

Create the World You Want to Live In

Erev Rosh Hashanah 5786

Rabbi Laila Haas

Temple Beth El of Boca Raton

It was 5 years and 9 months ago to the day, I was sitting in a pre-op room waiting to be wheeled back for a procedure. The nurse had just finished finding the one and only vein I had left capable of drawing blood after months of blood tests. She placed the IV in my arm and before leaving she gently laid her hand on my back and gave me a comforting smile. I was now, alone, and found myself relishing this moment of stillness.

During my year and a half-long IVF journey, it was rare to find a moment when I was not consumed by the rigorous process of timed injections throughout the day, medications, doctor appointments, scans, and weekly blood tests. I became a highly tuned machine in service to the science that I prayed, God willing, would give us a healthy baby to call our own. I lived with an underlying sense of worry that I kept buried very deep within. I became consumed with the routine prescribed by my doctor. I was highly focused, I didn't miss an injection time, or one step along the way because I knew the consequences would push me further from my dream, a baby.

It was an emotional whirlwind. I cautiously acknowledged the little wins and wholeheartedly experienced the disappointments.

So, with the blessing of a quiet moment, in the pre-op room, I closed my eyes and imagined the world Will and I would create, together, as parents. This was the first time, in many, many months, I had allowed myself to dream. To dream of Will as a daddy. To dream of a little voice calling out, mama. To dream of the tender moments that would sustain the world we would bring into being.

I took out my notebook, flipped to a blank page and began writing in detail what I wanted this world to look like. I exhaled. The words flowed from a place I had hesitated to access, for fear of putting a *k'eyin harah* on the process. At the bottom of the page, I scribbled my prayer to God. I folded the paper and held it tightly.

Once in the operating room, they brought Will in, and the doctor explained to us, we'd be able to watch on the screen, as the embryo was transferred and then implanted. I asked if I could read my prayer at the exact moment of transfer, He said, "of course, I'll let you know when." A

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few moments went by, I heard, “it's time.” I opened the folded piece of paper, held on to Will's hand and began:

“O God, may we be blessed with the sacred opportunity to partner with You, in the work of creation.

May we know the incredible gift of this precious embryo transforming into a healthy and vibrant baby whom we promise to love completely.

May we be blessed to be their parents and guide them to walk in your ways, live by your Torah and create a world worthy of your blessing.

Hayom Harat Olam—may this be the day our world is created a new.

We offer this prayer, for the first time, out loud—for it has rested deeply, unspoken within the stillness of our souls.

Sh'ma Koleinu, Hear our prayer.”

I'll never forget the sound of the *Amen* that came from Will's soul and seeing the tears fall from the eyes of the doctor and nurses. Nine months later, we welcomed Asher, our Rosh Hashanah baby, and the world we dreamt of was born.

Tonight, we enter this sacred space, each of us, carrying prayers buried deep within our souls. As I look out, I know many of us carry worries, fears, and anxieties upon our hearts. As members of *Am Yisrael*, we feel the heaviness that accompanies us this year—war continues to be waged, we feel the hurt of pain and loss, and the darkness seems even darker than before.

Our world has shifted. We've experienced a dramatic rise in antisemitism. Deep fracture, radical extremes, and entrenched polarization fill our world. We feel far from one another. We are exhausted. The noise and uncertainties of our world have created such turmoil that even sitting here on the threshold of a New Year, it feels naive to conceive of the possibility that 5786 will bring better, brighter days. Many of you have shared with me that when thinking about the challenges we face in our world, you feel powerless, defeated, and that change is out of reach. I know it feels hard, it feels hard for me too.

I recently heard Krista Tippet speak. She is a thought leader and host of the podcast, *On Being*. The wisdom she shared really inspired me. She said “the world has only ever changed because human beings imagined something else. You have to live into the world you want to live in.”

Our tradition teaches something very similar. We, human beings, were created with the unique ability to partner with God in the work of creation. (Rabbi Abraham Joshua) Heschel said, “*God’s dream is to not to be alone, but to have humanity as a partner in the drama of continuous creation.*”

Every morning in our prayers we recite: “*Blessed are You, Adonai our God...who in goodness renews every day, the work of creation.*”

Every day, the world is created and recreated. This means, creation was not just a moment in time. It's not just a story we tell. Creation happens every day, and we, human beings, are bestowed with the responsibility, the sacred obligation, of being God's partners in the work.

On Rosh Hashanah we recite the words, *Hayom Harat Olam*—which is often translated as “Today is the birthday of the world”, but to me, that suggests a celebration of a past moment in time. Or we read it translated as, “Today the world is created” well then, that suggests that the work has been done for us.

What do these words, *HaYom Harat Olam*, actually mean, and where do they come from? The words were first spoken by the Prophet Jeremiah during a dark time. The world around him was crumbling. Corruption and sin surrounded him. He was in great pain that the people would not heed his warnings. In frustration and anger he cried out to God and to all humanity,

אֲמִי קִבְּרִי וְרַחֲמָה הַרְתָּ עוֹלָם

“I wish my mother had been, “*harat olam*”, pregnant forever”—had never birthed me into this world. (Jeremiah 20:17)

The rabbis took these words, spoken by a distraught soul, surrounded by darkness, and looked deeper. The word, *Olam* not only means forever, but it also means, world, and *Harat*, means, conception. They placed the phrase intentionally in our Rosh Hashanah liturgy, “*HaYom, Today, Harat Olam, the world is conceived.*” Thus, framing the day as one of new beginnings and possibilities. The rabbis are teaching us something profound. From a place of deep despair and a world of darkness can come the light of potential.

Generations later, we find ourselves living in a time of upheaval and uncertainty, and these words serve as a powerful charge: Each of us has the ability, *harat olam*, to conceive the world we wish to create; even and maybe, especially, during difficult and dark times. The world we conceive is within us— in our mind, in our soul, and in our deeds. We carry the world we dream of within us, it becomes part of the essence of who we are. *Hayom Harat Olam*, is not a declaration that today, Rosh Hashanah, is the birthday of the world. Rather, as Rabbi Karyn

Kedar teaches, it is an aspirational expression of potential, of what we will create and bring into being.

The Torah begins:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים:

When God began to consider, conceptualize, and conceive the world, God wanted to create...*Vayomer Elohim*, God said, *Y'HI*. Let there be.

God allowed Godself to dream, to imagine the world they wanted to create. And then God said, *VA'YHI*, and there was.

Just as God began with "*Let there be...*" so too, do we, begin the creation of our world with the visions we dare to imagine. Of course, dreaming is only the seed. Rabbi Sacks taught: "between the dream and reality lies the struggle, there lies the work. Imagination is only the first step. It's the will and the desire that are the bridge that carry us toward "*VA'YHI*, and there was."

The long arc of Jewish history reveals how our people have repeatedly risen from darkness to dream and create worlds of possibility.

In the year 70 CE, when the Temple in Jerusalem was burning, and our people's world seemed destroyed, the sages reimagined what it meant to live as Jews. No longer would we need to travel to one holy spot to find God. They conceived of and created a world where we could speak to the Divine from our souls. Personal prayer was born from destruction.

In the 16th century, as a result of the Spanish Expulsion, the mystics made their way to *Tzfat* and reimagined their spiritual lives, finding God in trees, grasses, and all living things. From terror and loss, they conceived of and created a world where they could express their faith, through joy and song.

After the liberation of the concentration camps, Holocaust survivors in DP camps allowed themselves to dream again. These temporary communities became sites of weddings, births, schools, and theater groups. They refused to let despair define them. From the dust of devastation, they conceived of and created a world for the living.

Theodor Herzl declared: "*Im Tirtzu Ein Zo Aggadah*"—"If you will it, it is no dream" and fifty-two years after he conceived of the world he wished to create, the founders of Israel signed the Declaration of Independence and a Sovereign Jewish State in our homeland, was born.

Days after the tragedy of October 7th, those who survived the Nova Festival in Israel, allowed themselves to dream of a world that would help bring redemption to broken hearts and return, *nishmat chayyim*, the breath of life, back to the souls that had survived the unimaginable. From blood-soaked fields, they conceived of and created the “Tribe of Nova” and a transformative organization, committed to healing, was born.

My friends, to conceive the world you want to live in, you must first allow yourself to dream. Take a moment to imagine, what does the world you want to live in, look like? What will the generations who come after us inherit because we in this moment, dared a different world into being! Allow yourself the time to dream! Accept the responsibility to partner with God and commit this year to being a creator.

“Being a creator is not reserved for artists—it is the essence of being human.” Rick Rubin, in his book “The Creative Act”, says, “It is not about waiting for inspiration but about showing up, noticing, imagining, and daring to begin.”

Every word we speak, every relationship we nurture, every injustice we confront is part of the great canvas of creation. The small decisions—how we respond to anger, greet a stranger, show up for those we love, how we engage with others in the everyday moments—all these aspects shape the texture of the world we create. On Rosh Hashanah, we declare: *Hayom harat olam*—today the world is conceived. It's not a once upon a time story. *HaYom*, Today, this moment, our world is conceived. Tomorrow it is our responsibility to begin bringing it into being!

So here is what I want you to do: in the morning, before you come to services, take out a pencil and a blank piece of paper. Find your space of stillness and start to sketch the world you want to live in. Be specific. What does it look like? Feel like? What is at its core? Notice how it makes you feel to do this kind of work. Keep that sketch by your bed. Every morning before you get up, look at it and ask yourself: What am I able to do, today, to create this world?

Remember, the process of creation happens every day, so add to it, erase something, scribble more, recreate the vision. Dream up something new and better, more loving. Let's promise each other, we won't wait for more time to pass or for circumstances to change, in order to begin. Take tonight to dream. In the morning, let's dare to begin. To begin creating and living into the world we want to live in.

I opened tonight with words of prayer, and I want to conclude with one from Rabbi Naomi Levy:

“May you come to see what is inside you waiting to be born...You have the power to give it life. Break through, break free. Today is the day you get to decide what will live only in your dreams and what will be born and light up the world.”

Hayom Harat Olam—today your world is conceived and tomorrow may you bring into being!

Amen.