

## ***Parshat Ki Tavo: Creation, A Theme of Shabbat and of the High Holidays*** Meditation by Rabbi Debra Orenstein

Shabbat is the culmination of Creation, and we celebrate the world that God created in our observances of Shabbat. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel observed that Shabbat shifts our attention from “the world of creation” to “the creation of the world.” That spiritual insight about Shabbat applies equally well to Rosh Hashanah, which marks the anniversary of Creation.

The liturgy of Yom Kippur, as well as Rosh Hashanah, relates to humanity as part of Creation. The poem *Ki Hinei Kachomer/We Are as Clay in Potter’s Hand*, for example, imagines God as an Artisan-Creator who fashions us.

The Torah portion *Ki Tavo* begins with a famous litany, quoted in the Passover seder, which was originally recited by Jews bringing their first fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem:

A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down to Egypt, and sojourned there with very few in number but became there a great, mighty, and populous nation. The Egyptians harmed us, and afflicted us, and gave us hard labor. And when we cried out to Adonai, the God of our ancestors, Adonai heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression. Adonai brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great awesomeness, and with signs, and with wonders. God has brought us to this place, and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land, which you, Adonai, have given me. – Deuteronomy 26: 5-10.

In a few short verses, the history of the Jewish people is relayed – from the very beginning to this, for Moses, *future* moment in which an individual worshipper will bring his first fruits to the Temple. The litany draws connections between ancient Aram and the Land of Israel and between the bounty of Creation and the offerings Jews bring to the Temple. This recitation relates both the flow of history and the cycles of the natural world to Jewish identity.

The following are meditations, exercises, and discussion questions to help you contemplate Creation this Shabbat and increase your connection to it.

1. If you were to offer a holy gift from the world of creation, what would it be, and what “script” would you write for its presentation?
2. Take a prayerful walk in nature or practice “walking mediation,” in which you mindfully pay attention to the physical sensations of walking, in the same way that other mindfulness meditators pay attention to their breathing, as an anchor for the mind.
3. Engage in paired walking meditation. Walk with a friend or loved one. Stop after each step and alternate making an observation that occurs *in that moment*. Partners are not meant to respond to each other and build a conversation, but rather to see what comes up in each moment. For example, you each take a step, and partner A observes, “It’s quiet.” Then you each take a step, and partner B observes, “I feel close to you.” After the next step, Partner A might say, “Slope.” Then partner B might notice, “Wind.” The walk is slow and often peaceful. You notice many things in yourself and in Creation that you would otherwise rush by.
4. Consider: what can you do this year to help preserve the world that God created, in light of the degradation of our ecosystems and planet?
5. Discuss with a friend or write in a journal about the following quotation from the Chafetz Chaim: “The Sabbath signifies an abdication on that day of the right to be master of certain things enjoyed during the other six days. It means not only resting oneself, but letting other things rest; creating nothing – neither fire nor sound, except when it is for the sake of the Creator. A Sabbath so observed is an essential affirmation of faith.”
  - How can refraining from creation honor Creation?
6. How might you bring an appreciation of Creation into your Shabbat observance? For example, you could:
  - Plant an herb garden and use the herbs from it to season your Shabbat meals or provide scents for your havdalah spice box?
  - Take a regular Shabbat walk in nature
  - Study how the work traditionally forbidden on Shabbat is not limited to hard labor but also encompasses creative endeavors.
  - What else could you practice or study?