



Roka ha'aretz al hamayim -

Hebrew Blessing for the Earth

Looking at earth from space, it is evident that the planet is covered with water. According to NASA, water covers over 70% of the earth's surface, representing 99% of its habitable space. In the Scriptures, the image given is that God "spread out" or "stretched out" the land (*eret*) upon the waters. The Biblical writers used the verb *raka'* to refer to the stretching or spreading out of silver (Jer. 10:9) or gold (Isa. 40:19) as a beaten metal.



The following blessing thanks God for creating the dry land as a habitation for mankind:



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
רוֹקֵעַ הָאָרֶץ עַל הַמַּיִם

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, King of the universe, who spreads out the earth upon the waters.

This blessing accords with the creation account given in Genesis by affirming that God "spread out the earth upon the waters":

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מִבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לְמַיִם:
וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָרָקִיעַ וַיִּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת
לְרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לְרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי־כֵן:
וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְרָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי:

And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. (Gen 1:6-8)

God's second day of creation involved the "division of the waters," that is, He created the firmament (*rakiya*) to separate the watery sphere of the earth from its atmosphere (2 Pet 3:5). The waters under the firmament initially constituted the earth (cf. vv. 9-10) and the waters above constituted the edge of the outer limits of the firmament (cf. Ps. 148:4). This firmament, also named *shamayim* (heaven) and perhaps etymologically related to the word for *mayim* (water), came into existence the second day.



Likewise, the Psalmist recounts the “stretching out of the earth” upon the waters:

לְרַקַּע הָאָרֶץ עַל-הַמַּיִם כִּי לְעוֹלָם תְּסֻדּוּ:

To him that stretched out the earth above the waters:
for his mercy endureth for ever. (Psalm 136:6)

Transliterated:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

ha'o lam me lekh e lo hei nu Adonai attah barukh
the universe King (of) our God Lord are you Blessed

רוֹקַע הָאָרֶץ עַל הַמַּיִם

ham ma yim 'al ha a retz ro ka'
the waters upon the earth who spreads

*Barukh attah Adonai, melek ha'olam,
roka' ha'aretz 'al hamayim.*