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*BronfmanTorah: commentary on the Torah that draws on the lives, skills, and insights of our community*

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# Beginning Again

Daphna Ezrachi (Amitei Bronfman '05) | BronfmanTorah | Sukkot 2017

***Daphna (Daphi) Ezrachi (Amitei Bronfman '05)** currently lives in Princeton with her husband Yitz Landes (05') and their son, Shai Aviv. Before moving to the US, Daphna was an educator in Israel, including with The Bronfman Fellowship. This September she started a Masters in Urban Planning at NYU's Wagner School of Public Service.*

The month of Tishrei offers a unique opportunity to think about beginnings. On Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we are given the unbelievable opportunity to start afresh, to recharge ourselves with intention and go forward on a better path. Sukkot offers one more stop on the way to the new year in which we spend our days in a temporary home, acknowledging, at least at a very simplistic level, what it means to be out of a protected and permanent home. On Simchat Torah, the last days of the Chagim, we encounter another beginning as we finish, and promptly begin, the yearly cycle of the Torah reading.

For me, this coincides with another good reason for thinking about beginnings – having my first child. While pregnant, for months you carry a new life and all you can do is hope and pray for a timely (בשעה טובה) and healthy start. Until our son Shai was born, I had done everything I could think of to ensure that he would have that right start. Of course, just like most women, labor was totally different than what I had hoped for. Coming to terms with the labor I did have reminded me of a

shiur I had attended a few years ago with my teacher, Rabba Tamar Duvdevani.

Tamar's shiur was dedicated to the topic of beginnings and highlighted two models of beginnings that we can find in Judaism. We find the two models in the opening verses of Parshat Bereshit, which are read on Simchat Torah, and in the opening lines of the Mishna.

"When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering over the waters, God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And it was evening and it was morning, first day."

Translation by Robert Alter, "The Five Books of Moses."

א בראשית, ברא אלהים, את השמים, ואת  
הארץ. ב והארץ, הייתה תהו ובהו, וחשך, על-  
פני תהום; ורוח אלהים, מרחפת על-פני  
המים. ג ויאמר אלהים, יהי אור; ויהי-אור. ד  
וירא אלהים את-האור, כי-טוב; ויבדל אלהים  
בין האור ובין החשך. ה ויקרא אלהים לאור,  
יום, ולחשך קרא לילה; ויהי-ערב ויהי-בקר, יום  
אחד."

"From when may one recite Shema in the evening? From the time when the Kohanim go in to eat their Terumah [produce consecrated for priestly consumption], until the end of the first watch – so says Rabbi Eliezer. And the Sages say: Until midnight. From when may one recite Shema in the evening? From the time when the Kohanim go in to eat their Terumah [produce consecrated for priestly

מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבית? משעה  
שהכהנים נכנסים לאכול בתרומתן, עד סוף  
האשמורה הראשונה; דברי רבי אליעזר. וחכמים  
אומרים עד חצות. רבן גמליאל אומר: עד שיעלה  
עמוד השחר."

'משנה ברכות, א, א'

consumption], until the end of the first watch – so says Rabbi Eliezer. And the Sages say: Until midnight.”

From *Sefaria*

The opening verses of Bereshit declare a dramatic beginning. The earth was “תהו ובהו,” “welter and waste,” and God created everything from nothing. The words take us step by step in what appears to be God’s detailed plan for the creation of life. The opening of the Mishna, however, leaves us with a very different feeling. It is as if we entered the first class of the semester but missed the opening remarks of the professor. We join the discussion that has already started. We might not be sure what is going on, but the text invites us to try it out.

When I think back, I understand that I have experienced both kinds of beginning in my life. There were instances when I came to a new program or workplace with great awareness and intention. There were other times when I found myself immersed in something without even planning on it. And then there were also times when I had planned, meticulously, how something would start, only to find that it had started without me or in a very different way.

I had “trained” for natural birth – yoga, exercise, reading extensively; I had a doula. When I needed an emergency C-section, I wept through it. Three things helped me come to terms with this experience: I healed well; I recognized that I got the big picture ‘goal’ – I’m healthy and my baby is healthy; and I came to terms with the ongoing lesson of parenting: I do not control things.

These two models have taught me, on the one hand, the importance of intention and reflection and, on the other hand, the importance of the ability to be flexible and open-minded to new experiences. I held, and still hold, these two models in my head as I was waiting to become a mother, a very new and uncontrollable adventure.

As the new year begins, I hope that many new and good things will come to all of

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us. I hope that we will be able to start things with intention and dedication but also be open to joining something that has already started, even if we don't know where it will take us.

*Continue the conversation. Send Daphna your thoughts:  
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*P.S.: We're always looking for more dvar torah  
writers. Interested? Contact [stefanie@byfi.org](mailto:stefanie@byfi.org). We look forward to hearing  
from you.*

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