

The Rig Veda, one of the ancient holy texts of Hinduism, contains a creation poem that is remarkably similar to Genesis 1. It goes like this:

There was not then what is nor what is not.

There was no sky, and no heaven beyond the sky.

What power was there? Where? Who was that power?

Was there an abyss of fathomless waters?

There was neither death nor immortality then.

No signs were there of night or day.

The ONE was breathing by its own power, in deep peace.

Only the ONE was: there was nothing beyond.

Darkness was hidden in darkness.

The all was fluid and formless.

Therein, in the void, by the fire of fervour

arose the ONE.

And in the ONE arose love. Love the first seed of soul.

Isn't that interesting? There is the same rhythmic stateliness, the same starting point of darkness and fluidity. And what the Rig Veda says explicitly and Genesis implicitly is that all creation began when in the One, love arose. "Love the first seed of soul." Genesis observes repeatedly that God saw that it was good, a statement of love that led, every day, to more creation and more love.

This is a story without any conflict or suspense. When God is the only actor, it seems like everything works perfectly, and every new day only makes creation better. The very absence of any conflict or problem to be solved is actually kind of

like the experience of being in God's creation, which I did twice last week more intentionally than I usually do. Last Sunday was our anniversary, and Tom and I packed a picnic and went to Ewing Park where we ate, watched Frisbee golfers, and walked around. We just walked in the park, noticing things, not making lists of action items or intending to do anything at all about what we saw. We just were in it. Ewing Park is no wilderness, but it's removed and quiet, and being there allowed us to forget about schedules and to be somewhat more present to the moment than either of us usually is.

Then on Labor Day we took our Salvadoran friends up to Ledges, a brilliant idea that about 5000 other people had had, but fortunately Ledges is pretty big. They had not been there, and the kids *and* parents loved wading in the creek, making one of those dams that you do, like this time we're actually going to dam Pea's Creek with its own rocks unlike the ten thousand other times people have failed. We sort of wandered up the creek, counting crawdads and rearranging rocks to suit ourselves, exclaiming at wildflowers and butterflies. Then we hiked for a while, until the kids fell over themselves laughing at the hilarious insight that people desperately long to come to America, only to find that what you do in America is take long walks on steep cliffs. Again, it was a level of engagement *and* tranquility that I rarely experience except in a natural setting.

So my brilliant conclusion is that when we make the effort—more of an effort for some of us than for others—to get out there and *be*, it's a little like the very experience of the creation: it starts with love, and it just unfolds as you go, without a plot or a conflict, just being what it is and letting you be what you are. That may be

the particular gift that is important to us in this time and culture, when technology makes it possible for us to ignore our natural surroundings and other people without even realizing what we're cutting out of our lives. Much as technology enriches our lives, much as we depend on it, we have not developed the spiritual and ethical depths that we need to know how to keep it from owning us . . . and ultimately destroying God's green earth.

The scripture reading today is not complicated. There's no subtle, tricky idea to get across, no complicated call to action. It just tells us that God made everything and loves it all, including us. I suppose the tricky part now is developing the spiritual and ethical depths in our species to avoid destroying what God creates. A little over a month ago, Jews observed Tisha B'Av, the midsummer day of Jewish mourning for the ancient Temples in Jerusalem, and the day of hope for a transformed future. Rabbi Arthur Waskow, an American author, suggested that in 2017 this day of mourning be focused on the endangered Earth as the Temple of all humanity and all life-forms that live upon our planet. He pointed out that the rabbis who wrote the Talmud identified the destruction of the Temple as a natural consequence of the human behavior that caused Adam and Eve to be expelled from the Garden. The exile that followed the destruction of the Temple is patterned on that original exile. But, Rabbi Waskow says,

The ancient rabbis also taught that on this very day of desolation, the Messiah was born, and hidden away till the world was ready for the Great Turning. From the seed of despair can grow the tree of life, determination to make healing happen.

With that in mind, he has written this poem for the lighting of a candle:

Between the Fires," by Rabbi Arthur Waskow

We are the generation that stands
between the fires:
Behind us the flame and smoke
that rose from Auschwitz and from Hiroshima
And from the burning of the Amazon forest;
Before us the nightmare of a Flood of Fire,
The flame and smoke that could consume all earth.
It is our task to make from fire not an all-consuming blaze
But the light in which we see each other fully.
All of us different, All of us bearing
One Spark.
We light these fires to see more clearly
That the Earth and all who live as part of it
Are not for burning.
We light these fires to see more clearly
The Rainbow in the many-colored faces of all life.
Blessed is the One within the many.
Blessed are the many who make One.

May the actions that we take bring us to deeper spiritual maturity and give us
renewed energy for all that we do to heal and restore this beautiful earth.