, which comes from *rehem*, womb].

What is this, in the end, all about? Ben Arza's answer is that by analogizing our relationship to the Holy One to the relationship of parents and children — and using the vivid narratives of parents and children to evoke spiritual depth on these days — the tradition is trying to direct our thoughts to God through things we already know.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- In what ways do you find the metaphor of God as parent and humanity as children spiritually helpful or challenging?

We may not have experienced exactly what Sarah and Abraham and Hannah and Rachel went through. But many of us are parents, and all of us are children. Many or most of us have participated in the hopes and disappointments of planning for children. We have all been receivers of the gift of life from our parents, and we've insisted on taking those lives in the directions we wanted to take them in. Parents have experienced their children's separation as an exile as much as they've known that the separation was inevitable.

Children, too, while traveling their own paths, have felt the pangs of separation each time they remember their parents' dreams for them, however unrealistic they were. An exile may be necessary, but it's still accompanied by pain. And sometimes there's a recognition that not every aspect of the separation was entirely necessary after all. Perhaps we can come to understand that our separation from God could be painful in just that way to the divine parent.

But what about the question of how this is all connected — as it is in the Mahzor — to the blowing of the shofar?

Here, Ben Arza draws our attention to a midrash in Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 32:

> When Abraham returned from Mount Moriah, Samael (Satan) was piqued that he had not succeeded in foiling Abraham's willingness to go through with God's command. So he came to Sarah, and said, "Have you heard the news?" Sarah said, "No." He said "Your old man took young Isaac and offered him up as a sacrifice, and the child wailed (ילל) since he could not be saved. Immediately, Sarah began to cry and to wail. Three times crying, corresponding to 3 Teki'ot, and 3 times wailing, corresponding to 3 *Y'vavot* (what we call Shevarim and Teru'ah).

And there's the stunning connection between the crying of parents and the shofar sounds in the Musaf. We have sometimes sobbed and wailed about such things in our lives, have we not? And we've made sounds like the Shevarim and the Teruah of the Shofar.

Immediately after those sobbing and wailing sounds of the shofar, *Hayom Harat Olam* deliberately gives us the bold image of God's womb that conceived us so that we can understand that there is a Source that is always concerned and always willing to embrace us when a path we have chosen fails us. And it does this so that we can empathize with God, as it were, as the parent who can't hold onto children but can't quite bear to let them go either.

This *piyyut*, and its placement in the service, asks us to imagine a God Who Feels Pain — and wails, as it were — when the paths that bind us are destructive and when the paths we ourselves have chosen are not good ones and who longs to see us return.

Perhaps that is why the newest Conservative Mahzor (Lev Shalem) translates the phrase as "Today the world stands as at birth." It is not merely an anniversary of an act of creation that brings God and us together here, but a parent-child drama that is universal in scope, that is majestic in its ramifications, and that is enacted — not just remembered — each year. We are urged to think of God in the terms that we know best, having all been children even if we are not all parents.

It is of the essence of literary artistry to produce words with a multiplicity of valences, each of which addresses a deep human need and aspiration. In the case of *Hayom Harat Olam*, the author has managed in 32 Hebrew words to touch our anxieties about judgment and self-judgment, our need for hope in our lives, our sense that there is an eternity of which we are a part, and the hurts and the joys that come with familial love. The upcoming Days of Awe will surely be the most unusual and challenging that most of us have ever known. We should be grateful to this unknown spiritual artist for complicating and enriching our liturgy on these awesome days.

RABBI GORDON TUCKER is a Senior Fellow of the Kogod Research Center at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America. Previously, he was the Senior Rabbi at Temple Israel Center (a Conservative synagogue) in White Plains, New York , from 1994 to 2018. He received an A.B. from Harvard College, a Ph.d. from Princeton University, and Rabbinic Ordination from Jewish Theological Seminary.