

that a productive and meaningful life took place.

We are bidden by Moshe in his famous psalm to “count our days in order to bring forth a wise heart.” The phrase can certainly be understood to mean that one should attempt to make one’s days count as well. Our father Avraham is described as having come to his old age with his days in his hand. Time is a precious commodity and squandering it is one of our foolish and self-defeating habits.

Adam is criticized by the Midrash not only for his original sin and expulsion from the Garden of Eden but for withdrawing morosely from life for so many long decades thereafter. Avraham is complimented for being active and vital even till his last days on earth. The attitude of Judaism towards life is to make it meaningful and elevating, productive and noble. It is for this purpose that we were in fact created. *Rabbi Berel Wein and torah.org.*

### Haftarah Summary Rabbi Aron Tendler

The first verse of the Haftarah connects the reading to the theme of the Parsha. “So said G-d. “Hashem Who creates the heavens” However, Yishaya’s prophecy is not recounting the past; instead, it describes creation as an ongoing phenomenon and process. “In His goodness He constantly renews Creation every day.” As such, we should begin each day with a “new song” (43:10) proclaiming G-d’s praises.

The concept of daily recreation is the foundation for renewed optimism regardless of past failures and consequences. We start fresh every day - and in truth, every moment. At

### Minyan Schedule

Erev Shabbat Parashat Bereshit  
Candle lighting 09/10/15 6.45 pm  
Kabbalat Shabbat 6.30 pm

Shabbat Parashat Bereshit  
Shacharit 10/10/15 9.15 am  
Children’s Service 10.00 am  
Mincha (Mizrachi) 6.41 pm  
Shabbat ends 7.41 pm

Rosh Chodesh 1 Cheshvan 13/10/15  
Rosh Chodesh 2 Cheshvan 14/10/15

Erev Shabbat Parashat Noach  
Kabbalat Shabbat 6.30 pm  
Candle lighting 16/10/15 6.50 pm

### Announcements

**Kiddush is sponsored by  
the Synagogue**

**Mazal Tov to**

**Danny and Rikki Friedman  
on the birth of a son**

**and Rabbi and Eileen  
Franklin on the birth of  
another grandson.**

the same time it challenges us not to rest on past laurels. Every day we must renew our determination to realize and accomplish the purpose of our individual and national creation. What is that purpose? (43:10) “You are My witnesses and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you will know and believe in Me, and understand that I am He.” *Rabbi Aron Tendler and torah.org.*

# Or Chadash

קהילת אור חדש

## WEEKLY BULLETIN

**Shabbat Parashat Bereshit**  
27 Tishrei 5776; 10 October, 2015  
**Shabbat Torah reading:** Stone Chumash page 2, and Haftarah page 1130.

**President** Jonathan Erlich  
**Rabbi-in-residence** Rabbi Franklin  
**Dvrei Torah**

### The Age of the Universe Rabbi Marc D. Angel

The Torah begins with a majestic description of God’s creation of the universe. The powerful language is remarkable for its poetic beauty, evocative imagery, and profound spirituality. When we read these paragraphs thoughtfully, we feel that we are in the presence of God at the very moment of creation. The language of the creation story is religious/poetic, not scientific. The Torah, in its infinite wisdom, wants us to sense the wonder and grandeur of God’s creation. It does not present a cold scientific treatise, but a lofty, emotionally compelling account.

Regrettably, the notion has arisen in some religious circles that the creation story in Genesis is to be taken literally—that God created the world in six

24-hour days. Proponents of this view have then made calculations based on biblical narratives and have concluded that the universe is 5776 years old plus almost six days. They have declared this to be a non-negotiable religious “truth”. One right-wing Orthodox Jewish group requires that would-be converts answer a question on “the Torah view on the age of the universe”. One elderly “sage” in Israel was quoted as invalidating religious rites performed by Orthodox rabbis who believe the universe is older than 5769 years. A number of rabbis and teachers insist that dinosaurs never existed, since scientists claim that dinosaurs lived millions of years ago—an evident impossibility if the universe is only 5769 years old.

The “fundamentalist” view is not only scientifically incorrect, but is intellectually flawed on its own terms. Since the sun was not created until the fourth day, how could there



have been sunset and sunrise on the first three days? What could the Torah have meant by the words “evening” and “morning” in a universe that had no sun, moon or stars? Moreover, why do “fundamentalists” feel compelled to defend a position which is clearly at odds with the unequivocal findings of scientific research? Maimonides taught, quite correctly, that the Torah and Nature (governed by scientifically verifiable laws) were created by the same Author—and cannot be in basic conflict with each other. Scientists have dated the universe at approximately 15 billion years. They have discovered and dated dinosaur fossils going back many millions of years. If these are indeed established facts (and they are), then why would “fundamentalists” demand that religionists deny clear scientific evidence—especially when there is no theological reason to do so? Why should religious people be asked to become unthinking, unscientific, unreasonable beings?

The “days” in the creation story surely do not refer to 24 hour periods. Rather, they might better be understood as periods of time of undetermined length. They might each have been billions of years long. The universe was created in stages, with each stage involving an evening (erev=a period of mixture) and a morning (boker=a period of clarity, when the mixed state of things solidified into identifiable things). The Torah does not indicate how long these “days” were, and it

makes no attempt to frame the story in scientific terms. Since these first six “days” might have been billions of years long, there was ample time for dinosaurs to live and become extinct before the creation of Adam in the “afternoon” of the sixth “day”.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan cited classic rabbinic texts asserting that the world is far older than the 5769 years implied by our current dating system. The Sefer ha-Temunah, attributed to the Tanna Rabbi Nuhunya ben ha-Kanah, suggests that there were other worlds before Adam was created. The Talmud (Hagigah 13b) records the view that there were 974 generations before Adam. Most interesting is the view of Rabbi Yitzhak of Akko, a student and colleague of Ramban, and one of the foremost kabbalists of his time. Rabbi Kaplan made calculations based on Rabbi Yitzhak’s writings, indicating that Rabbi Yitzhak thought the universe was 15.3 billion years old! This is incredibly close to the “big bang” theory posited by modern day scientists. (For more information on this and related topics, please see my article, “Reflections on Torah Education and Mis-Education,” in the Min haMuvhar section of our Institute’s website, jewishideas.org)

Rabbi Yitzhak of Akko and the other sages who posited a universe far older than 5769 years had no theological problem suggesting these views. These opinions were not seen as heretical in any way. It was not felt by these sages, nor by the many

others who read their views without raising objections, that it was a vital principle of Judaism to believe the universe is only a few thousand years old.

The creation story that opens the Torah should inspire us to come closer to God, to appreciate His grandeur and unfathomable wisdom. It should excite our minds to want to learn more about God’s ways as manifested in the laws of nature. It should help foster a spirit of scientific inquiry, intellectual curiosity, and a profound love and reverence for God. *Rabbi Marc D. Angel and the Institute of Jewish Ideas and Ideals.*

## A Meaningful Life

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Torah covers quite a bit of ground in a very short period of writing in this week’s first parsha of the Torah. The ten generations from Adam to Noach are dispatched of without too much detail or description. The Torah in its entire narrative does not spend effort to inform us of the particularities of the lives of many of the people that it mentions. The Torah instead concentrates on detailing the lives of the people whose lasting moral impression on humankind was so great that they live on throughout the generations.

The Torah in fact comes to teach us the great lesson of opportunities granted and either frittered away or positively exploited. The Torah obliquely mentions our father Avraham already at the beginning of its narrative even though he will not appear in real life for another twenty generations. The Torah thereby points out to us the truism that our rabbis in Avot stated, that Avraham exploited

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his opportunity for spiritual greatness and received the reward of all of the preceding generations while those people preceding him did not, either out of passivity or willfulness.

The lesson here is obvious. In every generation, each and every person has an opportunity to enhance spirituality and morality in the world. It is those that exploit this opportunity that the Torah details and expands upon. They are the true builders of civilization and goodness in God’s world. The Torah slows down, so to speak, to enable us to analyze their lives and deeds and to draw conclusions from this to apply to our own lives.

The length of life of the people that the Torah mentions in this week’s parsha is also astounding. Centuries on end did they live and yet apparently they had very little accomplishment to show for all of those years. Though length of life is certainly an important factor in one’s own life, apparently it is not the most important factor.

There are those who accomplish much in a relatively short time and those who leave little inspiration behind them after living many decades. King Solomon in Kohelet makes note that even if a person lived a thousand years that would not be a guarantee

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