

# "IN THE BEGINNING" IN MOROCCO

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 **Fabrice Beaux**  12/10/2023

As Morocco rebuilds in the aftermath of a horrifying earthquake that struck High Atlas Mountain ranges last month, this article considers the guiding premises for sustainable societies established in the first chapter of the *Torah*, "In the Beginning."

This week, in every synagogue on earth, commences again the weekly reading of the five books of Moses, considered divine by the Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. The start of Genesis is poignant at this moment.

It is striking that the most deterministic feature for development to be sustainable—identified over recent generations from cases all over the world—is also explained in the story of creation for the peaceful progress of human affairs. The contemporary and biblical lesson is, perhaps not surprisingly, that consultation and even inclusion in decision-making of interested and impacted parties is essential for the resilient growth of their communities.

The foundational premise—that consensus leads to sustainability—is found in the description of the sixth day of creation. We may be puzzled by the language in the statement: "Then God said, 'Let *us* make mankind...'" (Genesis 1:26). Who is the plural *us*, creating alongside the Creator? The Millenia-old Midrash (Talmudic biblical interpretation) explains that the administering angels were brought into the discussion by God in order for them to participate in the decision and not incite their strife and jealousy toward living people with choice.



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and parties impacted by the outcomes. In addition to the quality of humility being conveyed to people, by the all-powerful allowing an "us" into deliberations, its fixation within creation embeds the dynamics and degree of inclusion to be profoundly informative of the quality of our human affairs.

In Morocco, we are in the fortunate situation, despite a catastrophic event, of having prior in-place national policies, programs, and charters that encourage people's participation in planning local development. However, experiences in Morocco and around the world show that even when people are free to voice their priorities, people may not consider themselves free, or they may feel fear and doubt as to their own vision to meet their self-described needs.

Rebuilding, therefore, needs to be launched or coincided with psychosocial empowerment. These are facilitated sessions for personal exploration that are experienced in group settings where participants honestly consider their emotional well-being, social relationships, outlook of work, and other core areas of life to not only reimagine their senses of selves and of the future but also to strengthen their wills to affirm and pursue the implementation of their goals.

As people of the High Atlas have experienced tragic loss and trauma, they must be availed of methodologies that help people manage harsh emotional pain and also continue forward to envision building a more satisfying future. Rebuilding, just as with sustainable development, integrate this kind of internal individual and collective journeys to regain strength to carry on and to identify priority directions. The Torah did not say it would be easy, nor as utterly hard as it is.

A second illuminating lesson for rebuilding from "In the Beginning" is in the notorious reactions of Adam, Eve, and Cain when confronted by God for their misdeeds. Adam blamed Eve—and indirectly, God himself—for his decision to eat from the tree of knowledge, and Eve blamed the snake; while Cain dissembled when asked the whereabouts of his brother Abel whom he murdered and acted aggravated for even having to explain.

Not one took responsibility for their actions "In the Beginning," suggesting a deeply formidable human inclination. Embracing responsibility allows us to reframe the events of our lives as a reflection of what is in our minds and hearts, and this contemplation reveals to us corrective possibilities from which we can grow and rebuild.

The Moroccan government is investing heavily in rebuilding the devastated communities. The government has long established pathways for sustainability driven by local communities, however difficult it is, especially in rural areas, to meet this potential for

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outpace any tendency toward not taking responsibility.

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Psychosocial empowerment and participatory action assures the peoples' ownership of rebuilding. Implementation of the projects that they set forth is vital. Viable projects in this glorious yet impoverished region are water for irrigation and drinking, terracing the mountains to not just end the calamitous levels of erosion and slides but to plant native almond, cherry, carob, fig, juniper, lemon, oak, olive, pomegranate, and walnut trees, as well as the dozens of wild herbs.

"In the Beginning" gives special attention to seeds, sprouts, plants, and trees, and the Midrash explains that the biodiversity of our natural world and its thriving or destruction bears consequences even on an interplanetary level. Thankfully, farming families of Morocco carry the dream and will to grow and harvest the range of endemic plant life from seeds, and rebuilding should champion this intrinsically human desire, an incomparable basis for a resilient society.

A lesson from Morocco's multi-billion dollar program to implement local projects—called, the National Initiative for Human Development—is that its scope is not that of the full range of the people's project priorities, with a too complicated application for most rural people to access. Rebuilding funds should support the gamut of project types, and accept multiple forms of application presentations, including oral ones, so that people who are illiterate can participate.

Abrahamic civilizations agree on the profound truth of "In the Beginning." In Morocco, where local populations of the civilizations of Abraham have historically been, they have complete solidarity for the ever-long life of the Kingdom and to insure the sustainable rebuilding in the quake's aftermath. Genesis' Creation suggests that embedded in our best being is inclusion, responsibility, and growing native seeds. It is a beautiful guide in this determining time.

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*Empowered Rebuilding workshop in the Al Haouz province of Morocco, 9 October 2023 (photo by the High Atlas Foundation)*

*Disclaimer: Special thanks to Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir for authoring this article. He is is President of the High Atlas Foundation in Marrakech, Morocco.*





# A LONG-DISTANCE REUNION



Jeff Davidson 15/10/2023



A milestone anniversary is approaching for me and my college buddies.

The problem is, we can't get enough people to attend a reunion. One college mate lives in Clearwater, one lives in Albany, another in Chicago, another in Sherwood Forest, another in Nashville, and I am in Raleigh. A few other college mates that we might lure are also in various parts of the U.S.

It would be a shame for us not to get together. It's been 10 years since the larger group has assembled and five years since the smaller group has. However, as we age, people tend to be reluctant to hop on a plane, lay down bucks for a hotel and other expenses, and take time out of their normal routines.

I'm always up for meetings. One never knows when someone will not be able to attend in the future because of death, illness, or whatever. Others drop out along the way and decide that they simply don't want to keep up anymore or they don't see the value of meeting. What a shame.

I thought about the situation and said, "Okay, what if we schedule a Zoom meeting? Sure, the event will look a little like *Hollywood Squares*, and people will have to take turns talking, but that would be a viable solution – especially if everybody has a webcam and is showing themselves in real time, as opposed to some staid picture."

With Zoom, no one will have to travel. Everyone can participate from the convenience of their den or office. We'd feel as if we had been together, in a manner of speaking, and maybe even feel prompted to physically meet once again in the future. Who can say?

This much I know: Reunions serve a useful purpose. They help to solidify our memories. They instill in us feelings of friendship and bonds that once mattered, if indeed, they still matter today. Reunions can be uplifting and revitalizing. They are reminders of who we were, who we are, and potentially who we can be, going forward.



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study. Most serial killers, psychopaths, and otherwise lost souls have few or no connections. People who are well connected seem to be the happiest. People with big families, many friends, and lots of engaging activities seem to do well in life.

Our Zoom session, as I envision it, can occur in early November. I'll report back what happens then. I'm hoping for the best, and why would it be any other way? If we can agree on a time and a day, and everybody has the right equipment and is looking forward to the session, why wouldn't it be engaging, uplifting, nostalgic, and inspiring in some ways?



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