B'reisheet   October 14, 2017

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים, אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ, הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ...

Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was void and formless…

The biblical stories of creation appear as carefully-constructed, meticulously-worded narratives with repeated motifs and measured phrases - making "order out of chaos" while establishing the origins of the earth and humankind.

So, too, can the narrative of the creation of the State of Israel be unfolded as a deliberate and meticulous plan. Out of an underdeveloped land in the late 19th century, early Zionists began to construct communities that would soon evolve into a flourishing, democratic nation.

One of the engineers who helped initiate the building of the State of Israel was Arthur Ruppin. Ruppin moved to Palestine and to the WZO offices in Yaffo—The Palestine Bureau (also known as "Eretz Yisrael Office"). Ruppin's efforts were in response to the practical Zionists who maintained that without significant prior settlement in Palestine it would be impossible to convince any of the Great Powers to grant legal provisions for creating a Jewish nation. Objecting to this stance, political Zionists urged for the Palestinian Bureau to secure a charter before any major settlements be established in Palestine. Ruppin's efforts on behalf of "practical Zionism" helped lead to the second *Aliya*. He was able to secure loans for establishing Tel-Aviv; he negotiated land purchases in the Jezreel Valley, Carmel, Afula and Jerusalem—places where Jewish communities could establish *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* (cooperatives that enabled economic security for new settlers). Ultimately the two stances, both political and practical Zionism, merged and policy making and diplomacy took place concurrently with community building.

Ruppin did not shy away from politics. In 1925, along with Henrietta Szold, Martin Buber, and others, he helped create *Brit Shalom*, a peace movement that called for a binational Arab and Jewish state in Palestine. Speaking at the fourteenth Zionist Congress in Vienna in 1925, Ruppin stated, "There is the possibility... to establish in Palestine a community where both nations, with no ruling advantage (*Vorherrshcaft*) to the one, nor oppression of the other, shall work shoulder to shoulder in full equality of rights towards the economic and cultural development of the country." (Lavsky, Hagit, "German Zionists

and the Emergence of Brit Shalom" in Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira's *Essential Papers on Zionism*, New York: New York University Press, 1996, p.664). Disillusioned by continued Arab riots in the late 1920s, Ruppin and others lost faith in this ever becoming a viable reality.

Every culture has its creation story. The early Israelites placed their faith in a single G-d who they believed was responsible for creating all of existence from nothingness. The texts that explain human existence and the environs in which people live are a never-ending narrative. Ongoing commentary and the constant development of religious laws impose structures that encourage progression.

Similarly, Israel is still a work in progress—like every other nation in the world. Despite often chaotic relationships with her neighbors, the continual absorption of peoples from all corners of the earth, citizens who rise up for and against policies, and existing in a critical, global fishbowl, this young nation continues to evolve with intention and purpose. With constant growth and development in technology, health and environmental advances it's no wonder that Israel has, for years, been called the "startup nation."

Discussion Questions:

The Torah actually relays two accounts of creation. Though they differ in several ways—the telling of how humankind came to be on earth, the order of what is created, the narrative voice, among other differences—the creation narratives are still presented in a single portion in the same document that tells of the origins of the earth and human existence. Similarly, the creation of the State of Israel is told with differing and often conflicting narratives. Using *Bereshit* as an example, how could these narratives be synthesized into a single story of the origins of the State of Israel?

If you could create developments in Israel's future for the next decade, how would you prioritize them?

Additional Resources:

Gregory S. Mahler, <u>Politics</u> <u>and</u> <u>Government</u> <u>in</u> <u>Israel:</u> <u>The</u> <u>Maturation</u> <u>of</u> <u>a</u> <u>Modern</u> <u>State</u>, Rowman *&* Littlefield, 2004