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Ahh 40...I know some of you are laughing but it is a hard concept to get a handle on. I guess because deep down inside I still think I'm 27. My younger sister says that she celebrates the anniversary of her 29th birthday. So I guess that makes me younger than her now!

I suppose birthdays are one of those occasions where it's a given that you look back at where you've been, and look forward at what you'd like to happen. Especially when the birthday ends in a zero.

This week also happens to be when we finish and begin the yearly cycle of Torah reading. In one evening we go from death—of Moses—to creation—of the world. There is a Midrash, a Rabbinic legend, which states that when G-d found his creation to be “very good” this implied a comparison. From this, the Rabbis inferred that G-d had created and destroyed previous worlds before creating this one.

As destructive as this may look at first glance, I actually find it to be very comforting and inspirational. Not only because it makes me feel better about this world; after all, imagine how it must have been to not have passed G-d's global test. And not just because it becomes a great test of the imagination to envision what else G-d had in mind.

No, this Midrash has a great forward-thinking message buried in it. Because it gives each one of us the green light to start over, to not be satisfied with what is, but to begin again with a better outcome as a possibility. When we start something new, whether it is a new job, a new relationship, or a new decade of life, we need not settle for what we have. We have the example set before us that we can choose to try and try, to begin again and again. We have the example set before us that eventually we can get it right—that we can create a universe for ourselves that is workable. Not perfect ever, but workable. Because that is our part of our partnership with G-d, that we were created to continue the work of making this world better.

The Midrash gives us both the permission to dream of a better life and to make changes to achieve it, and it also grounds us in the reality that what we choose needs our efforts to make the most of it. So when we decide to change jobs—as I've done—it is because of the new challenges it presents. When we start a new decade of life—as I am doing—it is to work towards what we want our life to be. When we start a new

relationship, or take it to a new level—as Margaret and I are doing—it is because we know that we can and are willing to work together on whatever comes our way.

Perfection may be a coveted goal, but perfection is boring. It is the trying, the repeated attempts, the imagining of what could be better, that makes us grow, and helps us to appreciate what unfolds. Maybe those previous worlds that G-d destroyed weren't horrible, maybe they were too perfect. Even G-d likes a challenge. So should we.

Shabbat Shalom.