

Nothing in our society possesses the currency of science. If you want to demonstrate a truth, you turn to science to provide an answer. People who dismiss scientific truths are relegated to the margins of our discourse and are viewed as irrational.

The advent of modern science begins in the early 1600s. Galileo is the person most associated with the Scientific Revolution. His claim that the earth revolves around the sun is the most famous example of a bursting forth of scientific truth into the arena of human discourse. Another famous figure who was instrumental to the Scientific Revolution was Francis Bacon. Bacon developed the scientific method and explicated the mechanistic view of the universe.

The development of science is the primary story line of modern human history from the 1600s until today. Yet even something good can go too far. Today, some express the view that anything that cannot be validated by science has no truth value. This view of science's power has clearly gone too far. Not every question can be given a scientific answer. Especially as concerns matters of value, science cannot offer us much guidance. When we consider value, meaning, and purpose we have to turn to other disciplines to guide us, and indeed one of those disciplines is religion.

The dislodging of religion from its supreme standing as the source of truth that accompanied the Scientific Revolution carried many benefits, but with religion growing ever more marginal in our society, we are now facing other difficulties that science will never help us solve.

The account of Creation that we read about in this week's *parsha* is not a description of what actually happened, but a teaching about God, the world, and human beings. About God, the Creation account teaches that He is the origin, source, and sustaining force of all that is. About the world, that it is God's handiwork; and about human beings, that each of us is unique and of infinite value.

Whereas other organisms vary very little from one another, no two people are the same. We can lose track of this simple fact by being inundated with social science – a derivative of pure science – which looks for generalizations, patterns, data sets, and polling. Social science is not concerned with this unique person, but of human beings as a group. Because of its utility, social science also carries much weight in our society. None of this, however, teaches what the account at the opening of Genesis teaches: that each human being is unique.

If we reflect on this Torah truth for a few moments, we are astounded at its profundity, and we recognize that affirming its truth is – or should be – one of the central aims of our society. The Torah teaches that each person is of infinite value and is therefore irreplaceable. The death of a person is the destruction of an entire world, the rabbis teach.

Yes, the rabbis state that a person is a world, and in saying that they convey something that no other source in our discourse can provide. We think of the world as extraordinarily large, but the insight of the rabbis is that a world can also be awesome in its smallness. Each human being carries within himself a world. That world is the network of relationships that only this particular person enjoys. The implications of this teaching are fantastic and can completely reorient anyone who takes them seriously. Before every person, we are forced to stop and acknowledge the sacred quality that inheres in him. No other person is like the one before you nor has anyone since or anyone who will be. This gives our interactions a whole other cast and quality.

What sprouts from this outlook is the notion of human dignity. Human dignity is probably the central issue in all of the heated discussions that are tearing our society apart. Competing narratives about whose human dignity is not being

properly acknowledged drives much of the bitterness, anger, and argument that have become commonplace. Dignity claims that a person has worth irregardless of his social standing, wealth, status, access, or any other criterion. The person you see who is ambling around on the subway platform who clearly lacks a home and has no job possesses the exact same amount of dignity as the wealthiest person in a city or the most well known celebrity or the highest ranking government official. We are so overawed by all the decorations we and others wear in order to convey to others what we think our value is that we forget that ultimately our worth is the same because each of us is created in the image of God.

Clearly this is one of the fundamentals of a good society; in fact it is one of the building blocks of a society that has yet to come into existence, a society that is redeemed. If we jump ahead to the end of the Torah, we learn about redemption – a state of man where each person’s infinite worth gains acknowledgement. In the fractured world we live in, we can only gain glimpses of the redeemed reality that is promised us by the prophets. The final redemption, however, will be characterized by wholeness, completeness, shalom.

We know that that Jews are the central human protagonists of the narrative the Bible wants to tell, but before the Bible even mentions the Jews, it establishes in

Adam the concepts of human dignity and each person's uniqueness and infinite worth. Once we understand that, then we can understand the Jews, which is to say we can understand ourselves.

Our purpose is to be a nation in which the dignity, uniqueness, and infinite worth of each and every Jew is affirmed. We are meant to be a model nation, a chosen people, that instantiates these qualities, that organizes its social life around the promotion of these values. Fearfully, degradation threatens to erode our recognition of these qualities in ourselves and in others. That is what our daily and weekly struggles are about. We fend off the degradation that threatens to erase what we know is actually true about human beings.

Stop and consider the next time you are confronted by a person this teaching of the Torah, for it is the groundwork, the frame for everything else that is built on top of it. Let's not get lost exploring the upper chambers of the house that is civilization. Let's recall the foundation. For this we restart the Torah today and re-learn its most profound truth as if we were learning it for the first time.