

**Hayom Harat Olam**  
**Rosh Hashanah Second Day Sermon 5784/2023**  
**Cantor David Margules**

Today is the birthday of the world.

*B'reishit bara elohim et hashamayim v'et haaretz.*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was void and without form, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. God said, let there be light, and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated between the light and the darkness. God called the light, "Day" and the darkness God called "Night". And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

The Torah tells the story of creation in just a few short sentences.

Out of nothingness, chaos, and darkness, God brings light and form into the world. The mysteries of creation are beyond our human capabilities and understanding. The opening verses of Torah debunk the notion that creation is some kind of cosmic accident. We are all here for a reason, and we must live to discern the purpose of our existence. I wish I could tell you that after this sermon all will become clear, but that's not how life works. We are all struggling to find our way in this world, to add our energy, our light, and our creativity in shaping this beautiful abode.

I came to California to be your Cantor in July of 1991. It was a new beginning for me, with a burst of creative passion, I dove head first, immersing myself in the traditions of the *makom*. I reveled in learning new melodies, fostering new relationships, and engaging with so many congregants and families. The b'nai mitzvah program was robust and I worked to train a new generation to grasp the Torah as their own. What a joy it has been to both teach and learn from our youth.

Embracing the new meant leaving the place where I grew up. Like Abraham, Lech L'cha meant going forth from New York, family, friends, and familiarity.

Thirty three years later I have many fond memories living, praying, and singing with this blessed community. Marrying Marney, raising Benny and Danielle, embracing our granddaughter Ava, there is much to be grateful for.

*Modim anachnu lach.*

I remember fondly Rabbi Michael Barenbaum meeting me at SFO, and driving north for the first time. We crossed the Golden Gate Bridge, drove up 101, and glancing west saw the mountain. He proudly told me, "That's Mt. Tam, it's the highest peak in Marin county."

Michael was warm and welcoming. He and Hanna opened their home to me. In fact when I arrived I lived in their house.

Like the creation story, Michael wanted to show me Gan Eden, all the beautiful things that he knew and loved in Marin.

He took me to see the congregation's cemetery at the end of 5th Street, a holy place where the community could bury their dead. We walked into the domed sanctuary on North San Pedro road and I could feel the power of prayer. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and I was grounded in my new home, a place where I could be creative and share my voice with the community. Thirty-three years later, and I still experience the same gratitude year after year.

On this Rosh Hashanah, the world is created anew. Time stands still for a moment.

Haven't we all had the experience of time taking forever to pass, yet on this birthday of the world, where has all the time gone? Thirty three years pass in an instant. Years working alongside wonderful gifted rabbis. Michael Barenbaum, Robert Daum, Stacy Friedman, Michael Lezak, Lara Regev, Elana Rosen-Brown each have taught us so much, yet time can only be measured in the instant of the present. How can we begin to understand the story of the creation of the world?

Haven't we all had the experience of time taking forever, life dragging on endlessly, and feeling either stuck or worse?

Yet at other times life races by and suddenly our entire life has passed and we weren't paying attention? We've muted difficult moments that we didn't want to hear, and fast forwarded through moments to avoid facing life's challenges head on. Let us live in the present, taking on the teshuva we must do, to learn, change, and grow.

Reflecting on the relationships I've formed over three decades and connections I've made, I thought some things would last forever.

I thought I would hear Martin Brotman read *B'reishit* on this second day of Rosh Hashanah forever.

I can still hear Martin Friedman's voice intoning the story of Jonah on the afternoon of Yom Kippur.

They're both a blessed memory now, yet their light and warmth continue to embrace and bless us.

On this birthday of the world, we are asked to consider who we've been, and who we want to be. There is much work to do! Much of the work is individual, but there is also the work we need to do as a community.

As I ready myself for retirement, I'm grateful that I have helped us transition to our new holy space.

Having spent the last year plus without our sanctuary and synagogue building, we have proven that Rodef Sholom is way more than a building or temple structure. We are a community.

We are a sacred people. We are a tribe of good doers. We are resilient. We adapt to temporary displacement.

Our prayers are more than words recited by rote in a familiar space. We have proved that over and over by praying in our neighborhood parks, congregants' homes, on hikes by the sea, via zoom and facebook. We found ways to meet face to face during COVID as we celebrated Chanukah and Purim waving to each other from a caravan of cars passing through our parking lot, safely connecting our community in the midst of isolation.

Connecting as a community around the county I'm reminded of my first glance at Mt. Tam and how blessed we are to live in this part of the world where nature touches us so deeply.

It turns out that we can survive as a people, as a community, as pursuers of peace without a building, and yet how exciting it will be that soon we will be in our new holy space?

I've watched with pride our new building going up. We are emulators of the creative force that we celebrate on this holy day.

*V'asu li mikdash, v'shachanti b'tocham.*

Build me a sanctuary that I may dwell among you.

A few weeks ago our torah study group focused on Ki Tavo and struggled with Bikkurim (bringing the first fruits of the land to God for sacrifice).

The Talmud specified that the verse to bring *bikkurim* “when you come into the land . . . *and you will possess it and settle in it*”— teaches us that the first fruits of the land should be presented to God only after the conquest and allocation of the land have been completed. (which could take 7-14 years)

The Sifrei, on the other hand, places the emphasis on the same verse’s opening words—“And it shall be when you come into the land”—to imply that the obligation to bring *bikkurim* applied immediately upon the Jews’ entry into the land.

You can see my looming retirement at the end of June brings these two insights together. I will want to bring my first fruits according to the Sifrei tradition and offer my prayers upon immediately entering our new holy space.

I have felt God's presence even during this time of transition and a lot of that is because of you.

Praying with Stacy and Elana has become such a deep part of who I am. I am so grateful to them to share in this holy work and creative process.

Showing up to pray, to work, to sing, to laugh, to teach, to learn, to study, to rejoice. All of this has made me so very happy.

May this New Year 5784 be filled with much joy, nachas, and celebration, as we enter our new gates, and our new synagogue home.

*Kein Y’hi Ratzon.*