

Naming Adam Naming Creation

“All creatures and plants and animals bring and offer themselves to man, but through man they are all brought and offered to G-d. When man purifies and sanctifies himself in all his members as an offering to G-d, he purifies and sanctifies all the creatures.”

Abraham Yaakov of Sadagora (Book II, *Tales of the Hasidim*, Martin Buber, p. 70)

R. Joshua b. Levi said; “When the rain descends it makes a face for the ground.”

Genesis Rabbah, XIII, 17

R. Hanina said: If he [Adam] merits it, [G-d says] ‘*uredu*’ (have dominion); while if he does not merit, [G-d says] ‘*yerdu*’ (let them descend).

Genesis Rabbah, VIII, 12



I. The Naming of Living Creatures by Adam

A rose by any other name smells just as sweet. Or so a Shakespearean character has famously argued.¹ But the rabbis have some second thoughts about this opinion. For naming in the Judaic tradition is first and foremost what we philosophers would call an ontological act—unlike the aforementioned proverbial wisdom might indicate, to name does not merely assign a label to what already exists in its own right. Rather naming in some sense participates, for better or worse, in the very life of whoever is named.

Naming, as Martin Buber would remind us, is in its first moment an encounter, a coming into relation with one who hears me and responds, an addressing of “thou” to thou. And in this contact, one is touched as much as one touches, one is named as much as one names. One cannot even speak one’s own name—I cannot even say the pronoun “I”—without hearing in it how the name of another, a “thou” encountering me and I encountering her or him, is already spoken as well. Put otherwise, in the very act of naming, in the naming of the name, we bear witness to whom we name. We speak for

¹ Juliet: “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet” *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare.

and toward another living entity, another fellow creature. Naming shows that not only is our speech indexical—a pointing out of something with our lexical finger, with the ghostly denotation of words—but also and far more importantly, our speech is creative. In naming we call others into the full breath and breadth of their existence, even as we in turn are called too by them.

Let us attend for a moment just a few moments of naming creatures in the recent history of lyrical poetry: Kenneth Rexroth in “Spring Rain”: “Tree toads cry like tiny owls.” (Rexroth, 46). Dylan Thomas in “Poem on his Birthday”: “By the full tilt river and switchback sea Where the cormorants scud, In his house on stilts high among beaks And palavers of birds...He celebrates and spurns His driftwood thirty-fifth wind turned age; Herons spire and spear.” (Thomas, 190). Robert Haas in “Meditation at Lagunitas”: “Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings, saying *blackberry, blackberry, blackberry*” (Hass, 5). Don Pagis in “Bestiary”; “The elephant, a crusty old general, scarred, patient, thick-skinned: on his pillarlike legs stands a whole world of belly” (Pagis, 61). Marriane Moore in “To a Snail”: “If ‘compression is the first grace of style,’ you have it. Contractility is virtue as modesty is a virtue.” (85). Pablo Neruda in “Some Beasts,” as translated by James Wright: “The jaguar brushes the leaves with a luminous absence, the puma runs through the branches like a forest fire, while the jungle’s drunken eyes burn inside him. The badgers scratch the river’s feet, scenting the nest, whose throbbing delicacy they attack with red teeth.” (Wright/Neruda, 96).

Even in this spotty compendium is found a breadth of naming the living world that is, at least in my hearing of it, startling, arresting, provocative. To hear these words is to encounter how the continuum of living creatures, plant and animal, call us human listeners into the manifold senses of creation and so replenish our humanity. The animals and plants make their commentary even as we are spending a rainy, spring evening outdoors, marking the passing years of our lives, appraising the virtue of modesty as a mode of acknowledging one’s inimitable style of being, judging the massive features of character of an aged warrior, undergoing the dark passions that fuel the taste for another’s flesh and hint at the elemental flames regularly cleansing a forest of its life. The candor of words, of how they mark out the lay of the land and the peculiar contours of its living inhabitants, is at work in these poems. The struggle here is not to prettify creation but to name it honestly and so to true our own take on and stake in it, even as it hints at its take on and stake in us.

In Bereshit, Adam, in a gesture perhaps not so unlike that of the aforementioned poets, names the animals. He does so at the invitation of Adonai, Adam’s creator, who is pictured as being disturbed by the isolation of Adam, by his lack of any helpmate. Like the poet Dylan Thomas, alone in his house high on stilts, Adam is called upon to announce the palaver of birds, the wishbone of wild geese, the root of whales. In being so called, Adam is named by Adonai as the namer of names, particularly of the names of animals which the creator generously gathers before Adam. And as Adam calls each creature by its name, the creator looks upon Adam and affirms whatever name Adam has assigned as being the name of that animal.

I would like to argue against any simplistic interpretation of these lines. I am particularly wary of an approach that would characterize this moment as one of appropriation, as if, in his naming of the living world, Adam was meant by Adonai to possess it, to seize it as his own. Indeed the naming in this episode is itself the outcome of Adam's longing for companionship, for relation, for a helpmate. Adonai sees that it is *not good (lo tov)* that Adam is alone. Appropriation is not the subtext here but rather longing for the encounter of another. And so Adonai calls the animals near to Adam, who in turn, in a gesture similar to the Creator's own behavior at the beginning of creation, names all those who have been created. At the same time that this gift of naming is offered Adam, I think the violence it can precipitate is hinted at in the very disposition of G-d at this moment, in his reticence, his silence, before Adam's naming. For G-d affirms Adam's naming but without immediate commentary on the part of the text that that this naming is good.

Earlier, G-d's own calling of creation into existence is termed *tov* or *tov mo-od*—good and very good. But the intensification of the good in successive days of creation comes to a moment of silence here. No similar commentary of Adam's naming of the living creatures as having been itself good is granted in this text. In fact, the naming that occurs here emerges after the first judgment in creation that something is going on that is not good. Here the deed and word of Adam's naming, its *davar*, is given witness by G-d, even as its import remains open, remains unjudged in its naming. Whereas earlier moments of naming are named straightforwardly as being good, now the very significance of naming is itself brought into question. The naming, even as it is affirmed by G-d, even as it sets into place with creative authority the significance of the entirety of the living world, is also in its very gesture given as incomplete. The naming of the living world, in this sense, has only begun to be named.

II. Creational Ethics and Midrashic Naming

In recent environmental discussions of the so-called Jewish approach to the natural world, which, from the Jewish perspective is not a natural world but one that is created, a world of *Chaiyot*, of living things or creatures, much emphasis is put on a series of commands given to Adam and his kind upon his creation by Adonai in Bereshit I:

28 And God blessed them; and God said unto them: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.'

In a commentary of this text found in Midrash Rabbah the controlling verb—the last and summative in a series of 5 commandments—is heard ambivalently. *Yeredu*, as

commanding dominion can also be read as *yerdu*, as commanding descent, depending on the manner, so Rab Hainina argues, in which we humans take on the meaning of this command. What then would be a response to G-d's command to be fruitful, multiply, replenish, subdue and have dominion that accords humans merit, that becomes a gesture of ascent rather than descent? Reverberations of this question are also heard in an additional commandment added later to this list in Genesis, the moment of Adam's naming of the living creatures. A Chassidic commentary on this passage adds some insight when Yehiel Mikhal of Zlotchov notices a possibility for translating the passage describing the animals to be named by Adam as "living souls" in lieu of "living creatures." The maggid comments: "Every being has the root of its soul from which it receives its life, in the upper worlds. Now Adam knew the soul-roots of all creatures and gave each its right name according to its living soul."² If the Maggid is right, a great responsibility has been laid upon human beings, one with a concomitant power, that of language. We are called to trace out the roots of every soul via its naming. How will we use language in fulfilling this important responsibility and what will become of us as we do? The Biblical text lays out the question without offering a conclusive answer. One could argue that only in the resulting history of naming, one that in part is contained in the Hebrew Tanach, as well as the traditions of Biblical interpretation inspired by it, can we find the beginning of an answer to that implicit question.

In developing a Jewish environmental ethics, which I would prefer to call a creational ethics, at least two threads of ethical discourse within its tradition need to be picked up and followed out. On the one hand are Halachic considerations, the rich fabric of laws and practices that bring Jews into a full and fruitful responsibility with their fellow humans, with creation more generally and ultimately with creation's Creator. Just one example can suffice here: Much is currently being made out of the prohibition in Dueteronomy 22:6-7 regarding the compassionate treatment of the mother bird when her eggs or brood are harvested from a nest. How does this particular expression of a law form a precedent for the manner in which various other creatures are treated when their flesh is harvested for human nutriment? At the very least, this law, along with another one in Leviticus 22:28 requiring a waiting period of 7 days after the birth of lamb or ox before separating it from its mother, strongly suggests we must keep in mind the significance of the mother of any living being, when we approach it as our food. The entities we eat are not mere flesh but very importantly living flesh, flesh that reproduces itself through gestation, through parents who bring a new generation into existence from out of their very bodies. The meat that we eat was once a babe being licked clean by the attentive tongue of its mother, or fed beak to beak by its father. This very distinction—between the food that becomes our living flesh and the living being whose flesh our food was—is all too often effaced by the manner in which industrial farming has affected our own involvement in the living entities which we eat. Indeed, the argument can be made that the contemporary process of mechanized meat production in massive feed lots in alliance with our manner of feeding, processing, packaging, advertising, and consuming this food, forgets altogether the actual living quality of the animals involved. Additionally, the sensitivity to the plight of the mother on the part of Torah can be read as an admonishment that we too act in lieu of all mothers of all living beings. In this way, a

² Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hassidism*, Vol, 1, p. 152.

legal precedent emerges for our becoming stewards of creation's diversity and so actively resisting all practices that lead to the extinction of any living species and so to the diminishment of creation's *chabod*, its announcement of G-d in its very glory of existing.

But in my own approach to a Jewish creational ethics, I will confine my discussion here today, much as my philosophical hero, Emmanuel Levinas, did in the past in regard to other questions, to matters of aggadah and midrash. In doing so, I am intent on emphasizing the spiritual attitudes and theological inquisitiveness that are implied in fulfilling the rich legacy of avodat, of service commanded by the 613 mitzvot at the core of Jewish existence. The second thread of the Jewish religious tradition is less well known outside of the confines of its religious life than that of Halachah. Much can be made of Judaism as a religion of laws, an orthopraxy, but much could also be made of Judaism as a religion of the Book and so of reading and interpreting holy texts, of deciphering words spoken in the name of Adonai, indeed of following out in manifold readings of the manifold names of Adonai as they make their impact on the manner in which we humans are called into our humanity, our creaturehood.

Midrash, which is a practice of highly nuanced exegesis and commentary on biblical texts, first engaged in by the Rabbinical tradition of Judaism, takes seriously the power of language to name, particularly the language of Holy Scripture. Indeed, in the practice of Midrash, argues a work of Midrash (Numbers Rabbah XIV.12), each verse of the Torah has 70 faces. Stephen Wylen expands on this thought: "Just as each human being has an existence, a soul, an integrity of his or her own, so each and every letter of the Torah has an integrity of its own....Each single verse of the Torah yields seventy different interpretations"³ In this approach to reading scriptures, a plethoric fecundity is registered in its naming of creation and of the Creator. Further this fecundity emerges through the manifold of *particular* human voices engaged in receiving and then passing down biblical texts through the Jewish religious tradition. In this process of transmission across generations, not only a radical openness is articulated in the inherited name itself but also by the tones of naming emanating from each human voice that names again that name.

III. "I am the Rose of Sharon: Naming the World beyond the Power of Angels."



One particularly evocative example of the creative power of naming living creatures, is found in the Song of Songs/Shir HaShirim. In its second chapter, the mutual, evolving pursuit of the beloved and her lover is named in apple trees growing amidst the woods, in the leaping and skipping of a young gazelle, in the wily cunning of foxes spoiling a vineyard, in the shy peering of a dove from out of the clefts of a rock, in the luxuriant blossoming of figs with their rich, sexual perfume, in the ebullient song of the

³ Stephen M. Wylen, *The Seventy Faces of Torah* (Paulist Press, 2005), pp. 61-63

turtledove announcing spring. And in particular, the beloved is characterized in the first verse of the chapter as “the rose of Sharon” and “a lily of the valley... a lily among thorns.”

Rabbinical discussion has found the Song of Songs both scandalous and summative as Holy Scripture (FIND REFERENCES!!!). In the text of this particular biblical book the overriding desire of the soul to seek out its beloved—might we also add its help meet?—is brought tenderly into conjunction with the poetic naming of living creatures. In doing so, the text gives an exemplary moment in what might count as fulfilling G-d’s commandment of Adam to name the living world. Further, the very sensitivity of the naming here, as well as its rich evocation of the senses, of what it means to be an embodied creature, resonates with a midrasic discussion of Adam’s naming, in which G-d is reputed to have permitted humans to name the living world only after proving how the angelic creatures of the heavenly court were incapable of doing so.⁴ Precisely the immersion of human beings in creation, our shared legacy as bodily creatures with fauna and flora, puts us in the creative and perilous situation of mediation and so of midrashic naming. We are, as the contemporary midrashist Avivah Zornberg once put it in a conversation with Bill Moyers, G-d’s shadow cast into the world. In a poem from early in his life, Abraham Joshua Heschel argues similarly when he writes:

I am a trace of You in the world,
And everything is like a door.
Let us all trace that trace of You,
And through all things go to You.⁵

In being that shadow or trace of the ineffable Name, the Creator, we are given the responsibility, the vocation, of naming, of bringing forth the rich contours of creation in a manner that testifies to the glory of its caring and engaged Creator.

The Song of Songs/*Shir Hashirim* coming late in the Biblical canon and already rich with allusions to the books preceding it, is in itself a rewriting, a renewing of Holy Scriptures and so a prototype for the very midrashic naming and commentary that now comes to attend upon it in the rabbinical tradition. A radical moment in this rewriting occurs when a rose is not only named by the Book of the Song of Songs but also is named as naming itself, of saying, “I am the Rose of Sharon.” The question posed in *Shir Hashirim* Rabbah of exactly who else might be named as speaking here in the name of the rose inspires a rich series of puns on the Hebrew words for Rose of Sharon, namely, *Havatalel Hasharon*. The commentary plays with all possible senses of this naming and so the seventy faces of a single inspired word emerge. The discussion begins by identifying the rose with the people of Israel⁶ and in particular with Israel as given in the

⁴ Rab Acha in Bereshith Rabbah XVII.4.

⁵ Abraham Heschel, “At Dusk,” in *The Ineffable Name of G-d: Man* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), p. 75.

⁶ The Community of Israel! in *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, II, 1.1. Notice here the midrashic commentary is so radical, so playful, so provocative the it lets the rose itself emerge into the text to speak as itself among the voices of the various Rabs. This occurs at least insofar as the rose speaks as “the Community of Israel.”

prototype of the builder of the ark, *Betzalel*, whose name in turn inspires a further pun for shade, namely, *tzal*. The rose is, the discussion advocates, Israel providing shade for the Most High, a dwelling place, an ark. But as well the rose is Israel as the beloved who is in the shadow, the protection, of the lover, and so in the shadow of the parting waves of the Red Sea, of the peak of Mt. Sinai, and finally, in a more disturbing and provocative manner, in the shadow of the ruling powers of worldly kingdoms. There is generally an increasing uneasiness in the interpretations offered over the vocation of Israel as the Rose of Sharon. Yet other permutations severely darken the notion of that shadow, but also speak of a rising up from darkness, a blossoming into song (based on reading *Sharon* as *Shir*, which leads to the formulation of a rose of song.) And so the rose that sings leads to the Book of Psalms in which the rose can be understood as calling upward from the very pit of sorrow, of Gehinnom, “Out of the depths I have called them, O Lord” (CXXX, 1), as well as blossoming forth into good deeds, as in “He hath put a new song into my mouth” (XL, 4).⁷

Perhaps most helpful to our discussion today is a permutation argued for by Rab Berediah when he states concerning the identity of the Rose of Sharon: “This verse is spoken by the wilderness.” The Rab’s discussion of this claim is surprisingly sensitive to contemporary environmental concerns. The Rab hears in the rose’s speaking the following, implied discourse: “I am the wilderness, and beloved am I, for all the good things of the world are hidden in me, as it says, *I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia tree* (Isaiah XLI, 19); G-d has placed them in me for safekeeping, and when G-d requires them from me, I shall return them to Him His deposit unimpaired.”⁸ The living world paradoxically is given a sanctuary in the wilderness, which for the Hebrew imagination is a land of sere weathers and poor soil. It is a place removed from history, from human striving. But this sanctuary of trees becomes in yet another permutation the cemetery of the dead, those buried in Israel, whose good deeds will blossom again like a rose and chant in song before the Almighty. The editor of the particular edition of *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* being used in this paper says in a footnote: “The idea may be that the wilderness was endowed with potential fertility, which in the fullness of time will be realized”⁹

What is remarkable about these passages is how pressing moral and eschatological issues—the ultimate trajectory of history, the search for justice, the depths of suffering born in the human soul, the eventual fate of all those who have died, the healing and perfecting of the world in the Name of HaShem, of G-d—are interwoven with a careful and poetic observation of the living world. The wilderness is not merely a place of sanctuary for living beings but also for departed ones awaiting their resurrection; the blossoming of the rose not only alludes to the mysteries of the soil, of how from its darkness the fecundity of a green world breaks forth. The rose also speaks of songs that stir up from the human heart in the moments of its most severe trials, in its desolation at the absence of the beloved, of G-d. Rab Judan carefully considers the distinction

⁷ Rab Acha in *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, II, 1.3.

⁸ Rab Berekiah, *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* II.1.2.

⁹ *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, in *Midrash Rabbah*, Rabbi Dr. H. Freeman and Maurice Simon, editors (London: The Soncino Press), p. 92, fn. 2.

between *havatzalet* and *shoshanah*, which he considers to be two versions of the same flower rather than two different flowers altogether. When the flower is small it is called *havatzalet*, the Rab points out, but when it becomes full-sized, the term used is *shoshanah*. And why is it called *havatzalet*, the Rab asks? He answers in a Hebrew pun on the flower's name: "Because it is hidden in its own shadow (*chabuyah betzillah*)."¹⁰ The editor of *Midrash Rabbah* notes in explanation: "its many petals creating a shadow for itself."¹¹ In this image, itself a naming of a naming, a contemporary midrash upon an ancient one, lies much wisdom and beauty. The very notion of creation as an act that stirs up the soul from the depths, delivers it from out of nothingness to affirm its Creator in song, this creation is itself characterized in a creature whose many petals in its beginning stages immerse it in shadow. There is a pregnancy of meaning in this rose and in its naming. As in the notion of the wilderness above we find again a sense of nature that is unfinished, that serves not as a fullness in itself of being but as a sanctuary and storehouse that awaits a "fullness in time," an eschatological dimension of the world that yearns to be born into eternal abundance and yet remains all the same fully nested in the naming of roses that unfold from the darkness of their seeds. As Heschel puts it in another poem:

I'll make every word a name for You!
I'll call you: Forest! Night! Ach! Yes!
And collect all my moments,
Weave a bit of eternity, a gift for You.¹²



IV. Naming Joan Not Naming Glacier Lily

Let us now take stock of how an ethics of creation might find, as suggested in Heschel's lines, some fruit in the naming of living beings. This discussion turns, it must be emphasized, not only on the close observation of natural entities, upon a love and respect for living beings, but also upon their naming and a love and respect for the living word. Consider for a moment this passage from an essay by the biologist and natural historian Joan Maloof:

When I walk through the woods I touch, smell, watch... and name. My hand glides across smooth bark and my lips proclaim *hornbeam*. The smaller voice in my head rehearses the Latin: *Carpinus caroliniana*. Just as a person's name conjures up other thoughts, so too does a tree's name; I think

about the habitat it lives in and perhaps the person who first introduced me to it. Despite those other thoughts though, it is mainly the naming of the name that I care about.¹³

¹⁰ Rab Judan, *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* II.1.3

¹¹ *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, (London: The Soncino Press), p. 93, fn. 1.

¹² Abraham Heschel, "The Most Precious Word," p. 59.

As in the Biblical story of Adam, the living world comes to Maloof so that she might encounter and so name its creatures. To name a living entity, such as a *glacier lily*, by its Latin, scientific name *Erythronium grandiflorum*, Maloof goes on to point out, is to “have access to a wealth of information about it. Through this name I can learn from my books that it is edible. I can learn that the pollen color varies- - in some flowers it is red and in other flowers it is yellow. The scientific literature contains hundreds of references to *Erythronium*, a wealth of details I would never be able to uncover in my lifetime without the handle of its name.” Maloof’s comment reminds her reader of a history, a legacy, of naming—each species of rose and lily, not to mention of all the other creatures of the world, enters by means of human beings into a great network of naming that builds up discrete moments of engagement and observation into a coherent and wide-ranging understanding of the living world. This understanding would discern the true shape of each creature, become sensitive to the particular capacities and vulnerabilities of each living entity and even to be touched, in moments of reflective discernment, by its respective virtues and beauty.

As important as the information about a living entity that its name accrues might be, familiarity with this accumulation must be balanced by a readiness for renewed encounter of the being one has named. Paradoxically, Maloof discovers that, as a naturalist, discarding the name of a living entity and so shedding the vast store of facts and details about it brings one to encounter again how the unnamed lives and so approaches us in its renewed givenness. For the glacier lily is emphatically *not* merely the information I have stored up about it. Rather, in its first instance, the glacier lily is an invitation to call out to it and be called by it, to encounter yet again on its terms its creative gesture of existing. I am called, then, to renew the naming of the glacier lily’s name; to become like Adam, without preconceptions about the living world and instead vulnerable to how the other who approaches me speaks itself in my bones, is given witness in my flesh and carries its voice into mine so that it might find its name uttered on and in my human tongue.

In musing about the significance of this renewal of the name, Maloof inadvertently sets up a variant of the scene in Bereshit of naming animals in the garden. In her version, she comes to play the part of Elohim as she watches and affirms the moment of naming on the part of her students, new-found Adams of a new-found garden:

I began to realize how my students might be better served if I was not so quick to name for them. By waiting until a student is already familiar with an organism before pinning a name on it, when the name finally arrives it is more alive. It represents color, shape, movement, sound, even time.

Maloof’s reflections remind her readers that the naming of names is no small consideration, if we are to become responsive to the natural world in a manner that takes into account its full significance. From a Jewish perspective (and it should be noted here that Maloof’s own religious approach to these issues is more predominantly Buddhist

¹³ Joan Maloof, “The Naming of Things.” In *Species of Thought: In the Approach of a more-than-human World*, special edition of *Journal for Environmental Philosophy*, guest editor James Hatley (Fall, 2008).

than anything else), at the core of this existential significance is creation. Natural history in this sense approaches rabbinical aggadah. If a Jewish contribution to the task of natural history is to be invited, then it involves bringing yet again the rich questions and themes of the Abrahamic religious world into conjunction with creation, with a more-than-human world, in two senses of that phrase: A world that gives witness to its creator and one whose creatures reach beyond the scope of the merely human in the giving of that witness.

To be Jewish is not to diminish the heterogeneity of creation but to intensify, magnify its diversity, its fecundity, its plethoric flourishing. While it may be true, as Abraham Yaakov of Sadagora claims in Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, that "all creatures and animals bring and offer themselves to man," one must also keep in mind that this occurs only so that these creatures might in turn "be brought and offered to G-d." Human beings in this sense are the priests of all creation. And the mode of this priesthood in the first instance in *Gan Eden* did not involve the sacrifice of animals to G-d but their naming in G-d's presence. Rab Yaakov continues: "When man purifies and sanctifies himself in all his members as an offering to G-d, he purifies and sanctifies all the creatures." What our discussion today indicates is that this purification and sanctification occurs not only in ethical action but also in creative naming. Humans are called upon to bespeak creation and to do so with a dizzying manifoldness as suggested by the midrashic practices of the rabbinical tradition. To render G-d's earth as a thou, to bring to it the radical intensification of meaning that naming engenders, need not be an engagement in pagan idolatry, a mistaking of the finite for the infinite, but rather a rendering back to G-d all that G-d has created. And this to be accomplished in a manner that resonates as fully as possible with the manifold dimensions of giftedness that creation bespeaks. Only when the creatures are so named can the full significance of their presence among us humans be registered. And only in that registering of their presence can we begin to consider how our actions toward them might find the full extent of their goodness, might finally respond to the gifts each creature so generously and selflessly renders to us. And we must learn to be haunted by the question of how this very naming of creation, which in turn is a naming of the human and ultimately of HaShem, the Creator, is diminished by the loss of every species upon the earth.

Let us begin again, you and I, to name the animals, to bespeak once more the living world.