

October 16, 2009

Shabbat Shalom!

“This is the written record of the human line from the day God created human beings, making them in the likeness of God, creating them male and female, blessing them, and naming them “Humans” on the day they were created.”

*Discussions about this passage, verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 5 of Genesis, and about the creation story in Genesis Chapter 1, often focus on whether or not the biblical account of the creation of humanity is true. Some say that, because it comes from the Bible, it must be true. Others say that because it cannot be scientifically proven, it is not factual and therefore, it is not true. I recently read an excerpt of the new book by Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, which expressed his views on the creationism/evolution debate. In Dawkins’ observations about this ongoing controversy, he stressed over and over that it is more correct to say that many species of animals share a common ancestry than it is to say that one form of life evolved into another.*

Dawkins’ comment (unwittingly) echoed the statements of the rabbis about why it is important to think of all humanity as having a common ancestry. In the 2nd Century, Rabbi Akiba asserted that “love your neighbor as yourself” is a fundamental principle of the Torah. His contemporary, Ben Azzai, quoted the verses, above, Genesis Chapter 5, verses 1 and 2, as an even greater principle, because those verses remind us of what holds us all together: that every human being comes from the same lineage. That is essentially true in Judaism, but it is also essentially true in evolution, if we define “lineage” as broadly as possible. We are part of a family tree not only with respect to our relatives, and all of humanity, but all of creation as well.

The rabbis’ concluded, based on this realization, that we should treat each other with respect precisely because that we are part of one family, despite any differences we may see. Realizing that the “likeness of God” is in every person (and throughout creation) means that we should see not only God’s reflection in the face of another person, but our own as well. In our attitudes and our actions, may we try to reach out to one another – and to all creation - with kindness and support because of the common ties that truly link us together.

-- L’shalom, Rabbi Larry