

Shabbat Breishit 5781  
Rabbi Alex Freedman

Shabbat Shalom!

Think different.

"Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes ... the ones who see things differently -- they're not fond of rules, and they have no respect for the status quo. ... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things. ... They push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the people who are crazy enough to *think* that they can change the world, are the ones who do."

Think different.

This quote by Steve Jobs, late co-founder of Apple Inc., was the basis of an ad campaign for Apple in the late 90's. Posters featured iconoclasts like Albert Einstein, Jim Henson, Amelia Earhart, and Thomas Edison. It's an inspiring pitch: be bold, be original, be creative. Think different.

If Judaism were to have an ad campaign, "Think different" also works well as a tagline. Our Torah heroes like Abraham and Moses had unique attitudes and perspectives. Fully understanding a discussion in the Talmud requires seeing both sides of an issue. Jewish life is filled with rituals that make us stand out, which strengthens our muscles to think different.

We don't have to go very far in the Torah to discover this, just five verses. Today we begin at the very beginning, Parashat Breishit. One refrain among many in the creation story of Chapter 1 is the conclusion to each day. "*Vayhi Erev Vayhi Boker, Yom Echad...* There was evening, there was morning, one day," and so on for each of the seven days.

The Rabbis looked closely at this language and determined that the first 24-hour period began at sundown, with nightfall. That's why *evening* is mentioned before *morning*, because the clock started, as it were, with the evening.

This is why every Jewish “day” begins in the evening. This explains why Shabbat and every holiday start at night and not in the morning. Because the Torah says the first “day” started in the evening.

There is another reason why Shabbat and Jewish holidays begin with sundown and not at midnight. Midnight works only if you have a clock. But what about those generations who lived before there were standardized clocks? They too must have kept track of time, and the only natural division is either when the sun goes up or when the sun goes down. The minutes before and after these moments look starkly different. Lighter and darker. Whereas the minutes before and after midnight appear equally dark.

Beginning the day at night also explains why the Talmud opens by asking when we recite the *evening* Shma, not the *morning* one. There are other examples too.

Thus, Jews count time differently. Our day begins at night, not morning. Our week begins on Sunday, not Monday, as Shabbat is the conclusion. Our months are based on the moon, not the sun. And our year begins in the fall, not January 1st. So we count time differently, which helps us to think different.

Israeli inventors also think different. Start-up nation Israel has produced an astounding array of ingenious inventions. Every country has its creative teams and inventions, but Israel punches above its weight in this area.

Maybe you've heard of the PillCam. It's a miniscule camera packed inside a pill that gives doctors and patients a live view of the digestive tract. It's been FDA approved for 19 years. In that time, the video capsule has been used close to 1.5 million times by more than 5,000 medical facilities in more than 75 countries. A camera you can swallow? That's a great idea, said Israeli inventor Gavriel Iddan, who made it happen. That's how to think different.

There are more out-of-the-box Israeli inventions too.

Like OrCam, wearable devices with high-quality cameras that visually impaired people wear which enable them to read text, recognize faces and more.

And ReWalk, a wearable robotic exoskeleton that allows paralyzed individuals with spinal cord injuries to stand and walk again. Recently the FDA-approved device assisted paralyzed veteran Terry Hannigan Vereline complete the New York City Marathon.

And Watergen, which creates fresh drinking-quality water from just fresh air. The generators tap into the humidity of collected air to produce safe water wherever it is needed most, including disaster zones and rescue scenes. It can produce up to 5,000 liters of clean water every day, requiring nothing more than a standard electricity outlet.

I could go on but we have Musaf to do!

Judaism is not contrarian, seeking a single view in opposition to the mainstream. Judaism instead seeks to see *multiple* views. Perhaps having two eyes should remind us there's always more than one way to see things.

Remember I said Judaism begins the day at night? That's usually true but not always. A famous medieval rabbi named Rashbam read our verse and concluded differently. "*Vayhi Erev Vayhi Boker, Yom Echad...* There was evening, there was morning, one day." He says that the first day began with sunlight, morning. That was the start, and only then was there evening, followed by another morning. In other words, "there was evening" marks a difference from what was before. So for Rashbam, Jewish time began with morning, not night.

This is certainly a highly unconventional interpretation. In fact, the Orthodox publisher Artscroll censored his comments in one of their recent publications because they felt it threatened Jewish law and practice. It does not, and this censorship is outrageous.

In the laws regarding sacrifices in the ancient Temple, the day precedes the night. As prayer services replaced sacrificial worship, this affects prayer life. It is taught that each of our Patriarchs instituted one of the three daily services. Abraham began the Shaharit morning service, Isaac the afternoon Minha service, and Jacob the evening Maariv service. This paradigm only works if morning precedes night because Abraham must come first and he is connected to morning. Thus, the Jewish tradition has two models of when the day begins, though the law almost always assumes that nighttime is the start of each 24 hour period.

The goal is to see things from several angles, not just one.

Why would the Jewish tradition not adopt the Temple paradigm of morning beginning each day? That would certainly be more convenient and natural for us today and the last many centuries.

Rabbi Levi Cooper of Pardes in Jerusalem wrote an article about this, and many of my ideas here came from his article. He concludes, "By adopting the night-before-day system, our sages convey a message about priorities: True we must work to support

ourselves and our families, but employment is merely a means, not the goal. Our day really begins when we arrive home from work, when we sit and enjoy a festive atmosphere with loved ones.” In other words, the starting point should be family time.

My answer is my message today: seeing things differently enables us to think different. Seeing things from different angles sparks creativity. Not just in inventions but creating solutions to large, structural societal problems too.

Each of you faces different challenges. Whether you are in school or working or retired, you are tasked with solving different problems. Relationships can pose challenges too. It's easy to feel stuck. I'm not minimizing the difficulty of any of these. But I am suggesting that if you try to look at the problem from a different angle, a new solution might present itself. Our Parsha begins with a different model of when day begins. Let us see things differently to think different. And let us think different to win the day.

Shabbat Shalom!