## [The Refrigerator – Parshat Bereisheet](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/parshat-bereisheet)

Sometimes it happens that a jar of something spills in the refrigerator. It is rare, in our home, for the refrigerator to be totally clean; usually it shows the signs of being well used. But when something spills, it crosses over from acceptable *shmootz*to a genuine crisis of muck. The spilled mess pushes me over the edge of complacency and drives me to clean not just the spilled stuff, but also the dirtiness in general. It is then, ironically, that *more dirtiness leads to more cleanliness.*

And so it is with the spiritual life.

When things are going well, there is a low level of discomfort that is easily tolerated without much effort. We can become lazy in our attentiveness. But when the “jar” of our expected routine “breaks,” when some crisis disrupts our sense of normalcy, causing the mind to rush and the emotions to flare more than usual, we are driven from the comfort of our ordinary laziness. It is then that we are again motivated to find our way back to the true peace within, the peace that lies not in the external and temporal, but in the Eternal Present within which all experience arises.

This sense of being driven out from our comfort, a universal experience fundamental to the human condition, is appropriately expressed in this first *parsha,* in the story of the expulsion from Eden:

וַֽיְשַׁלְּחֵ֛הוּ יְהוָ֥ה אֱלֹהִ֖יםמִגַּן־עֵ֑דֶן לַֽעֲבֹד֙ אֶת־הָ֣אֲדָמָ֔ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר לֻקַּ֖ח מִשָּֽׁם׃

*The Divinesentthem from the Garden of Eden, to work the soil from which they were taken.*

*(Bereisheet3:23)*

Adam and Eve are sent out of Eden because they “ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad.” In other words, they became conscious of the possibility of crisis. Rather than passively and unconsciously receive the moment as it unfolds, the way a fetus would in the womb, this *daat/knowledge*is imagining how things might go wrong;we might say this is the beginning of *worry.* It is also the beginning of ego, of the attempt to control our experience.

וַיְגָ֖רֶשׁ אֶת־הָֽאָדָ֑ם וַיַּשְׁכֵּן֩ מִקֶּ֨דֶם לְגַן־עֵ֜דֶןאֶת־הַכְּרֻבִ֗ים וְאֵ֨ת לַ֤הַט הַחֶ֙רֶב֙ הַמִּתְהַפֶּ֔כֶת לִשְׁמֹ֕ר אֶת־דֶּ֖רֶךְ עֵ֥ץ הַֽחַיִּֽים׃

*He drove the Adam out, and stationed east of the Garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery sword, ever-turning, to guardthe way to the Tree of Life.*

*(Bereisheet 3:24)*

When our awareness of crisis triggers the turning movement of the mind and the enflames the fire of the heart, driving us from our peace to “work the soil” and deal with our situation,our worry can eventually become compulsive, and we may come to feel as though we have been exiled forever (or worse, lose all memory of peace altogether). The plain meaning of the text seems to support this: “…*the fiery sword, ever-turning, to* ***guard (lishmor)*** *the way to the Tree of Life.”*This is the bitterly pessimistic view of human life that we sometimes see in Biblically based perspectives – that the Way back to The Garden, the *derekheitzhahayim,* is completely blocked to us in this life by the “fiery turning sword” that guards it.

But we can understand this word for “guard” – *lishmor –* in a different way by looking at some other passages:

שָׁמ֣֛וֹר אֶת־י֥וֹם֩ הַשַׁבָּ֖֨ת לְקַדְּשׁ֑֜וֹ כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר צִוְּךָ֖֣ ׀ יְהוָ֥֣ה אֱלֹהֶֽ֗יךָ

***Guard(shamor)****the Sabbath Day and keep it holy, as the Divine has commanded you.*

(Devarim 5:12)

This passage from the Ten Commandments says to “guard” the Sabbath. Does that mean that we are kept away from the Sabbath? Of course not! To “guard” doesn’t mean we are blocked from it; it means that we should not take it for granted, that we should recognize its sacredness so that we can enter into it more deeply.

Or how about this passage:

וְהָיָ֣ה עֵ֣קֶב תִּשְׁמְע֗וּן אֵ֤ת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים֙ הָאֵ֔לֶּה וּשְׁמַרְתֶּ֥ם

*And it will followif you listen to these rules and* ***guard (ushmartem)*** *them…*

(Devarim 7:12)

Does it mean to guard the rules so as to keep away from them? Of course not – it means the opposite. And this reveals the deeper dimension of the“fiery turning sword” – yes, the movement of the mind and the triggering of emotion drives us out from our peace, but it also serves as a beacon to bring us back, showing us exactly where to find the Path to the Tree of Life!*More dirtiness leads to more cleanliness.*

That is why the “guardian” of the Path is not just movement and fire, not just thought and emotion, but is also a *sword.* This is the sword of intention that directs us into *awareness of* thought and emotion, so that we need not be caught by them. And more than that, as we intensify our awareness of the movement of the mind and the fire of the heart, the quality of awareness itself comes to the foreground, showing us not only the Way Back to the Garden, but also revealing that the *Garden is who we really are,* beneath and beyond the mind and heart. The Tree of Life is not external; it is our own nervous system.

וַיַּשְׁכֵּן֩ מִקֶּ֨דֶםלְגַן־עֵ֜דֶןאֶת־הַכְּרֻבִ֗ים – *and caused to dwell east of the Garden of Eden the cherubim…*

The “east” is the place of the rising sun, the place of the dawn, reminding us: when we awaken in the morning and the mind is moving and the heart is agitated, let that “fiery turning sword” show you the way back to the Garden. Before you go out to “work the soil,” spend some time first with meditation, using the “sword” of intention to cast off the bonds of the temporal, dip into the spacious freedom of the Eternal Present, and nourish yourself with the Tree of Life.

It is a new year – let us recommit and deepen our practice – the Garden is waiting for you. I’ll be there with you tomorrow morning!

## ****More on Bereisheet...****

[**The Garden- Parshat Bereisheet**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-garden-parshat-bereisheet)

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| “Bereisheet Bara Elohim Et Hashamayim v’Et Ha’aretz-"In the beginning, Elohim created the heavens and the earth…”**What Is My Purpose?**When you awaken from sleep, is it because you’ve decided to awaken?Or, do you simply wake up when your body is finished sleeping?In sleep, there’s no deciding.Once you are awake, you are faced with the question:What shall I do? What is my purpose?Waking up itself solves nothing-There was no problem to begin with.But once awake, life becomes a problem.The universe springs into being-Does creation have a purpose?But “purpose” is itself something that’s created!“Purpose” is a thought; “purpose” is a thing.There cannot be a purpose for creation until after creation.Before, there is no problem.The universe comes into being because:Why not?Sometimes, after many months, I clean my car.My wife asks, “Why did you have to clean it now all of a sudden?”But the only answer is: Why Not?Before creation, there is no problem.After, all the problems.What is the solution to all the problems?Go back to before the problems!“Hinei Tov Me’od-Behold it was very good!”That is the Shabbat- the remembering that there were no problems before we got involved;In fact, there are still no problems.The “Before” never went anywhere, because it is not a thing.It is always right here.The Shabbat, the Garden- they were Here before Anything.From within the Garden, there is no problem with moving back into problems.From within Shabbat, there is no problem with moving back into time.Seeing from within the Garden, even outside the Garden is really still inside the Garden-For where can the Garden not be?Seeing from outside the Garden, even inside the Garden is just more of the same:“How can we manage to get back in?”“Once we get in, how can we make sure that we stay there?”But- The Garden is not “there.”Thought springs into being from No-Thought; in No-Thought, there is no problem.From No-Thought, why not think?“Eitz Hada’at Tov v’Ra-The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad…”Here we are amidst the trees of the Garden-Why not take a bite of the good and the bad?Of the This and the That?Of the Before and the After?But once you leave the Timeless, the Sword of Fire blocks your way back.What is the Sword of Fire?Nothing but thought!You can't decide to awaken-You can’t think your way back into the Garden-The Garden never went anywhere.But let thought cease, and you will see for yourself:The “Purpose” is to come back to No-Purpose-To the Place from which the Universe springs:“Y’hi Or- Let there be light!”To return to No-Purpose requires living with Great Purpose-The Purpose of Being Present.From There (which is always Here)We can create something beautiful-You, Me, and Others.The world is waiting!Do you not believe me?Don’t worry- it’s Friday afternoon! |

**The Pool- Parshat Bereisheet**

When I was about two or three years old, my parents took me on vacation.

I have a memory of a boy playing by the pool, filling his plastic bucket with water and splashing it on people. As I walked by him, he made an angry growling noise and threw some water on me.

Without a thought, I just pushed him into the pool and watched him slowly sink to the bottom. Immediately, a barrage of adults surged all around me. Men in suits threw off their jackets and dove into the water. In a moment he was safe, and I stood there watching in astonishment.

He coughed a bit, looked at me and said, “Next time I’ll push you in the pool!”

I wonder sometimes what my life would have been like if I had accidentally killed that boy, and I am so grateful that he was saved from my innocent but deadly push. At that age, I had no idea what the consequence of pushing him into the water would be. It was just an impulse.

As adults, we know that we can’t breathe underwater, and that we must constantly breathe to stay alive. And yet, there is a different kind of breathing that many people are barely aware of at all- not a physical breathing, but a kind of inner breathing, without which you can “drown” in your own life.

Meaning, you can “drown” in the “water” of your roles, your desires, your opinions, your memories, everything that seems to make up your life.

This “water”, however, actually exists only in only your mind. This “water” is nothing but thought!

The more continuous your stream of thinking, the less space there is to “breathe”- meaning, the less you can feel the openness and ease that is available when simply living in the present. This continuous stream of thinking is not malicious or evil; it is just an impulse. But it's an incredibly strong impulse.

Most people function on very little “breathing”. Their minds “come up for air” only occasionally, take a “breath”, then dive back into the waters of thought.

Some people, unfortunately, lose the ability to come up at all, and end up drowning in the stresses and pressures of life, all created by thought. For these people, there is no longer any ability to differentiate between thought and reality. Everything is seen as a projection of the mind.

Who will save them?

Is it possible to awaken from the dream of your own mind, to come up and breathe the life-giving air of the present?

It is possible, but to do it, you have to make the background the foreground.

For most, the present moment glows faintly in the background, while the foreground is filled with the noisy waters of thought.

But when the background becomes the foreground, the texture of this moment becomes bright, alive and new, as if seen for the first time. This is hinted at in the very first verse of the Torah. This week’s reading begins:

“Bereisheet bara Elokim et hashamayim v’et ha’aretz-

“In the beginning, the Divine created the heavens and the earth.“

The 12th century Kabbalistic text known as “The Bahir” equates the word “Reisheet”, which means “Beginning”, with the word “Hokhma”, which means “Wisdom” or “Consciousness”, by means of a verse that connects the two:

“Reisheet hokhmah yirat Hashem-

“The beginning of consciousness is awe of the Divinity of Existence…” (Psalm 111:10)

When your own awareness (Hokhmah) meets this moment, it has the quality of brightness, of newness (Reisheet).

This is also hinted at by the duality of “heavens and “earth”-

When the “heavens” of your awareness meet the “earth” of all of your sense perceptions- then everything is be-reisheet- with (be) the quality of beginning-ness (reisheet).

We’ve all known this newness at the very beginning of our lives. As an infant, you didn’t know your name. The infant has no story. Just like a cat rolling in the sun, like a bird flying in the sky, like a worm tunneling through the earth- the newborn is fresh and alive in this moment.

But then the story begins.

The child learns its name, its roles, its story, and the confusing mix between direct perception and all these mental narratives starts to obscure the present moment. As it says:

“V’ha’aretz hayta tohu vavohu, v’hoshekh al p’nai tahom-

“And the earth was confusion and chaos, with darkness on the face of the depths…”

But fortunately, there is a path out of this confusion:

“V’ruakh Elohim merakhefet al p’nai hamayim-

“And the Divine hovered over the face of the waters-“

Rather than drown in the waters of your mind, you can “hover” over it simply by consciously noticing what your mind is doing. In deciding to notice your own thoughts, you can command your inner “light” into the darkness:

“Vayomer Elohim ‘y’hi ohr’

“And the Divine said, ‘let there be light!’”

Simply notice what’s going on in your own mind: “There is a thought about such-and such.”

And when notice it, what happens?

You may find your mind becomes quiet all by itself, revealing an experience of Reality without the burden of mind, without the burden of time. Practice this often, and eventually a new light will be revealed:

“Vay’hi ohr!

“And there was light!”

This “light” is the dawning of the brightness that was there when you were a newborn, before you were a “someone”. It hasn’t changed! It was overlaid with narrative, but it never went anywhere.

This goodness of life in the present in not something you have to believe in. It’s not about philosophy. It’s something you can see directly:

“Vayar Elohim et ha’ohr ki tov-

“The Divine saw that the light was good!”

And so the Torah opens not merely with a cosmology or a mythology, but with a description of awakening- a Torah of Awakening.

Of all the Hassidic rebbes, Reb Zushia of Hanipole was particularly known for his simple wisdom that transcended the intellectual complexity characterizing so much of Jewish teaching.

According to one story, when asked to reveal his core teaching on what’s most important, he replied, “To me, the most important thing is whatever I happen to be doing in the moment.”

Again, none of this is to put down or devalue the mind and thinking. After all, you wouldn’t denigrate your clothing for not being your body! You wouldn’t insult a menu for not being food!

It’s only that when we confuse thought for reality, we tend to lose reality. Then we are literally living in a dream, and dreams can become nightmares.

Of course, bringing the power of awakening into its full potential for your life takes training and practice. Soon I’ll be launching a new opportunity for you to get that training and practice in this new year. Stay tuned!

As we enter the gates of Autumn and this Shabbat of Beginnings, may these opening words of Torah inspire us to not forget the inherent goodness, newness and freedom that is our birthright and nature-

-the ever-available, ever-flowing present moment.

Good Shabbos!

-b yosef